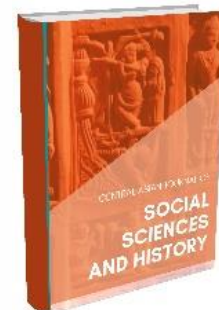




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### Legislative Institutions and the Democratic Development: A Comparative Analysis of USA and Nigerian Democracies

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#### Abstract:

Democratic processes are often influenced by the robustness and efficacy of legislative institutions. While the USA boasts a long-standing democratic tradition, Nigeria, with its intermittent democratic journey since independence, presents a contrasting paradigm. The period from 2015-2023 witnessed significant global political shifts, which posed challenges to these democracies. An examination of how their legislative institutions responded to these challenges, and consequently impacted the democratic processes, becomes imperative. This research aims to provide a comparative analysis of the roles and impacts of legislative institutions in the development of democracy in the USA and Nigeria from 2015-2023. The paper was anchored on the structural functionalist theory—originally developed by sociologists including Emile Durkheim, Bronisław Malinowski, and Talcott Parsons. This study utilizes a qualitative research design. The study reveals that legislative institutions in both countries, despite their differences, faced challenges stemming from partisanship, global political shifts, and internal dynamics. While the USA's legislative challenges often revolved around ideological differences, Nigeria grappled with ethnoreligious and regional loyalties. Nevertheless, both countries' legislative bodies demonstrated resilience and adaptability, emphasizing the structural functionalist theory's assertion on the role of such structures in societal equilibrium. It is recommended that legislative institutions continually evolve in response to societal needs, ensuring they remain true to democratic principles. Cross-national legislative exchanges could also be fostered to share best practices and bolster democratic ideals.

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## 1. Introduction

Legislative institutions serve as the backbone of democratic governance, ensuring that the voice of the people is translated into actionable policy and law. Defined as formal governmental structures that possess the mandate to enact, amend, or repeal laws, legislative institutions act as an essential check and balance in a democratic system, guarding against the potential excesses of other governmental arms. According to Lijphart (1999), these institutions embody the representative nature of democracies, ensuring that diverse voices and interests are adequately considered in the policymaking process. Furthermore, as Patterson and Mughan (2001) emphasize, legislative institutions, often manifested as parliaments or congresses, are not only platforms for law-making but are pivotal in fostering political discourse, shaping national identity, and ensuring governmental accountability. Thus, understanding the intricacies of legislative institutions is crucial for anyone wishing to comprehend the broader democratic processes.

Democracy, often heralded as the pinnacle of political systems, holds a paramount position in contemporary global discourse, given its profound implications for human rights, governance, and societal progress. Rooted in the Greek words "demos" (people) and "kratos" (power), democracy can be succinctly described as a system of governance where power and authority emanate from the people, often operationalized through periodic free and fair elections. As put by Schmitter and Karl (1991), democracy extends beyond mere electoral processes; it encapsulates broader principles of participation, freedom, equality, and the protection of individual rights. Equally compelling, Dahl (1989) underscores that a genuine democracy not only allows its citizenry to participate in the decision-making process but also ensures access to alternative information sources, granting them the right to express dissent without retribution. In essence, democracy represents both a governance system and a societal ideal, emphasizing the intrinsic value and rights of every individual within a state.

Legislative institutions play a critical role in shaping the trajectories of democracies. Their capacities, structures, and actions can either fortify democratic tenets or inadvertently erode them. Nigeria and the USA, despite being worlds apart geographically and culturally, offer compelling lenses to inspect the relationship between legislative bodies and the growth or stasis of their respective democracies.

In Nigeria, the National Assembly, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives, has been pivotal in the post-military democratization process. While the return to civilian rule in 1999 ignited hopes for a consolidated democratic journey, concerns remain. The legislature's battle with executive overreach, allegations of corruption, and frequent shifts of political allegiances have occasionally overshadowed its legislative functions (Akinboye & Adeoye, 2005). These institutional challenges, while not unique to Nigeria, underscore the complex terrains emerging democracies must navigate. On the flip side, the Nigerian legislature has shown moments of resilience, pushing back against potential threats to democracy and seeking reforms in critical sectors.

The USA, with its bicameral legislature—the Senate and the House of Representatives—provides a contrast yet offers parallels. Established over two centuries ago, the U.S. Congress epitomizes an enduring legislative institution. However, the polarized nature of current U.S. politics, spurred in part by gerrymandering and amplified partisan media, has raised questions about the effectiveness of Congress as a genuinely deliberative body (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). While the checks and balances

built into the U.S. system have often ensured the protection of democratic principles, recent times have tested these boundaries, raising concerns about the future trajectory of U.S. democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

In essence, both Nigeria and the USA underscore the intricate dance between legislative institutions and democratic development. The challenges and triumphs experienced by these nations reaffirm the need for robust legislative structures, not just as law-making bodies, but as critical custodians of democracy.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

In the annals of democratic studies, the role of legislative institutions cannot be undermined. They stand as vital pillars holding up the democratic infrastructure, ensuring checks and balances, and preserving the will of the people (Smith, 2016). The USA, with its seasoned democratic traditions and long-standing practices, presents a fascinating case. Its bicameral legislative system, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives, has undergone evolutions that have consistently shaped American democracy. The two chambers' processes, the partisan politics, and their interactions with other government arms, particularly the executive, provide insights into how legislative frameworks can either bolster or hinder the democratic process.

In contrast, Nigeria's democratic journey, punctuated by military interventions, has had its legislative institutions witness tumultuous times (Adegoke, 2018). Since its return to democratic rule in 1999, and particularly in the period between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria has seen its National Assembly play pivotal roles in shaping the political landscape. These roles have oscillated between progressive legislations, power tussles with the executive arm, and sometimes, controversies that raise questions about the integrity of the legislative process. Yet, amidst these challenges, Nigeria's legislative institutions have shown resilience and an adaptive capacity that resonates with the nation's dynamic political atmosphere.

