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THE NIGERIAN LEGISLATURE AND ITS CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE: FOCUS ON THE FOURTH REPUBLIC DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the political representational role of Nigerian lawmakers, their relationship with their constituencies and its impact on democratic consolidation under the on under the nation's fourth republic. It relied on secondary materials such as journal articles, books, and the theory of liberal democracy as a framework of analysis. From the analysis, results revealed a bleak representation and relationship between the lawmakers and their political constituencies. Their poor pattern of relationship was attributed to many factors which include corruption and poor political education on the responsibilities of the lawmakers. Other factors revealed include absence of transparency and accountability, limited resources, time constraints, and personal interest at the expense of public interest by the lawmakers. Their pattern of relations, without doubt, contradicts the principle of liberal democracy which is centered around fair citizen representation and political participation in the affairs of the state. It does not consolidate democracy. In a democracy, sovereignty belongs to the people and, therefore, the ultimate concern of the state should be focused on the people. Based on the results, there is need for better representation of the people by their lawmakers. The lawmakers should also educate their constituents on their major constitutional roles, promote public interest, and consolidate democracy. The constituents and the political system must also be able to hold parliamentarians accountable. When this is achieved, the people would be well-represented, and democracy consolidated. Lastly, while the research would be of benefit to the lawmakers, their constituents, the public, researchers and, by extension, the body of knowledge, future study should examine the legislature and its execution of constituency projects in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS : Constituency representation, Democracy, Fourth republic, Legislature,

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, the eminence of parliamentary, presidential, constitutional, or simply representative democratic governance, continues to dominate space and discussion amongst scholars. This is because democratic governance appears to be the regnant concern of several nations. Also, in such democratic settings, the legislature as an institution and its representational role remains cardinal because of its key position amongst other institutions of the state and as a mouthpiece of the common people. According to Murana and Bakare (2019), the argument that the parliament occupies a key position in a democracy compares to other organs of the state, appears to persistently enjoy the support of practitioners, scholars, and observers. In fact, democracy cannot survive in any nation without a lively and a healthy parliament (Blondel, 1973). This is because of the indispensable position of the parliament in the advancement of democratic governance (Murana, 2018; Brunner, 2013; Mattes & Mozaffar, 2011). As a political instrument of a representative democracy which emerged due to complexities and new challenges in contemporary societies that hinder peoples' direct involvement in governance, it is expected to act as the mouthpiece of the people, as well as promote their interests (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020; Arter,

2011; Rehfield, 2006; Urbinati & Warren, 2008). In Nigeria, for instance, and considering the importance of representation in a democracy, the Nigerian 1999 Constitution in Section 48 and 49 ensures delineation of political constituencies where people elect representatives to stand for their interest in the parliament based on size, population and state of origin (Baba, 2019). This is done to ensure that the people make input and are included in the governance process of the state.

Based on the delineated political constituencies, Baba (2019) revealed that elected legislators are constitutionally expected and obligated to communicate and relate with their electorates to ascertain their inputs, as well, reflect their interest in the parliament. To facilitate this, the constitution also ensures the creation of constituency offices where constituent interests, requests, inputs, and complaints are collated for discussion in the parliament. However, Murana and Bakare (2019) argued that, while some of the constitutionally-created constituency offices are very active in operation and useful to their constituencies, others are mere structures with no relevance to the people. Therefore, based on the above submissions and considering the critical importance of the legislature in the promotion of democratic governance and consolidation, it becomes necessary to cast deeper research into the

area. This is to ascertain the actual state of political representation as well as the pattern of relationship between the lawmakers and their constituents in Nigeria's fourth republic democracy. Though several studies have been conducted in the field by Yusuf et al. (2018), Fashagba et al. (2019), and Ruffin and Fagbadebo (2019) amongst other scholars, none was found to have focused on the interrelationship between the lawmakers, their representational role and relationship with their constituency. This study fills the gap and contributes to the body of knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To consolidate knowledge on the studied phenomenon, important concepts and keywords are reviewed below. These include the legislature; political representation; legislature-constituency relations; methods of relations between the lawmakers and their constituencies; and democracy and democratic consolidation.

