



## THE 60 YEARS OF THE NIGERIA SENATE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*The Senate is referred to as the upper chamber of Nigeria's bicameral legislature. The National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a bicameral Legislature established under Section 4 of the 1999 Constitution which consists of 109 Senatorial seats with the 36 states divided into three senatorial districts, each electing one Senator through the implementation of the First-Past-the-Post electoral system. The Federal Capital Territory also elects one senator using the First-Past-the-Post electoral system. There have been nine National Assemblies since the independence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The primary responsibility of the National Assembly is to make law. The functions of the Senate in other countries and democracies vary and are peculiar due to the system of government or governmental style, culture, dogma, and traditions inherent in such societies, population amongst other factors. Some of the functions of the Nigerian Senate are as follows; lawmaking, corrections of defects and ambiguities in the constitution which is enabled by the provisions of section 88 (2)(a) of the 1999 Constitution, the approval of judicial appointments. Section 231 (1) of the Constitution provides that the assignment of an individual to the office of Chief Justice of Nigeria shall be made by the President of the Federation on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council subject to such appointments by the Senate. Besides the appointment of Judicial Officers, the Senate possesses the power and legitimacy to approve and confirm other appointments made by the Executive arm. The President's constitutional right to appoint ministers of the Federal government is subject to confirmation by the Senate. This paper solely examines the 60 years of the Nigerian Senate intending to define the origin and path of the Nigerian Senate. For this study, the institutional approach, historical approach, and legal approach were adopted and data were garnered from secondary sources. This paper places historical evidence of the various National Assemblies in Nigeria from past to present.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, National Assembly, Senate

## **1.0 PREAMBLE**

The Nigerian Senate is chaired by the President of the Senate. The House of Representatives is likewise chaired by the Speaker of the House. The First Senate President in Nigeria was Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1960, who stepped down to become the country's first Head of State.

Dennis Osadebay of the NCNC party took over from the year 1960-1963 to become the second Senate President. Sequel to the conclusion of Dennis' tenure, Nwafor Orizu took over as Senate president from the period of 1963-1966. 1979-1983 saw the transition from the then ruling party NCNC to NPN as Joseph Wayar became the fourth Senate President. 1992-1993 saw Iyorchia Ayu emerge as Senate President followed by Ameh Ebute and Evan Enwerem subsequently.

Chuba Okadigbo represented PDP from the year 1999-2000. Next was Anyim Pius Aym who took over the role of Senate President from the period of 2000-2003 under the auspices of the People's Democratic Party. The next Senate President to emerge was Adolphus Wabara from the period of 2003-2005. The years 2005-2007 saw the leadership of the Nigeria Senate under Ken Nnamani. From the year 2007-2015 David Mark became the first person to retain the Presidency of the Senate and serve a second term as he and his deputy were re-nominated without contest to date, David Mark remains the longest-serving Senate President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. From the year 2015-2019, Bukola Saraki became the first civilian former governor to become the President of the Senate. Ahmed Lawan took over from Saraki on the 11th of June 2019 and is currently the Senate President of Nigeria.

Conditions such as population, multi-ethnic pluralism, religion, the variety of culture and tradition help defined the nature of the Nigerian Senate as regards the total number of seating senators, positions, and respective roles allocated to each member of the Nigerian Senate in an attempt to fully entrench the spirit of democracy within the federal system [Lateef: 1963].

## **2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

It is unsafe to presume that the readers of this paper have a fundamental understanding of the concepts used therein. Thus, it is imperative to establish conceptual clarifications on major concepts used throughout this study. These concepts include Nigeria, National Assembly, the Senate, and the Historical Overview.

## **3.0 NIGERIA**

Nigeria is a West African state whose history and emergence were fundamentally birth from the shackles of colonial rule. Hence, the formative years of Nigeria were defined by challenges peculiar to post-colonial societies which altogether affected its overall growth and development.

The most populous black nation on the earth gained its independence on the 1st of October, 1960. For a country endowed with vast natural resources, Nigeria is yet to reach its full potential.

