

**DEMOCRACY, REPRESENTATIVE LEGISLATURE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN
NIGERIA: A TELEOLOGICAL TAXONOMY**

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Abstract

The legislature is the nerve center of all democracies; it forms the bastion of the representative character of the democratic system of government. Without it, democracy will lack the vital organ that will operationalize its tenets and define its tempo. It is regarded as the first estate of the realm because it kick-starts the entire gamut of government practices by laying the enabling constitutional foundation via law-making; it sets the frameworks for policy-making, annual budgeting, administration of justice, securitization of peace, and external relations. It then follows that when the legislature is defective democracy systematically becomes defective, a situation which naturally leads to a negation of good governance, especially in compelling the executive organ to guarantee the welfare and security of all. What this paper seeks to do is a teleological taxonomy and x-ray of Nigeria's democracy against the background of the character of the legislature since the commencement of the fourth republic. Adopting the structural-functional theory, secondary data collection, and descriptive-historical analysis method, the study finds out that the legislature in the said Republic has not succeeded in taking its rightful place in our democratic experimentation because of some intravenously debilitating drawbacks like incompetence, proclivity for corruption, susceptibility to executive high-handedness and propensity to delve into project and policy implementation for eccentric reasons. The paper then suggests that the only way the executive can be put on its toes to do the needful is for Nigerians to be mindful of those elected into the legislative chambers.

Keywords: Democracy, Executive, Governance, Legislature, Teleology, Taxonomo

Introduction

The emergence of any socio-economic and political formation is the emergence of the quest for leadership. A state, nation, or organization cannot survive without not only leadership but good and responsive leadership. With the independence of Nigeria in 1960, the country has passed through all sorts of political upheavals, economic logjams, and socio-cultural violence all attributed to bad leadership. With the hitherto struggle against colonial subjugation of Nigeria, an assembly of great men has been moving closely with the British officials and the queen of England to make sure that independence was a reality for Nigerians. However, after the attainment of self-government, Nigeria began to experience a series of political turmoil. The first republic was shoved in a cold-blooded military coup which paved the room for regional and ethnic tension in the country. The result of military leadership was unconstitutional leadership; they were answerable to themselves; easy to take advantage of the peoples' civil rights; and citizens became slaves in the hands of their new colonial masters (Sheriff and Adams, 2019).

Modern liberal democracy is all about participatory representation in governance. It is a political system that seeks to establish a situation in which the people or the *demos* effectively participate in the administration and management of their affairs via their duly accredited or electively commissioned representatives. These representatives who are carefully drawn from numerous districts and constituencies form the whole spectrum of law-making, and more (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). In all democracies, it is the legislature that houses the representatives that act as the medium through which the laws are made and possibly unmade. Since the 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the legislature has been known as the National Assembly in Nigeria. It is called the National Assembly at the center while at the state level, it is called the House of Assembly – this is the position today as contained in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

It is notable that at the center the legislature is bicameral, that is, it has two echelons or chambers - upper and lower -, while at the state level, it is unicameral having just one house. The two chambers at the center are called the Senate (Upper) and the House of Representatives (Lower). The Senate is composed of 109 senators elected from the 108 senatorial districts across the 36 states – on three per state basis - and one from across the Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T.), Abuja. The House of Representatives is made up of 360 members drawn from the numerous federal constituencies across the 36 states of the federation and the F.C.T. In other words, the National Assembly has as its duly elected members 469 Assembly men and women. So, the legislature is naturally expected to be people-centric. In this regard, it is demanded to make laws and carry out oversight functions that would bring about the attainment of the socioeconomic cum political aspirations of the people who constitute it in the first place (Laski, 2008).

The legislature, to this end, is expected to represent the soul of the people, and when this focus is damaged the whole essence and desiderata of democracy and the expectation of its cultural values disappear, or at any rate, become distorted. When situations take this shape, democracy gradually rots away and eventually decays (Laski, 2008).