The Legislature

The legislature as a concept enjoys various political appellations across democratic nations (Oni, 2013; Okpe & Othman, 2020; Okpe & Taya, 2018). In the US, for instance, it is known as the Congress. In Nigeria, it is the National Assembly while it is the parliament in the UK (Okpe & Taya, 2018; Lafenwa, 2009; Heywood, 2007; Oni, 2013) and Malaysia and South Africa. As an important democratic political institution (Fashagba, 2019), it stands as a vital organ in the governance of the state (Ewuim et al., 2014; Obidimma & Obidimma, 2015). It is a great pillar of democracy and positive governance (Godsweath et al., 2016; Momodu, 2012; Momodu & Matudi,

2013; Oni, 2014; Osakede et al., 2017). Aligning with the scholars above, it is also important to note that the common expectations in most modern-day nations and democracies, reside in efficient, active, and effective legislature that drive good governance.

The common expectation, as revealed by Oni et al. (2019) and Gill (2002), can only be achieved through an effective state government which does not only offer a good security to her citizens, but equally cares for their primary needs and guarantees their socioeconomic and political development. As an important organ of the state and democracy, Fashagba (2019), and Fashagba et al. (2019) found that the parliament is not only a vital democratic institution, but also a constitutional and political unit of the state that connects the state with the common people through a legal structure of a defined authority. They concluded by denoting the legislature as the greatest organized political platform for political activities as well as a

veritable route through which the consent of the citizens is mobilized and engaged for maximization of benefit. In this form, the authors observed the legislature as a link between the people and the state. Additionally, it is a political instrument of harnessing public interest which best defines democratic governance in a state.

According to Murana and Bakare (2019), the view that the national assembly, as preferably called in Nigeria, occupies a critical state in democracy, appears undisputed and it is a mark of public representation (Fagbadebo, 2019). As well it is an organ with a defined constitutional power that, not only makes laws, but equally influences the policies of the government (Omotoso & Oladeji,

2019), to maximize the best interest for the public. However, as revealed by Fashagba (2013), the manner and the application of such constitutionally-defined powers by the institution, determine and define its relevance before the public. In this regard, Hague and Harrop (2004) observed that the parliament plays a vital function in standing for citizens by offering a formidable guard and security against executive or government tyranny.

In Nigeria's fourth republic, the legislature is established under the 1999 constitution as a legal body, not only to make laws, change, or amend them, but as well, perform constituency representational role in the parliament. It equally exercises control over government activities through its oversight function. It is a policy-making and deliberative organ established by the 1999 constitution to enhance the political system and democratic stability. Drawing from the ongoing, the parliament is seen and projected as an important political and democratic instrument of the state through which the public consent is organized and represented for the essence of better life for the people. However, as noted by Fashagba (2013), the way its powers and functions are manifested in the state would define its relevance before the people. This is because the lawmakers, as noted by Fagbadebo (2019), have the duty to represent the people, promote public good, and provide a conducive political environment to promote good governance.

Political Representation

The concept of "representation" or simply "political representation" just like law-making, is another constitutional and legal function of the national assembly (Awotokun, 1998; Okpe & Othman, 2020). In Western political thought, for instance, Fairlie (1940) found that the concept could be drawn from the history of Rome, especially when the prince appeared as their representative collectively. According to Murana and Bakare (2019), during the medieval era, the emperor or the king, the Pope amongst other bodies like the Cardinals in the church, the Councils and the Assemblies of qualified citizens in a well-organized society, were given the character and image of representatives. In this regard, as they added, the representatives were seen in relation to a single administrator and often hereditary. The king or the emperor was the peoples' trustee and, to a great extent, free to indulge his whims in any way he deems as serving the interest of his people.