The comparative dichotomy between the USA and Nigeria reveals stark disparities and underlying similarities. Both nations have faced challenges related to partisanship, gerrymandering, and sometimes, legislative gridlocks that hamper effective governance (Jones, 2017). However, while the USA's legislative challenges have often revolved around ideological differences, Nigeria contends with ethnoreligious diversities and deeply entrenched regional loyalties. These peculiarities shape their legislative processes and, by extension, their democratic trajectories.

Furthermore, the years 2015-2023 have been characterized by global shifts in political sentiments. Populism, nationalism, and a resurgence of autocratic tendencies in several democracies have challenged conventional norms (White, 2020). In the USA, this period saw the Trump administration, followed by the Biden administration, both of which had distinctive legislative relationships and faced unprecedented political events. Nigeria, on the other hand, dealt with significant security challenges, economic recessions, and a push for constitutional amendments. How have their legislative institutions responded to these challenges? Did they bolster the democratic tenets, or did they waver under pressure?

Interestingly, one might wonder, as these two democracies navigated through these turbulent times, what lessons they might have drawn from each other? Did Nigeria's lawmakers ever look to the USA's legislative practices for inspiration, or vice versa? Was there a convergence in their legislative tendencies, or did they further diverge due to inherent socio-political differences? It is against this

backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine the “legislative institutions and the development of democracy. A Comparative Analysis of USA and Nigerian Democracies, 2015-2023.”

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between legislative institutions and the development of democracy in the United States and Nigeria. Specifically the paper seeks to:

1. investigate the foundational features and roles of the legislative bodies in both the United States and Nigeria.
2. evaluate the extent to which the U.S. and Nigerian legislative branches bolster democratic growth through representation, accountability, and citizen engagement.
3. investigate the hurdles hindering the legislative frameworks from enhancing democratic leadership in both States.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Legislature**

The legislature, often deemed the cornerstone of representative democracy, serves as the embodiment of the people's will in governmental affairs. Its primary functions include crafting, amending, and repealing laws; overseeing the executive branch; and representing the interests and aspirations of the citizenry. At its core, the institution of the legislature embodies the principle of separation of powers, an essential element in safeguarding the rights of the citizens and ensuring checks and balances within the government (Smith, 2008).

The inception of legislative institutions traces back centuries and is deeply rooted in the history of governance and statecraft. The Magna Carta of 1215 can be seen as a seminal point, where the English monarchy's arbitrary power was first checked by the will of its subjects, paving the way for the emergence of parliamentary democracy (Davis, 2015). However, the nature and functions of legislative bodies have evolved over time, shaped by societal changes, technological advancements, and the varying political aspirations of different nations. In modern times, legislatures vary widely in their structures and functionalities. Some countries have bicameral systems with two distinct houses, like the Senate and the House of Representatives in the United States, while others adopt unicameral systems with a single legislative chamber (Johnson & Nakamura, 2010).

The effectiveness of a legislature hinges upon its institutional design. This design encompasses the rules that guide its operations, the methods of electing its members, and the extent of its powers vis-à-vis other branches of government. One vital element of this institutional design is the electoral system. Systems like the first-past-the-post (FPTP) often result in two dominant political parties, as seen in the UK and the US, whereas proportional representation systems, such as in Israel or Sweden, often result in multi-party systems with coalition governments (Kreppel, 2011). The design has implications not just for the internal dynamics of the legislature but also for its broader relationship with the citizenry. A well-structured legislative institution fosters accountability, transparency, and inclusivity, ensuring that diverse voices from the society it represents are heard and acted upon (Lee, 2013).

However, the mere existence of a legislative institution does not guarantee its effective functioning. External factors, including political culture, level of economic development, and the strength of civil society, play significant roles in shaping the behavior of legislators and the overall effectiveness of the

institution (Peters & Pierre, 2017). Moreover, with the rise of digital technology and globalization, modern legislatures are faced with new challenges and opportunities. The proliferation of information has heightened the demand for transparency and accountability, with citizens now more empowered to oversee and critique legislative actions (Martin, 2019). On the other hand, global challenges such as climate change and terrorism necessitate a level of international cooperation and understanding that transcends traditional legislative boundaries.

In conclusion, legislative institutions remain at the heart of democratic governance. Their evolution, from historical origins to contemporary manifestations, underscores their adaptability and enduring significance. As societies continue to evolve, so too will the demands placed on these institutions. Meeting these demands requires not only robust institutional design but also an understanding of the broader sociopolitical context in which they operate.

## 2.2. Democracy

“Democracy” is a term that traces its origins to ancient Greece, specifically to the words “demos” (people) and “kratos” (power or rule). Thus, at its most rudimentary, democracy implies “rule by the people” (Held, 2006). However, since its inception, the definition of democracy has undergone significant transformations, adapting to varied sociopolitical contexts and intellectual discourses. In modern times, the term is multifaceted, encompassing a spectrum of interpretations, from direct participatory mechanisms to representative institutional structures, and from liberal to deliberative models (Dahl, 1998).

The classical definition of democracy, as envisaged by ancient Athenian polity, emphasized direct participation. Citizens actively engaged in public affairs, making collective decisions in assemblies. Such direct participation was feasible due to the relatively small size of the city-state and was founded upon principles of equality and active citizenship. However, scholars like Socrates and Plato were critical of this form, expressing concerns over the potential tyranny of the majority and questioning the capability of the ordinary citizen to make informed decisions (Ober, 2008). The modern representative democracy, prevalent in most contemporary nation-states, diverges considerably from this model. Rooted in the works of thinkers like Rousseau and Madison, representative democracy acknowledges the impracticality of direct participation in large, complex societies. Instead, citizens elect representatives who make decisions on their behalf. This model, as argued by Manin (1997), balances the principles of popular sovereignty with the need for knowledgeable and informed governance.