Research argues that the dilemma of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as it is with any post-colonial society is as a result of colonial rule. Colonial rule or colonialism altered levels of development in much of the developing world.

Economic and political models of the colonizing nations also influenced negatively the reversals of fortune [Lange, Mahoney, Vom Hau: 2006].

The core of Nigeria's foreign policy is based on the development of Pan-Africanism. The idea that all Africans and people of African descent share common interests and should thus be unified while the concept of Pan-Africanism is presumed to be one of the most complex occurrences in modern history, it is pivotal to the eradication of subjective accounts and presumptions of the African people [Geiss: 1967].

In the context of development, the exceptionality of Nigeria, the condition of political and both internal and external forces that continued to threaten the unity and sovereignty of the state.

Nigeria stands as a unique exception worth exploring for a better understanding of development in Africa [Akanle: 2013].

### **3.1 THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

The National Assembly is primarily defined as an assembly that comprises the representatives of a country and it usually constitutes a legislative body or the establishment of a constituent assembly. In the case of Nigeria, the National Assembly is made up of the Senate and the National Assembly with a total of 469 seats, 109 seats belonging to the Senate, and 360 representatives. The Nigerian National Assembly is fashioned and patterned in a manner that accommodates the various multiple ethnic groups in the country. Historically speaking, pre-colonial Nigeria was characterized by the existence of Kingdoms and empires as well as various segmented societies such as the Habe Kingdom (Hausa) of the fifteenth century before the ascendancy of the Fulani tribe in 1804, sequel to the Jihad. Other social and political entities included the Kanem-Bornu Empire, the Oyo empire, Benin Kingdom, amongst others [Agby: 2016].

The Assembly's broad oversight functions include the ability to establish committees of its members to scrutinize bills and the conduct of government officials. The code of conduct defines how government officials ought to act. They are both specific, aspirational, and enforceable and are all within the confines of the constitution.

The National assembly's state delegations include the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as well as the Federal Capital Territory. The various points of operation and convergence of the National Assembly include the Nigerian National Assembly building, the Nigeria Senate building (The Red Chamber), Nigeria's National Assembly meeting with the Male, and the National assembly complex

### **3.2 THE SENATE**

The ideology or concepts behind the Senate can be traced as far back to ancient Rome. The senate was the governing and advisory council that proved to be the most permanent element in the Roman Constitution. The earliest monarchy in Rome developed the Senate as an advisory council; as at 509 BC, it had 300 members, sequel to the abolition of the monarchy in 509 BC, the senate metamorphosed into an advisory Council of the "Consuls" which happened to be the two largest magistrates. The senate and the people were responsible for drafting the two highest magistrates. The Senate and the people of Rome were somewhat intertwined as the senate economic, political, diplomatic, domestic, and international laws

that aided the overall growth and development of Rome. The Romans explained their administration succinctly: “Senatus popu Lusque Romanus“. Otherwise known as the senate and the people of Rome, (remove the word home highlighted in yellow and put a comma after Rome, ) this influenced the life, customs, Laws, and the Trajectory of Rome from the 6th century to the Mid-third century BCE. The Senate was the machinery for public representation and administration [Fleiner: 2020].

In ancient Rome, there the cult of the senate existed in the imperial period as more than just an advisory body and rather the very entity that preserved the Monarchy, the Monarch and home but there is no evidence of this in the Republic [Erskine: 1997].

#### **4.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The term Historical Overview can be defined as the process of explaining or exploring the meaning and interpretation of a thing, person, people, nation, creed or institution from pre-existing occurrences from the past which is then considered to be a part of history. History is applied to better understand the meaning and interpretation of present occurrences.

#### **5.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For this paper, three theoretical approaches were adopted. They include;

- The Institutional approach
- The Historical approach
- The Legal approach

#### **5.1 THE INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH:**

The Institutional approach is somewhat related to the legal approach yet distinct in nature. Significantly, the approach does not solely rely on other disciplines for the understanding of politics but rather emphasizes political institutions and structures such as the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the Nation’s electoral commission, state actors, labor groups, political parties, etc. this approach holds political institutions accountable yielding virtues such as good governance and improving government capacity [Laegreid: 2020].