It is noteworthy that when the apparatuses of the legislature have been high-jacked by forces within or beyond its borders, or when the members of the National Assembly have been criminally divided among themselves perhaps by the force of money, tribe, religion, or region, the legislature systematically loses its mettle and unconsciously dismisses its vibrancy meteor. To be sure, it should be established that by the vibrancy of the legislature, we do not mean undue radicalism or institutional rascality, but the responsible and meaningful verbalization and securitization of the desires of the country's electorate. This is the vibrancy we refer to, and once this is lost, the salt would have lost its savor, and to this end, its relevance becomes exhausted and its mission murdered (Hague and Harrop, 2001; Johari, 2012). It is upon this note that it is contended that a vibrant and representative legislature remains the nucleus of the survival and success of representative democracy in any nation. This paper is divided into six parts. Part one looks at the introduction; part two deals with the conceptual interrogation; part three examines the methodology; part four explains the adopted theoretical framework; part five deals with a detailed discussion of the subject matter; part six concludes the paper and gives some policy recommendations on how to make the legislature more robust towards the sustenance of democracy.

Conceptual Issues

The Legislature: The legislature is one of the vital institutions or organs of modern government. It is one of the three political legs that aid the stability and stabilization of the government. It is a chamber in which deliberations, negotiations, lobbying, and resolutions about the laws that will govern the apparatuses of the state are made. It is a body of representative men and women charged with the herculean task of law-making, law-unmaking (repealing, abrogation, or amendment), and the ratification or domestication of international laws or treaties (Emim, 2003; Chikendu, 2003). These men and women, in an ideal situation, are people of much expertise, vast experiences, and high patriotism, because they are to serve, as it were, as eyes, mouths, ears, and noses of the people so that they hear for them, see for them, talk for them and perceive for them in the areas of the origination, enactment and even enforcement of state laws, rules and regulations (Izu, 2009). The critical nature of the legislature reflects the fact that it is indeed the first estate of the political realm because laws must first be made before any other action can be taken against them. So, the legislature is the first point of hope or hopelessness to the people; its character in terms of its robustness and vibrancy will determine the general workings and seriousness of other governmental institutions, especially the executive arm. It is in the above understanding that Abba (2007:57) firmly observed that "the institutional structure that creates laws and order in society which is presently symbolized by the legislature remains the hope for not only in attaining good governance but also for achieving socio-political stability". It then follows that in any governmental arrangement where the legislative arm is missing or not well-structured anarchic tendencies and animalistic uprisings characteristic of the Hobbesian state of nature are bound to be the other of the day (Laski, 2008; Elaigwu, 2004). This is because the state will be operating without any reasonably balanced body of laws; at best, it will be operating based on decrees, fiats, edicts, and other proclamatory or declarative regulations. These in themselves constitute anti-people and largely unbalanced and egotistical laws made essentially to serve and service the whims and caprices of a cabal or clique of men and women who, most times, lack the legitimacy of the people and legitimation of any popularly recognized law.

Such laws are largely primordial, parochial, and oriented towards sufficing the appetite of a section, a class, or a crop of like-minded political talebearers or seafarers. They cannot be balanced, unbiased, or conducing to even development. In a liberal democracy, the first point of call in the operations of government is the legislature (Ujo, 2008). Now, it is important to state that the legislature is known by different names in different political climes. In Nigeria, for instance, it is called the National Assembly at the federal level; the House of Assembly at the state level, and the legislative arm at the local government level.

In the same vein, the legislature is called the Congress in the United States of America (USA), the Parliament in the United Kingdom (UK), the Diet in Japan, the Knesset in Israel, and the Supreme Soviet in the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Despite these variations in nomenclature, its meaning remains the same. Even though the meaning of the legislature remains the same despite the varying names it is known within different political environments, its constitutional configuration however is not the same in all polities. It is this variation in the constitutional configuration that demarcates one type of legislature from the other. Squarely, it should be noted that in some legislatures there is only one house or chamber or echelon which operationalizes the law-making process. It does not share this responsibility with any other house. This form of legislature is called unicameralism or unicameral legislature. In this case, the people vote for just one set of legislators to represent them. Advocates of this type of legislature believe that it guarantees a quick law-making process; it cuts down costs because it does not allow for the duplication of legislative chambers as there is only one.