Adding to the above, Edigheji (2006) found that, in the early thought of representative government, public representatives were not necessarily elected. They were either inherited, appointed or a single actor representing the public and had nothing to do with constituencies. But in the contemporary democracies and political societies (Murana & Bakare, 2019), political representation widely remains a significant instrument of democracy. To Fairlie (1940), representative democracy informs a political system of administration where the constitutional power of public sovereignty is delegated to several elected representatives who act on them in the public interest. It is a political relationship between the legislators and their constituencies (Loewenberg & Patterson, 1979). It is a

machinery of government that joins the people and the state together for the realization of better life.

Also notable is that in the present-day governance, complexities amongst other challenges make it difficult for citizens to be directly involved in the administration of their country unlike in the small Greek city-states. This, therefore, makes the electorates to participate in the administration of their state through elected political representatives (Baba, 2019; Awotokun, 1998; Okpe & Othman, 2020). In Nigeria, for instance, the representational role of the legislature is defined in the 1999 constitution (Murana & Bakare, 2019; Okpe & Othman, 2020). According to Baba (2019), they perform major functions of law-making, representation and oversight. To aid its representational role, for instance, the constitution legalized the creation of various constituencies in the country. They enable the citizens to be represented in the national assembly based on their size, population, and state of origin. The 1999 constitution in Section 48/49 further observed that the Nigerian Senate must encompass three senators from every state of the federation, as well, one senator from Abuja, which is the federal capital territory. Also, the Nigerian House of Representatives shall equally encompass 360 elected lawmakers representing different constituencies of almost equal population. This move by the constitution is to ensure that the interests of the people are well-represented in the parliament by the elected representatives.

Legislature-Constituency Relations

Constituency-legislature relation or representation is often informed on the role of political representation of the legislature or representative democracy. The legislature, as highlighted in the preceding discussion, represents an important pillar of democracy as well as a vital instrument for good governance (Ewuim et al., 2014; Obidimma & Obidimma, 2015; Godsweath et al., 2016; Momodu, 2012; Momodu & Matudi, 2013; Oni, 2014; Osakede et al., 2017; Fashagba, 2019). While political representation is a basic function of the parliamentarians in both presidential and parliamentary democracies (Abegunde, 2016; Fashagba & Mu'awiyya, 2019), it is about transforming public aspirations into viable programs, policies, and projects (Dan-Azumi & Okereke, 2018; Omano, 2006). Based on this, it is incumbent on the lawmakers to create a stable political environment for public good. Also, a political constituency, as noted by Pitkin (1967), is a complex political concept. But as highlighted by Awofeso and Irabor (2020), it is a political electoral unit where citizens elect those who represent their interest in the parliament. It is a community of people represented in the parliament (Yusuf et al., 2018) as well as a state electoral district within a political setting (Benjamin, 2014). The above submissions show how the concept of legislature, representation and political constituency are interrelated in a democracy. They inform a political interaction and transaction between the people and their representatives in the government. This form of interaction often derives its legitimacy from the constitution which empowers the people to elect their representatives to the parliament to stand for their common interests.

In Nigeria, the 1999 constitution promotes this relationship between the entities through the creation of different political constituencies. The representatives are required by the constitution to interact and relate with their constituencies to reflect their interests in their general activities and conduct. Additionally, to facilitate interaction and positive relationship between the lawmakers and their electorates, the constitution empowers the lawmakers to create constituency offices as centers for input collation. However, as literatures have revealed, this role is not performed by the lawmakers without enormous challenges. This is because, as Baba (2019) revealed, in Nigeria, the lawmakers are barely held responsible for their actions and conducts especially by the state and the people. He added that, even when elections serve as a veritable instrument and

avenue to sanction or reward the parliamentarians for their poor performance and conducts, the lawmakers sometimes circumvent the electoral process and rig themselves back to office. Consequently, he concluded, the quality of representation is negatively affected by the attitudes of the lawmakers. It is not an ideal teaching of a representative democracy. Such conducts by the lawmakers contradict the interest of the public and democratic consolidation. According to SAHO (2014), the national assembly is where parliamentarians should represent and look after the interest of their citizens, and the constituency must offer the common people access to their legislators (Grant, 2016, cited in Fashgba & Mu'awiya, 2019). However, the interest of the people is compromised and, as such, the house presents a sign of unhealthy relations.