While the representative model remains dominant, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed an evolution in democratic theory, highlighting the limitations of purely electoral democracies. Scholars like Habermas (1996) championed the idea of “deliberative democracy,” emphasizing the importance of dialogue, discussion, and consensus in decision-making. Here, democracy is not just about casting votes; it's about fostering an environment where citizens engage in meaningful discussions, challenging and influencing public policies and discourses (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Parallel to this, the concept of “liberal democracy” has gained traction, particularly in Western political discourse. Beyond just electoral processes, liberal democracy underscores the significance of individual rights, the rule of law, and checks and balances. It posits that for a democracy to be truly effective, it must ensure that individual liberties are safeguarded against potential majoritarian excesses (Zakaria, 1997).

In the age of globalization and digital technology, the contours of democracy are being redefined yet again. The proliferation of information and the ubiquity of social media platforms have democratized

knowledge, offering unprecedented avenues for citizen engagement. Some scholars posit that we are transitioning towards “digital democracy” or “e-democracy,” where technology facilitates more direct forms of citizen participation and more transparent governance (Loader & Mercea, 2011). However, the same digital tools also pose challenges, from the spread of misinformation to the erosion of privacy. In conclusion, while the essence of democracy – rule by the people – remains unchanged, its interpretation and application are fluid, molded by evolving societal, intellectual, and technological dynamics.

### 2.3. Democratic Development

Democratic development, in both historical and contemporary contexts, refers to the evolution and strengthening of democratic institutions, norms, and practices within a society (Huntington, 1991). Such a progression does not merely signify the establishment of electoral processes but also encompasses the rule of law, protection of fundamental rights, establishment of a robust civil society, and the institutionalization of checks and balances (Linz & Stepan, 1996). As nations traverse the multifaceted journey of democratic consolidation, they confront myriad challenges, often reshaping their democratic contours in response to both domestic and global influences.

The transition from autocratic rule to a democratic state is often emblematic of the initial phase of democratic development. This transformation can arise from various factors: popular revolts, elite negotiations, international pressures, or a combination thereof (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). However, the initiation of electoral processes is just the tip of the democratic iceberg. A substantive democracy necessitates the development of a political culture that values democratic principles. Almond and Verba (1963) argued that for a democracy to truly thrive, citizens must not only participate in democratic processes but also believe in the democratic ethos. This cultural shift is particularly challenging in societies with histories of autocratic rule, where trust in public institutions is low and civil liberties have been historically suppressed.

However, the consolidation of democracy, marked by the stabilization of democratic practices and the widespread acceptance of democratic norms, is more intricate than just electoral victories or the cultivation of democratic culture. It requires the establishment of autonomous institutions – be it the judiciary, media, or civil society organizations – that can act as countervailing powers against potential governmental overreach (Diamond, 1999). Moreover, it mandates the protection of minority rights, ensuring that the “tyranny of the majority” does not impinge upon the fundamental rights of minority groups (Dahl, 1971). In many nascent democracies, this balance is precarious. Majoritarian impulses, often fueled by populist leaders, can undermine the very foundations of democratic development, leading to democratic backsliding.

In an era of globalization, democratic development is also influenced by transnational factors. International organizations, donor agencies, and foreign governments play crucial roles in supporting democratic transitions and consolidations. Assistance can range from financial aid, capacity-building programs for civil society, to the sharing of best governance practices (Burnell, 2000). However, these external interventions are double-edged swords. While they can catalyze democratic growth, they can also, if not thoughtfully executed, lead to perceptions of neo-colonialism or erode the organic, grassroots nature of democratic movements.

To conclude, democratic development is a nuanced, multi-dimensional process. It is neither linear nor uniform. Societies, as they chart their democratic journeys, grapple with internal tensions, historical

legacies, and external influences. Yet, the universality of the democratic appeal, underscored by the intrinsic human yearning for freedom, dignity, and participatory governance, remains a testament to its enduring relevance in diverse sociopolitical contexts.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the structural functionalist theory. The structural functionalist theory, rooted in sociological and anthropological traditions, posits that society is analogous to a biological organism wherein various components or structures function in harmony to maintain equilibrium and stability (Parsons, 1951). Talcott Parsons, often recognized as a key proponent of this theory, believed that each part of society has a function that contributes to the society's stability and continuance.

When examining legislative institutions through the lens of structural functionalism, one can conceptualize them as critical structures within the larger framework of a nation's political system. These institutions perform essential functions that promote stability, govern societal relations, mediate conflicts, and enact laws, thereby underpinning the democratic health of a nation (Easton, 1965).

The comparative study of the USA and Nigerian democracies between 2015 and 2023 offers an insightful exploration of the roles and challenges of legislative institutions, further illuminating the applicability of the structural functionalist theory.

In the USA, the bicameral Congress—comprising the House of Representatives and the Senate—embodies the nation's legislative structure. Throughout its history, it has functioned as a balancing force against the executive branch, underpinning the principle of checks and balances intrinsic to American democracy (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1788). Between 2015 and 2023, the Congress played pivotal roles in addressing issues such as immigration, health care, and electoral integrity. The structural functionalist perspective underscores how Congress, despite partisan divisions, serves the essential function of mediating divergent interests, reflecting public sentiments, and enacting legislation to maintain societal stability (Almond & Powell, 1966).