In Nigeria, the thirty-six states, including all the seven hundred and seventy-four local councils operate unicameral or one-chamber legislature. In some other countries, the legislature has two houses, chambers, or echelons that share the powers to make and make laws. In this system, the constitution spells out the areas of particularities and convergence between the two houses. This type of legislature is called bicameralism or bicameral legislature. In all forms of legislature, the basic function or duty remains law-making.

Governance: Governance serves as purposive justification or invalidation of electing or popularly endorsing given politicians or public office-holders. This is because politics goes beyond really being engrossed in electioneering to actual governing. It is the act of governing that reflects the elixir inherent in office holding and this is elicited by the works of those so elected or chosen to pilot the affairs of state. There must then be a clear demarcation between electioneering and governing periods and politicians must understand this. If the mandate is acquired through tedious acts of electioneering campaigns, governance is thus considered a corresponding effect of such mandate acquisition and so anything short of this sparks off discordant, disappointing, and even rebellious tones among the populace, both those who voted and those who did not.

It is instructive to note that even though some scholars like Rourke (2005) try to use the concepts of government and governance substantially interchangeably, they still have their clear-out differentiating parameters. This is so because whereas government has to do with an embodiment of the people and structures with the mandate to superintend over state affairs, governance typifies and specifies the work government does. It embodies the modus operandi by which government's superintendence is done; it covers the broad spectrum of activities, influences, styles, and patterns of operation which help to condition the character of policies and decisions, programs and action plans, including the views and interests of non-formal groups and

stakeholders, which help to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people. It is in this light that Hague and Harrop (2001) explain that while a government consists of institutions responsible for making collective decisions for society, governance refers to the process of making collective decisions; government essentially looks at what is to be achieved whereas governance considers how to achieve what is to be achieved. Governance then is the work of those charged with the mandate to govern. It is what comes after elections and electioneering campaigns and serves as a veritable platform by which the worth of a given political leadership is tested, positively assessed, or blacklisted. In progressive political systems like democracy, governance is what makes government meaningful to the governed; it is the connecting rod between the governors and the governed because it represents deliveries, what the government is offering in return for the mandate it has been entrusted with. It has to do with solving problems, and finding real solutions to real day-to-day issues of the public; it has to do with the management of human and material resources to meet the development aspirations and yearnings of the people whose votes and wishes formed the government in the first place. A close look at the three definitions below brings out the true meaning of governance:

- i. Governance is the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. Governance embraces all of the methods - good or bad- that societies use to distribute power and manage public resources and problems (UNDP, 1997).
- ii. Governance is how power is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resources for development (ADB, 2000).
- iii. Governance is the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, economic and social development (International Institute of Administrative Science, (1996)

Democracy: It should be stated that the concept of democracy does not have a watertight meaning as an understanding of it is not often unified but diverse. This is so because scholars, thinkers, and politicians usually project theoretical and pragmatic explanations of the concept from different angles based on the ideological dais upon which they stand, whether as liberals, Marxists, or third-worlds. The liberals conjecture that the concept of democracy seeks to define a political equation that entrenches the virtues of individualism or liberty of the individual; to the Marxists, a political system only becomes democratic to the extent that it seeks the institutionalization of the virtues of egalitarianism or equality of all, while to the third wordlists, the phenomenon of democracy is conceived to mean decolonization that results in self-reliant mass-participation or self-government. To this end, we have Western or Rightist democracy, Eastern or Leftist democracy, and Third World democracy.

For obvious reasons, today liberal democracy appears to be the only real surviving option left – the fall of the former USSR and the attainment of political independence by countries in Africa have whittled down the temperature of the other two alternatives. But, the true cultural virtues of democracy could best be understood and appreciated when its etymological conceptualization is first given its proper examination. Democracy as a political practice or historical concept was first engaged in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, and because of this its meaning has been effectively traced to two Greek words, “Demos” and “Kratia.”