Methods of Relations between the Lawmakers and their Constituencies

In a democracy, various means of interactions between the parliamentarians and their electorates exist and cannot be overemphasized. This is because they represent the people in the parliament, and, therefore, must interact with their people. Considering the importance of communication between the entities, the National Development Institute (NDI) (2006) in their research found that effective interaction between lawmakers and their constituencies demonstrates a lawmakers' level of responsiveness and commitment to the interests of their electorate. Aligning with the above, Murana and Bakare (2019) found that lawmakers who ensure good relations, communication and easy access by their constituencies often continue to enjoy their support. As further stated by the authors, this is built on the evidence that good relations between the entities promotes good interaction, exchange of information and ideas. It allows the electorates to exercise their preferences to either oppose or support decisions affecting their lives. To this end, the lawmakers and their constituencies interact via several methods, encompassing e-mails, phone calls, text messages and constituency offices. Others include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Radio and TV stations, as well as newspapers.

In Nigeria's fourth republic, and amongst the above-mentioned avenues of interaction and relations between the lawmakers and their constituencies, evidence shows that constituency offices are the most prominent. Regarding the constituency offices, as further explained by Murana and Bakare(2019), several of them are engaged in serious activities and interactions between the lawmakers and the people while others are simply deserted buildings. In the constituency offices, electorates submit their request letters, petitions, protests, and complaints for dispatch to their representatives. Apart from the constituency offices, they added, Community Development Meeting (CDM) meetings equally serve as another important method of communication. Through this avenue, constituents' requests and complaints are gathered, filtered, and presented at meetings with lawmakers. The lawmaker's response to the requests is often beneficial and in favor of the electorates because it also serves as an opportunity to secure re-election support from the people. In fact, the CDM does not happen frequently except in election seasons to gain the people's support in facilitating re-election. This indicates that communication between the lawmakers and their constituents could not have been more fruitful.

CONCLUSION

Effective political representation of the citizens is a vital instrument for effective democratic governance and

consolidation. It brings about better relations between the people and their representatives in the government beside the consolidation of democracy. As noted by Murana and Bakare (2019), a government that incorporates the inputs of her citizens in processes of decision- making not only promotes legitimacy and representation, but equally gives the people a sense of inclusiveness. This can be similarly termed the government of the people. However, considering the objective of this article which is centered around understanding the state of parliamentary- citizens representation and interaction in Nigeria's fourth republic democracy, relationship between the entities appears weak. Also, the study, in achieving its objective, relied on secondary resources such as journal articles and books and the liberal democratic theory to achieve a sound conclusion. Results from the analysis show that a positive political representation and sound relationship between the representatives and their constituencies has not been met. This ineffective relationship and representation were also attributed to certain factors which include corruption, personal interest, poor political education, time, and insufficient resources.

According to Fashgba et al. (2014), many of the representatives often claim that they are serving public interest but engage in sharp practices to the detriment of their constituency. Result also shows that several constituents do not understand the major constitutional roles of their representatives and, therefore, inordinately pressure their representatives for material benefits (Oni, 2013; Nwanolue & Ojukwu, 2012; Ojibara, 2017). Drawing from the foregoing, the people have to be educated on the major roles of the lawmakers. There is also the need for transparency and accountability as evidence has emerged that the representatives are barely held accountable for their actions and inactions. With these properly addressed, constituents would be not only be well-represented, democracy would also be consolidated. Lastly, the study would benefit the lawmakers, citizens, researchers aside from body of knowledge while future study could examine the lawmakers' execution of constituency projects in their constituencies.

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