Contrastingly, Nigeria, with its tumultuous post-colonial history, has grappled with challenges of military coups, corruption, and regional disparities. Its National Assembly, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives, is a crucial institution navigating these complexities. Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria experienced significant democratic transitions, with legislative institutions acting as both stabilizers and arenas for political contention. The structural functionalist theory elucidates the National Assembly's role in ensuring governance continuity, representing diverse regional interests, and mediating between the executive branch and the populace (Ake, 1981).

Despite the contextual differences between the USA and Nigeria, structural functionalism emphasizes the universal role legislative institutions play in maintaining democratic stability. They act as conduits for public will, reflect societal norms, and counterbalance other political structures, ensuring that the democratic organism functions cohesively and adaptively (Merton, 1968).

In conclusion, the structural functionalist theory, with its emphasis on societal equilibrium and the interplay of structures, offers profound insights into the workings and significance of legislative institutions in democracies. The comparative analysis of the USA and Nigerian democracies reaffirms the indispensability of these institutions in fostering democratic health, resilience, and evolution.

### 4. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach to deeply understand the parallels and distinctions

between the legislative institutions of Nigeria and the US, aiming to enhance Nigeria's legislative framework. Secondary data, sourced from policy documents and media reports, underwent content analysis to identify significant patterns. This analysis also assessed the consistency and potential disparities in the findings. The outcomes from this analysis were then contextualized against the study's objectives and problem statement, leading to the formulation of conclusions and actionable recommendations for Nigeria's legislative enhancement.

## 5. Data Presentation and Analyses

This heading deals with the presentation and analyses of data based on the stated research questions stated in the first section of this study.

### 5.1. The foundational features and roles of the legislative bodies in both the United States and Nigeria.

The legislative body, often termed the "people's assembly," stands as a cornerstone of representative democracies worldwide. Their primary function is to deliberate upon, modify, and enact laws that govern society. The United States and Nigeria, both influential democracies, offer unique insights into the workings of legislative bodies, given their diverse historical and cultural backgrounds.

The United States Congress, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, serves as the nation's federal legislative arm. Its bicameral configuration finds its roots in the U.S. Constitution, the country's guiding document. This distinctive structure was formulated as a resolution to appease both populous and less-populous states during the country's formative years (Madison, 1787; Goldwin & Schambra, 1993). The Senate operates on a principle of equality among states: every state, regardless of its population size, is represented by two senators. This design aims to ensure that even the smallest states have an equitable voice in the legislative process (Bowman & Kearney, 2014).

On the other hand, the House of Representatives embodies the principle of population-based representation. The number of representatives a state can elect to the House is directly proportional to its population. This approach guarantees that larger, more populous states have a voice commensurate with their size, thereby balancing the equal state representation seen in the Senate (Rossiter, 1961; Hamilton, 1788). This delicate balance between equal state representation and population-based representation epitomizes the nation's commitment to a fair and inclusive democratic process.

Nigeria's legislative structure, while drawing inspiration from the British system, has been tailored to accommodate its unique federal makeup and rich tapestry of ethnicities. The Nigerian National Assembly bifurcates into the Senate and the House of Representatives, a division somewhat reminiscent of the United States' legislative bodies. However, the way each body functions and represents its citizens encapsulates the distinctiveness of Nigeria's political landscape. For instance, the Senate, ensuring equal representation for each state, allots three senators to every state with an additional senator representing the Federal Capital Territory (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Ojo, 2006).

The House of Representatives, meanwhile, mirrors the population-driven representative principle seen in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, Nigeria introduces an added layer of complexity with its geopolitical zonal system, an informal yet impactful construct that reflects the nation's complex socio-cultural mosaic. Even though these geopolitical zones do not directly influence legislative responsibilities or districts, they command significant attention in political dialogues and



policymaking. This unique system acknowledges and respects Nigeria's multifaceted ethnic and religious composition, recognizing the importance of identity in the country's political discourse and decision-making processes (Adejumobi, 2002; Suberu, 2009).

Legislative bodies, like the U.S. Congress, play multifaceted roles in a nation's governance. Central to their function is the crafting and enacting of laws. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg, as the depth and breadth of their responsibilities extend far beyond mere legislation. For example, the U.S. Congress wields the significant "power of the purse." This denotes the exclusive authority to levy taxes and finalize government spending (Hamilton, 1788). This fiscal oversight isn't just an administrative function; it acts as a counterweight to the powers of the executive branch. By holding this responsibility, Congress ensures that the U.S. president doesn't have unbridled control over the nation's coffers. This division of financial control emerged from the framers' intent to avoid the concentration of power and protect the democratic structure (Fisher, 2004).

The Congress's responsibilities, however, aren't confined to fiscal matters. They further encompass crucial national decisions such as the formal declaration of war. While the U.S. president can direct the military, Congress alone holds the authority to declare war. This distinction came to light during the Vietnam War when debates raged over the extent of the president's power vis-a-vis Congress's sole authority to declare war. Additionally, the Senate's role in treaty ratification is another testament to the legislature's influence. For instance, the Treaty of Versailles, post-World War I, was famously rejected by the Senate, altering the course of international relations. Furthermore, Congress also oversees presidential appointments, ensuring a rigorous vetting process for critical positions like Supreme Court Justices. For instance, the Senate confirmation hearings for Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 underscored this role, as it extensively scrutinized his qualifications, judicial record, and personal history before granting approval (Binder & Smith, 1997; Howitt & Preece, 2019).