Demos mean ‘people’ as in the majority of the mass of the population who form the community of the commoners. It is they who truly represent the culture, history, degree of material development, and general pains or gains of the society in which they are found. Kratia, on the other end, stands for rule, government, or statecraft. Rule or Government or Statecraft in this sense entails the political management or administration of the affairs of the people. Then, bringing the two Greek words together, we arrive at ‘DemosKratia’ meaning the “rule of the people”. Democracy then has as its central necessitating ingredient people determinism.

The people form the spirit and soul of democracy and without them, democracy dissolves and its potency evaporates. So, whether democracy is from the rightist, leftist, or third-world point of view, it must configure within its bowels the quintessence of the desires and discretion of the people. Anything short of this makes the prevailing political practice assume another title other than that of democracy. It was in this light that the former President of Tanzania and Pan-Africanist, Nyerere (1969) submitted that “...democracy in Africa or anywhere else is government by the people”. These people constitute those over whom the political rule is established. Moreover, it is only in a democracy that the voice of the people, and not the voice of despots, self-made rulers, or sight-tight dictators, becomes the voice of God. This voice is expected to be respected and appreciated in all quarters of the state’s conduct. The basic argument here is that democracy, whether direct or indirect, whether pure or impure, is always defined by the supremacy of the people’s will. In democracies, the configuration of the government is such that the rulers are empowered by the ruled as political caretakers in the regulation and general administration of their affairs. In this understanding, Bryce (1920) defined democracy as a “... government in which the will of the majority of qualified Citizens rules.” The will of the majority of qualified citizens in this regard simply implies a situation where the dispositions of those constitutionally recognized as the electorate gain sway. And the citizens’ will rules only when certain guaranteed fundamental prerequisites have been put in place.

Methodology

This study adopts the secondary sources of data collection and uses descriptive-historical analysis as its method of analysis. In this regard, it sourced relevant data from published materials like books, journal articles, official government publications, and where necessary opinion position papers, magazines, and newspapers. All these are carefully studied, and dissected and relevant information is extracted to operationalize the subject matter of this paper. To this end, the content analysis method is deployed. In its analysis, the study uses the descriptive-historical method by which it looks at the what, how, when, where, who, and why of legislative business in Nigeria. It does a thorough exegesis of the legislature historically to understand its output towards laying the foundation for understanding the future of democracy and governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The crux of this research effort revolves around the centrality of the legislature in the liberal democratic governance system in contemporary world society, and how it has aided or hindered national socio-economic development in Nigeria. This is the same thing as saying that proper democratic governance is primarily an effect of effective participatory legislature. In this regard, the erection of the architecture, apparatus, or structure of the first estate of the realm is essentially what guarantees the realization of democratic and indeed developmental advances in

any clime. That is, the democratic cum development function or task of any society can best be realized in contemporary world society when the necessary legislative structures or institutions have been put in place because these parliamentary structures will meticulously ensure that the economic, social, political, and cultural developmental aspirations of society are functionally accomplished. In the above light, therefore, this research made use of the structural-functional framework to approach its subject matter. Under this approach, a social structure is viewed in terms of the function it performs. That is, all social structures emerge and exist to perform certain functions. This means that structures can be identified according to certain functions (Egbe, 2002). In other words, no function can be performed unless its corresponding structures have been put in place. Democratic governance cum development functions, or the generation of their realities, are functions that every society desires to accomplish. To realize this, certain structures are put in place, and in this case, the representative or participatory legislature comes to mind. It is in this sense that the structural-functional approach, or simply put structural functionalism, becomes useful and usable. Some of the foremost contributors to this approach are Talcott Parsons and Fred Riggs. In specific terms, Parsons noted that there are four essential functions that corresponding structures are to carry out to maintain the stability and survival of the entire society. These functions are:

- i. Adaptation – which pertains to a system’s ability to cope with its environment;
- ii. Goal attainment – the achieving of whatever goals the system may possess. At a minimum, the system will have the goal of survival;
- iii. Integration – which requires that the various parts and functions of the system cohere and provide a goal of balance among the groups;
- iv. Latency or Pattern maintenance – the preservation or reproduction of a system’s pattern or essential characteristics.

On his part, Riggs (1964:99) attempted to show that there are five functional requisites of any

society. These include economic, social, communicational, symbolic, and political. For what is worth these two scholars as other structural/functional scholars do, believe that without society appropriately putting in place mechanisms to realize or accomplish these functions, there will be cracks or crises of negative proportions. It is within this bracket that the theory becomes applicable in this study.

Findings and Discussion

It is necessary to note that the intentions, attitude, and sincerity of government can better be understood when its governance has been examined. The acquisition and exercise of power (government) is meaningless without actually consciously making this power directly or otherwise affect the people (governance). In doing this government cannot work with only those elected or appointed into public offices; it must of necessity incorporate and integrate the opinions and views of non-governmental, non-formal groupings and individuals thereby making the governed part and parcel of the governing process (Egwu, 2003). By doing this, citizens naturally develop a sense of belonging to the government’s policies and programs and so issues like tax payment, law enforcement, and general implementation of public policies and programs become very easy and cost-effective.

This is critical and very crucial because the people are the givers of the mandate (power) to govern, and when they are made to believe that the exercise of the power is unrealizable without their patriotic support or input they ensure that the government of the day does not fail as they have become part of its governance process (Elaigwu, 2005). What this means is that there is never a time in the life of a state when the government, in its right frame, should jettison the people on whose mandate it is riding - because the people if unable to dethrone the government easily may as a result of constitutional caveats, could nonetheless do everything possible to sabotage, stymie or denigrate its attainments. This is exactly why in developed democracies, those in government do not seek to play superheroes and could willingly resign their positions when their performances are abysmal or below-accepted expectations (Kajola, 2007).

When this happens, citizens rather than repudiate or reprimand, extol them for their sensitivity and selflessness in knowing when to leave the stage, and for their understanding that the work of government is a continuum, like a lengthy bridge under construction, traversing several administrations and involving expertise of several individuals, groups and companies (2007). More often than not, political leadership crisis in developing societies like those in Africa stems from the fact that those who are privileged to be chosen as governors in turn see themselves as demi-gods who now possess some ethereal intelligence and wisdom unavailable to the 'common' people and so must put them (the people) where they belong, that is out of government. So, they consciously create irrelevant but very cumbersome procedures around themselves that it even becomes humanly impossible to see, let alone convey suggestions from the quarters of the public to them. They make the people bystanders, mere spectators whose sole task after elections is to wait and receive 'orders' from their 'leaders'.

When unchallenged for long, such leaders become despotic, dictatorial, and overly authoritarian without knowing it, but tacitly triggering corresponding "rebellious" signals from the people which eventually lead to the dismissal of the leadership in subsequent elections, and where elections are not held or are clandestinely outlawed or suppressed, revolutionary crusades, movements and unrest gain sway and forcefully unseat the extant leadership. And yet, most of these African leaders claim to be democratic or apostles of democracy, not bearing in mind that democracy, in its simplest Lincolnian understanding is "government of the people, by the people and for the people" and does not end at the ballot box arena - the casting of votes and announcement of winners - but also has to do with how the government is run to deliver on its mandate (Izu, 2009, 2021).

It is no doubt apt to state here that democracy is not democracy if the ensuing governance is not democratic or democratized - involving opinions emanating from all segments and groups in society. To be democratic is not just to accede to electoral politics but to reflect the democratic tenets in the leaders' post-election actions, policies, and programs. This is what governance entails: democratizing the entire political process, from election to representation, policy formulation to implementation, and from public anomie to securitization of peace - it shows that the intelligence of the electorate in choosing the right leaders does not suddenly become backwater after elections. It could still be used and indeed needed in actual leading or governing.

Having said that, it is strategic to state that governance is not eternally good. It could also be bad, negating the interests and core wishes of the people and incorporating in the governing process non-formal wielders of authority who are not familiar with, and naturally not predisposed to sufficing the intents of the people but theirs and those of their paymasters. These peoples, according to Kalu (1981) “claiming representation for their tribes, they eat on behalf of the wretched inhabitants of their ethnic homelands”. To this end, “when they drug themselves with champagnes, tear the meat with their teeth and swallow it hastily with their eyes bulging in their sockets, they are merely hustling to get an adequate share of the national wealth”.