The Nigerian National Assembly, much like its counterpart in the U.S., stands as a cornerstone of checks and balances within the federal system of governance. Beyond its primary duty of formulating laws, it holds substantial sway over the nation's fiscal landscape. Specifically, the Assembly plays an indispensable role in approving the national budget. This is not a mere administrative process. Rather, it's a robust mechanism ensuring that the executive's proposed financial allocations and expenditures align with the country's overarching developmental goals and socio-economic imperatives. The national budget, in essence, is a reflection of a nation's priorities for a given year. By rigorously evaluating the budget, the Assembly ensures that resources are channeled to sectors that align with Nigeria's vision for growth and development. For instance, in recent years, there has been a push to diversify Nigeria's oil-dependent economy. Through budgetary oversight, the National Assembly can ensure more funds are allocated to non-oil sectors like agriculture and manufacturing (Aiyede, 2005).

Moreover, the Assembly's influence extends to the bedrock of Nigeria's democracy – the constitution. Recognizing that the ethos and needs of a society evolve, and that governance structures must adapt, the Assembly holds the power to enact constitutional amendments. This task is not undertaken lightly. It underscores the Assembly's pivotal role in sculpting Nigeria's evolving federal landscape and its democratic trajectory. For instance, since the adoption of the 1999 constitution, there have been calls for amendments to better reflect Nigeria's multifaceted ethnic, religious, and regional identities. The Assembly has, over time, deliberated upon numerous proposed amendments, some of which have been incorporated. One such significant amendment was in 2010, following President Umaru Yar'Adua's extended medical leave, which created a power vacuum. The National Assembly's amendment established a clear protocol for the transfer of presidential powers in cases of prolonged absences,

ensuring governmental continuity. This proactive step is a testament to the Assembly's role in not just reacting to present challenges but also anticipating and forestalling future crises (Suberu, 2009; Jinadu, 2004; Ojo, 2006; Omotola, 2009).

In both the United States and Nigeria, the principle of checks and balances is fundamental to their respective governance structures, albeit manifested in distinct ways befitting their unique political landscapes. In the U.S., the embodiment of this principle is evident in the powers vested in Congress. One of its most potent tools to ensure executive accountability is the power of impeachment, which allows for the removal of federal officials, even extending to the highest office - the presidency (Black, 1969). Similarly, Nigeria's legislative arm holds the impeachment instrument in its arsenal. However, its application is nuanced, influenced by Nigeria's specific political dynamics, reflecting its own historical and socio-cultural contexts.

In conclusion, while the legislative bodies of the U.S. and Nigeria emerge from different historical and cultural trajectories, they share foundational similarities. Both aim to ensure representation, maintain checks on the executive, and serve as a platform for national debate and decision-making. They stand as testimonies to the adaptability of democratic principles across diverse societies.

## **5.2. U.S. and Nigerian legislative Institutions and Democratic Development**

The very essence of democratic governance hinges upon representation, checks and balances, and ensuring public participation. As two distinct democracies, the U.S. and Nigeria each offer illuminating perspectives on how their respective legislative branches have worked toward bolstering these democratic principles.

The democratic fabric of the United States is intricately woven by its distinctive bicameral Congress, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. This dual chamber system, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, functions on foundational principles that prioritize both equal and proportional representation. Specifically, the Senate stands as a testament to the principle of equality among states. Each state, regardless of its demographic size or economic prowess, is represented by two senators. This design, rooted in the framers' vision, seeks to ensure that states' rights and interests are equitably represented at the federal level, providing a counterbalance against potential tyranny by majority populations (Madison, 1787).

In contrast, the House of Representatives operates on a principle of proportionality. Here, representation is meticulously determined by the state's population, ensuring that citizens from more populous regions have a voice commensurate with their numbers. A notable manifestation of this principle is seen in the state of California, one of the country's most populous regions, which commands a robust delegation of 53 representatives. Conversely, states with fewer inhabitants, like Vermont, are allocated a minimal representation of just one seat. Shifting the gaze to Nigeria, its legislative model, albeit inspired by the British system, resonates with the American approach in certain aspects. The Nigerian Senate, like its U.S. counterpart, embodies the principle of state equality. Each state, irrespective of its diverse ethnicities or economic disparities, sends three senators. For example, Kano, a northern state with a significant populace, enjoys considerable representation in the House, reflective of its demographic weight. Yet, in the Senate, it shares an equal footing with other states, emphasizing the balancing act between majority and minority rights, a nuance essential for maintaining the country's federal harmony (Adejumobi, 2002).

In the democratic edifice of the United States, accountability serves as a foundational pillar, as crucial as representation. The U.S. Congress's authority to oversee the budget and its unparalleled power to impeach epitomizes this emphasis on checks and balances. Historical proceedings like the impeachment trials of Presidents Bill Clinton and Donald Trump offer salient illustrations of this mechanism in action. While both Presidents were acquitted and remained in office, the very process and proceedings served as an indomitable reminder of Congress's role in ensuring executive accountability. These trials not only captured the nation's attention but also underscored the essence of a government answerable to its people, delineating the boundaries of executive power (Black, 1969).

Shifting continents to Nigeria, a similar ethos of accountability is discernible within its legislative framework. The Nigerian National Assembly, much like the U.S. Congress, wields considerable authority when it comes to fiscal matters and constitutional changes. One momentous episode that epitomizes this was in 2016 when the Nigerian Senate, exhibiting its fiscal oversight role, declined President Buhari's external borrowing request. Such actions are emblematic of the checks and balances embedded within the Nigerian democratic machinery, emphasizing the legislature's indispensable role in ensuring that the executive remains transparent and accountable to its citizenry (Ojo, 2006).

Citizen engagement is a hallmark of vibrant democracies, directly correlating with the transparency and representativeness of a nation's governance structure. In the United States, a keen emphasis on public participation has led to the institutionalization of mechanisms that actively involve citizens in policy-making processes. One such mechanism is the public hearings system, which often operates in conjunction with town hall meetings. These avenues offer citizens a direct channel to voice their concerns, provide feedback, or gain clarity on legislative matters. A striking instance of this was during the deliberation stages of the Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as "Obamacare". The intricate process leading to its enactment was punctuated by numerous public hearings. These forums allowed stakeholders ranging from healthcare providers to ordinary citizens to weigh in on the proposed legislation, thereby ensuring a more holistic and representative health policy (Kernell, 2006).

Similarly, Nigeria, despite navigating a complex socio-political landscape marked by political patronage and occasional disconnect between the legislators and the electorate, has witnessed moments where public advocacy has directly influenced legislative outcomes. A potent illustration of this is the #NotTooYoungToRun movement. Driven largely by Nigeria's youth, this grassroots campaign successfully pressed for an amendment in age requirements for political offices, enabling a younger demographic to participate more actively in the nation's politics. The success of the movement marked a significant shift in the inclusiveness of Nigeria's political arena, emphasizing that when the public rallies behind a cause, even deep-seated legislative frameworks can be revised in favor of democratic inclusivity (Adejumobi, 2002).

The legislative branch, in democracies worldwide, isn't merely restricted to law-making within the confines of national boundaries. Its influence often permeates international relations, especially in the arena of treaty ratifications, which can have profound implications on global geopolitics and domestic policy. The U.S. Senate exemplifies this influential role. One of its principal responsibilities is the ratification of international treaties, a task that requires a two-thirds majority, ensuring that these agreements receive broad support before adoption. A salient example of this is the New START treaty, inked with Russia in 2010. This treaty, focusing on significant reductions in the nuclear arsenals of both nations, wasn't just a bilateral agreement. It was a testament to the Senate's pivotal role in shaping global disarmament and non-proliferation narratives (Smith, J., 2011).

In a similar vein, Nigeria's legislative branch, the National Assembly, plays a quintessential role in the nation's foreign policy determinations. The significance of its influence was spotlighted in 2019 when Nigeria sought to join the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an agreement that promised increased intra-African trade and economic integration. Before Nigeria could formally be part of this ambitious project, the agreement had to undergo the scrutiny of the National Assembly. Upon its ratification, Nigeria didn't merely affirm its commitment to enhanced trade relations with African neighbors; it underscored the paramountcy of the National Assembly in sanctioning international agreements that align with Nigeria's broader economic and geopolitical aspirations (Akinola, A., 2020).

A robust democracy thrives not merely on the participation of its citizens but also on the transparency and accountability of its institutions. In the U.S., this commitment to transparent governance is manifested in significant legislative milestones. A particularly influential piece of legislation in this regard is the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), established in 1966. This act was not just an administrative directive; it was a revolutionary step towards ensuring that citizens have the right to access federal agency records, with some exceptions. The FOIA is indicative of a broader democratic commitment — the belief that a government should operate in the light, with its actions and decisions subject to public scrutiny. This promotes a culture where governmental operations aren't shrouded in mystery but are laid bare for public examination, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing opportunities for bureaucratic misconduct (Johnson, R., 1998).

Across the Atlantic, Nigeria, recognizing the imperatives of transparency in governance, embarked on a similar journey. In 2011, after prolonged advocacy by civil society groups, Nigeria passed its version of the FOIA. The Nigerian FOIA resonates with the spirit of its American counterpart but is particularly crucial given the nation's protracted struggle with corruption. By granting citizens the right to access information from public institutions, the act seeks to reduce the cloaks of secrecy that often shield corrupt practices. More than just an act, it signifies Nigeria's stride towards a more transparent, accountable, and, importantly, participatory democratic culture, where the governed can keep the governors in check (Adegroye, G., 2013)

The principle of checks and balances stands as a bulwark against unchecked governmental power and promotes accountability in democracies. The U.S. Congress epitomizes this through its oversight hearings, which critically examine executive actions to safeguard public interests. A significant instance of this was the intensive scrutiny that followed the 2008 financial meltdown, where Congressional hearings delved deep into the events leading up to the crisis, holding key stakeholders accountable. Similarly, Nigeria's National Assembly, in its pursuit of transparency and responsibility, has often employed its oversight capabilities. A poignant example is its probe into the nation's oil sector, where investigations unraveled significant instances of mismanagement and corrupt practices. Such legislative interventions in both countries underline the continuous effort to ensure that power is not just wielded responsibly but is also continuously monitored and held to account (Smith, D., 2004).

To sum up, both the U.S. and Nigerian legislative arms, molded by their unique historical and sociopolitical contexts, ardently work toward reinforcing democratic ideals. Their paths, challenges, and triumphs offer insights into democracy's evolving nature in different geopolitical settings.

### **5.3. Challenges hindering the legislative frameworks from enhancing democratic leadership in both Nigeria and USA**

The promotion of democratic governance through legislative institutions comes with its own set of challenges and constraints, which may vary based on the unique political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts of each country. Below are some of the key challenges faced by the legislative institutions in the United States and Nigeria:

**Partisan Polarization:** Partisan polarization in the United States has become an increasingly significant barrier to effective legislative action. As the Democrats and Republicans grow further apart ideologically, the common grounds for bipartisan solutions become scarce. A vivid instance of this polarization was witnessed in the deliberations over the Affordable Care Act. While Democrats viewed it as a necessary step towards healthcare reform, Republicans staunchly opposed it, framing it as government overreach. This deep-seated division not only prolonged the legislative process but also sparked a series of political confrontations and government shutdown threats. Such situations, where a crucial policy affecting millions becomes a partisan battleground, demonstrate the challenges polarization poses to democratic governance (Binder, 2003).