Since this act negates the intents of the people, it negates the spirit of democracy, and so bad governance becomes no governance or poverty of governance to the demos. This is because it is characterized by self-aggrandizement, primitive accumulation, and vendetta or vindictive disposition, offshoots of which are brinkmanship, chauvinism, vanity, and outright egocentrism all of which deepen the disadvantages of the already relegated masses – who are reduced to mere beasts of burden, bearers of the brunt and chief recipients of the repercussions emanating from the sordid behavioral conduct of those supposedly elevated to representatively defend their interests, both formally and non-formally. In the above light, democracy cannot be limited to a “system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics and hence gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community” (Olowu, 1995: 16), but must be considered to “exists when the relations between the governed and the government abides by the principle that the state is at the service of the citizens and not the citizens at the service of the state, that government exists for the people not vice versa”(Sartori,1987:34). What this implies is that the governance that could be regarded as good would not only be polycentric (involving diverse groups and individuals) but must at all times be populist (oriented towards the masses in intents and purposes). Anything other than this will evoke a monocentric, monocratic, or homocentric political order where there is a non-populist gravitation of all powers to one central point giving rise to political, institutional, economic, financial, and administrative centralization where few individuals claim demi-godship and govern with this non-developmental pomposity (Ostrum, 1990; Wunsch and Olowu 1990).

What then is the difference between good and bad governance? Generally, bad governance is characterized by: corruption, whimsical decision-making, shortsightedness and disregard for the concerns of the many, and decisions to benefit the few; while indices of good governance are accountability and ethics in decision-making and implementation, transparency and predictability, rule-bound decision-making and action, responsiveness, a long-term view of the public interest. Good governance is thus what balances government, it is what bridges the gap between the citizens and state, promoting, preserving, and protecting the aspirations of both parties and thereby fostering harmony in place of anomy, unity in diversity, and overall rapid development of society. Good governance is what truly makes government’s actions and policies democratized, appropriately prioritizing the demands and wishes of the people thereby creating a favorable feedback interaction between inputs and outputs.

Herein also lay the strategic place occupied by the legislature in incarnating the fidelity of both democracy and good governance in any sane society. It is through the elected legislators that appropriate laws and legislations are enacted and pursued to give direction to the entire paraphernalia of government. It is the legislature through the laws it makes that streamline,

concatenate, and condition actions, inactions, and reactions in all polities, without which there will be anarchy or cataclysmic ramifications.

Conclusion and Recommendations

All through this paper, we have attempted to examine the place of the legislature in procuring good governance in a democratic climate. The study has shown that the legislature is at the heart of democracy and democratization and that when the legislature is in bad shape there will be no possibility of realizing the desired progress and dividends of democracy. The study has shown that one of the major hindrances to legislative performance and efficiency is the lack of legitimacy. This lack of legitimacy is borne out of the fact that more often than not elections that brought the lawmakers to power were fraudulently and flawly conducted and their outcomes were often contested. Another factor that has hindered them from performing to full capacity is the excessive enslavement of the legislators to the head of the executive arm, that is, the President of the country, thereby making the legislature always play second fiddle even though it is supposed to be an independent arm in its own right. Another thing is that a major tool used by the executive arm to destabilize the legislative arm is to create cracks or divisive cabals among the members through the power of corrupt money on the floor of the house. Given these challenges and the hindrances that have stymied the legislature from properly carrying out their task, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration by relevant bodies:

- i. The electoral management body in Nigeria should ensure that only credibly elected individuals are returned to the National Assembly. This is to ensure that these individuals enjoy legitimacy to do their work.
- ii. Members of the National Assembly must be generally reminded and adequately re-orientated on the reality that they are messengers of the people and that their primary task is to represent them, and;
- iii. The Nigerian constitution should be amended to remove the clause that provided for or fixed the minimum educational requirement for members as a school certificate, and this should be fixed at a minimum of university or polytechnic degrees. This is to ensure that only those whose minds have been considerably treated are allowed to go to the National Assembly as members.

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