Similarly, another poignant example lies in the perennial debate over gun control. Despite a rise in mass shootings and public outcries for reforms, the ideological divide has prevented substantial progress. Democrats, emphasizing public safety, push for stricter regulations. In contrast, many Republicans defend the Second Amendment rights, opposing significant regulatory changes. This persistent stalemate on an issue of pressing national concern encapsulates the inefficiencies introduced by the heightened partisan polarization. When party loyalties supersede the broader national interest, the very essence of representative democracy is challenged (Lee, 2009).

**Influence of Special Interests:** The influence of special interest groups in the U.S. political framework cannot be understated. These groups, representative of specific industries or demographic cohorts, have become adept at navigating the legislative process to their advantage. A glaring illustration of this influence is seen in the realm of pharmaceutical lobbying. The industry, armed with significant financial resources, has frequently been able to sway policy discussions in its favor. For example, even amidst rising prescription drug costs that burden millions of Americans, meaningful reforms to curb these prices face significant hurdles in Congress. The magnitude of contributions flowing from pharmaceutical companies to political campaigns has prompted many to question whether the interests of the broader public are being duly represented or overshadowed by these powerful entities (Angell, 2004).

Similarly, the fossil fuel sector showcases the might of special interest influence. The urgent and globally recognized necessity to address climate change conflicts with the interests of this industry. Even as scientific consensus and public demand lean towards aggressive environmental action, significant policy changes remain elusive. The extensive lobbying and campaign contributions from fossil fuel conglomerates are often viewed as primary culprits, potentially diverting legislative actions from the broader environmental and public interest towards narrower industrial objectives (Oreskes & Conway, 2010).

**Congressional Gridlock:** The architecture of the U.S. political system inherently fosters a separation of powers, strategically distributing authority among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This design was intentional, aiming to halt any one branch from amassing unchecked power. Nevertheless, it's this very dispersal of authority that, under certain conditions, culminates in congressional gridlock. A classic manifestation of this is observed when the presidency and the Congress are helmed by rival political parties. In such scenarios, proposals from the executive often

face steep legislative hurdles. A poignant illustration from recent history is President Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court in 2016. With the Senate under Republican control, Garland's nomination was effectively frozen, neither approved nor explicitly rejected, simply left in limbo for nearly a year (Dionne Jr., E. J., Ornstein, N. J., & Mann, T. E., 2017).

Similarly, the wrangling between President Trump and a Democrat-led House of Representatives over the funding for a border wall in 2019 epitomizes this gridlock. The disagreement led to a prolonged government shutdown, the longest in U.S. history. This impasse, where critical governance decisions were held hostage to partisan interests, underscores the challenges the separation of powers can inadvertently introduce, especially in an era of intensified political polarization (Binder, & Smith, 1997).

### **Nigeria:**

**Corruption:** Nigeria grapples with an entrenched culture of corruption, manifesting in various segments of its political, economic, and social tapestry. The legislative domain is not immune; here, corrupt tendencies may emerge as bribery, embezzlement, or even nepotism. These malpractices considerably dampen the legislative branch's potential in advancing democratic governance. For instance, Nigeria's previous endeavors to privatize state assets and utilities faced criticisms over non-transparent procedures. Many believed that legislative approvals were influenced more by individual gain than the public good. This perception of underhanded dealings not only erodes public trust but also challenges the legitimacy of the legislative process, with the overarching consequence being that critical reforms often meet public skepticism (Adebanwi, W., & Obadare, E., 2011).

Furthermore, corrupt practices within legislative institutions also warp the decision-making calculus, leading to policies that do not necessarily cater to the broader public interest. A case in point is the misappropriation of "constituency funds" – budgetary allocations meant for local development in lawmakers' constituencies. There have been recurring reports of these funds either being unaccounted for or used for projects of questionable value, thereby depriving many communities of much-needed infrastructural development. Such distortions, where resources intended for public welfare get redirected, underscore the detrimental impact of corruption on democratic representation (Omotola, J. S., 2006).

**Capacity Constraints:** In Nigeria, the legislative branch, as in many emerging democracies, faces critical capacity constraints that impede its function in democratic governance. Notably, the dearth of specialized training and expertise in policy analysis is a glaring issue. Take, for instance, the country's annual budgetary process. The intricacies of national budgeting require nuanced understanding and rigorous scrutiny. Yet, many legislators lack the requisite background in economics or finance to thoroughly appraise and challenge the proposals set forth by the executive. This knowledge gap often results in budgets that are rubber-stamped without substantive legislative amendments or input. Consequently, key fiscal decisions might not reflect the diverse needs of the populace or ensure optimal allocation of resources, undermining the very essence of representative democracy (Adegoroye, G., 2007).

Similarly, capacity constraints also manifest in the oversight function of the legislature. While it's the duty of legislators to scrutinize the executive branch's actions, this responsibility can be daunting without sufficient resources. For instance, investigating alleged governmental malpractices or

misappropriation demands not just political will but also logistical support, investigative expertise, and legal acumen. There have been instances where legislative committees, due to limited resources or expertise, struggled to hold high-profile figures accountable, thus compromising the accountability pillar of democratic governance (Ojo, 2009).

**Insecurity:** The ongoing security challenges in Nigeria have posed substantial hurdles to the nation's democratic processes and the function of its legislative institutions. The menace of Boko Haram in the northeastern region offers a poignant illustration of this. Beyond the immediate devastation caused by their insurgent activities, these terrorist attacks have disrupted legislative outreach initiatives and hampered elected officials' efforts to gather on-ground feedback from their constituents. In several instances, town hall meetings, which serve as direct platforms for interaction between the public and their representatives, have been either cancelled or poorly attended due to fears of potential attacks. Such interruptions in critical communication lines impede legislators' abilities to understand and address the specific needs and grievances of their constituents, thereby undermining the essence of representative democracy (Ibrahim, J., 2017).

Similarly, the Niger Delta region, plagued by militancy and organized oil bunkering, presents another dimension of the challenge. Frequent kidnappings and attacks on oil installations not only destabilize the region but have also made it perilous for legislators to engage openly with their electorates. This volatile environment significantly limits opportunities for public consultations, thereby constraining the democratic feedback mechanism that ensures people's voices are incorporated in the legislative decision-making process (Ukiwo, U., 2011).

The legislative institutions play a pivotal role in the advancement and consolidation of democratic governance. Their key functions of representation, accountability, and responsiveness are crucial to the functioning of a healthy democracy, as demonstrated by the experiences of both the United States and Nigeria.

However, the realization of these functions is not without its challenges. In the United States, issues such as partisan polarization, the influence of special interests, and the potential for legislative gridlock can hinder the effective operation of the Congress. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, corruption, capacity constraints, and insecurity pose substantial challenges to the legislature's ability to effectively represent, hold to account, and respond to the needs of its citizens.

Despite these challenges, it is essential to recognize the substantial role that legislative institutions play in both countries in shaping policy, ensuring governmental accountability, and representing the diverse interests of their citizens. As such, ongoing efforts to strengthen these institutions, address the challenges they face, and improve their capacity to fulfill their democratic functions are of paramount importance to the continued development of democracy in the United States, Nigeria, and beyond.

## 6. Summary of Major Findings

Based on the analysed data, the following findings were highlighted:

1. A comparative exploration of the legislative bodies in the United States and Nigeria reveals shared responsibilities encompassing lawmaking, representation, and oversight. Additionally, both countries employ a bicameral structure in their legislatures. However, the intricacies of each nation's historical evolution, foundational legal principles, and prevailing socio-political narratives distinctly mold the way these responsibilities are executed. This variation underscores the multifaceted nature of democratic legislative systems.

2. An intriguing discovery from our analysis is the shared democratic pillars within the legislative institutions of both the United States and Nigeria. Despite their varied historical trajectories and socio-political dynamics, both nations emphasize representation, accountability, and responsiveness as central tenets. These pillars, fundamental to fortifying democratic governance, manifest through the dual-chambered legislative structure, mechanisms for oversight, and sustained dialogues with the populace.
3. A pivotal observation is that, while both the United States and Nigeria value their legislative bodies for upholding democratic governance, each faces its unique set of challenges. In the U.S., the threats of intense partisan divisions, outsized influence of vested interests, and possible legislative standstills impede seamless operations. Conversely, Nigeria grapples with issues of pervasive corruption, gaps in institutional capacity, and prevailing security threats, all of which compromise the legislature's commitment to its citizenry.

## 7. Conclusion

A comparative study of the legislative institutions in the United States and Nigeria underscores their critical roles in championing democratic governance. Though shaped by distinct historical narratives and socio-political backgrounds, both nations converge on the fundamental democratic tenets of representation, accountability, and responsiveness. The embrace of bicameral legislative frameworks serves as a testament to their commitment to ensuring diverse voices are represented, balancing immediate local priorities with overarching national goals.

Integral to these legislative structures is their oversight capacity, which acts as a bulwark against potential overreach by the executive. By scrutinizing executive actions and the allocation of resources, these bodies play a pivotal role in safeguarding the ethical, legal, and efficient functioning of the government. Moreover, the iterative dialogues between lawmakers and the public further amplify the democratic ethos, ensuring that the citizenry's aspirations and grievances directly inform policy directions.

Yet, navigating the legislative landscape isn't devoid of challenges. The U.S. finds itself wrestling with deep-seated partisan divides, looming threats of legislative deadlocks, and the sometimes outsized sway of special interest groups — factors that could muddy the legislative waters and erode public confidence. Parallely, Nigeria contends with pervasive corruption, resource and knowledge gaps, and an unsettling security scenario, all of which could potentially destabilize the legislative process and diminish the populace's trust in its democratic institutions.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the major findings, the following recommendations were offered:

1. The effectiveness of Nigeria's legislative institutions is pivotal for the nation's democratic growth. Given its distinctive socio-political landscape, a concerted emphasis on capacity-building becomes imperative. Tailored initiatives, informed by Nigeria's rich historical nuances, can equip lawmakers with the requisite expertise and tools essential for efficient lawmaking, astute representation, and rigorous oversight. Such bespoke initiatives, rooted in Nigeria's unique context, promise not only to empower the legislative arm but also to resonate more deeply with its citizenry, enhancing overall democratic engagement.



2. Both the United States and Nigeria, despite their differences, are anchored in the shared democratic pillars of representation, accountability, and responsiveness. It's therefore incumbent upon them to perpetually refine their legislative mechanisms in service of these ideals. Strengthening systems that amplify transparency is one such avenue. Similarly, fostering avenues for more inclusive citizen participation can ensure a broader representation of voices in the legislative discourse. Additionally, fortifying oversight mechanisms can further instill public confidence, ensuring that legislative institutions remain vigilant gatekeepers of democracy, continually checking and refining executive actions.
3. Turning the spotlight back to Nigeria, the challenges it confronts are multifaceted. To truly fortify its legislative institutions, a holistic approach is warranted. Foremost among these challenges is corruption, a malaise that has historically hampered governance. Intensifying anti-corruption drives, streamlining legislative processes, and instituting stringent checks can significantly mitigate this. Concurrently, capacity-building, as aforementioned, remains crucial, ensuring lawmakers are well-equipped to navigate complex policy terrains. Lastly, the specter of national security looms large, making it essential to evolve robust strategies that not only address immediate threats but also preemptively mitigate potential challenges. In doing so, Nigeria can truly empower its legislative institutions to resonate more effectively with its citizens' aspirations and concerns.

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