The upholders of the institutional approach study the government’s ability to function appropriately as well as the capacity of governmental systems and structures to produce and yield results. Through this approach, various components of institutional change are identified such as mutability, contradictions, multiplicity, containment, diffusion, learning, and innovation [Clemens, Cook: 1999].

In regards to this paper, this approach enables a contemporary examination and assessment of the Nigerian Senate as well as the dynamics that are peculiar to the senate as a political institution in Nigeria vis-à-vis the expansion of its national administrative capacities within the confines of the role and functions of the senate as provided by the constitution [Krasner: 1984].

#### **5.2 THE HISTORICAL APPROACH**

The Historical approach is of the position that political phenomena could be understood better with the help of historical elements such as age, place, scenarios, etc. Philosophers such as Machiavelli, Sabine, and Dunning believed that politics and history are intertwined and that all studies on politics should have a historical perspective to better have an

understanding of the subject matter. History is perceived as past politics and although this dictum has very respectable antecedents. Nevertheless, there are portions of and in history that cannot be defined as politics [LESE: 1913].

The concept of history itself transcends beyond polity. Because not all history expresses a political argument [Cavanagh: 2014].

All facets of politics have had a controversial history at some point. An example is a case in the Dominican Republic. In the 1960s after three decades of authoritarian rule under dictator Trujillo, his brutal regime was succeeded by the political guile and manipulation of Dr. Joaquin [Howard: 1999].

For a better understanding of political institutions, they are bound to try to understand these in a historical context [Hodgkin: 1963].

Every past is linked to the present as such, history provides a chronological order of every political phenomenon.

### **5 3 THE LEGAL APPROACH**

The Legal approach deals with the interpretation of politics within the paradigm of law. It deals with the concept of both legal and constitutional frameworks. It carries out investigations of the various respective legal positions, their powers, and processes which ultimately make actions legally binding. In regards to politics, law and the court system ensure separation of power as well as the legalization of politics [Beatty: 1996].

For politics to experience stability, it must culminate in legal provisions. Constitutional law creates an adequate appreciation of the impact of law upon relations to power, institutions, and states [Jones: 1995].

Law enables the court with the ability to look clearly at issues of procedure as this is fundamental to the construct and functions of the Nigerian Senate [Cot: 2003].

Law then becomes the machinery for justice, productivity, and effectiveness within the framework of politics [Hagles: 2008]. The Legal approach creates clarity as regards the essentials of democracy and equality [Hidalgo: 2008].

### **6.0 THE 60 YEARS OF THE NIGERIA SENATE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The legislature is a pivotal institution of democracy. Its functions are defined concerning lawmaking, representation, and oversight responsibilities [Wapmuk: 2018].

The year 1960 saw the emergence of the first-ever Senate President Nnamdi Azikiwe under the auspices of the NCNC party. The second was Dennis Osadebay from the period of 1960-1963. As of 1963-1966, Nwafor Orizu functioned as the third Senate President in Nigeria's mile before the seizure of power by the Nigerian military from the period of 1966-1999 with an interregnum from the period of 1979 to 1983. In this era, Military dictatorship was highly rampant in Africa and peculiar to certain emerging states. This was not linked to the size of the army, the level of professionalism of the army, or the career experience of the officers taking power [Bienen: 1978].

Joseph Wayas took over as senate president from the period of 1979-1983 to subsequently, Iyorchia Ayu was Senate President for the year 1992 1993 as well as Amel Ebute in 1993 under the SDP Party.

The 4th National Assembly was inaugurated on the 29th of May 1999 at the start of the fourth republic from the period of 1999-2003. Evan Enwerem was the first PDP Senate President in the year 1999. As Chika Okadigbo continued from the period of 1999-2000. Subsequently, Anyim Pius Anyim became Senate President from the year 2002-2003 and Adolphus Wabara From 2003-2005 [Omotala: 2010].

The fifth National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was inaugurated June 3, 2003, and ran its course till the 5th of 2005. Ken Nnamani too was Senate President from the period of April 5th, 2005 sequel to Adopt Adolphus Wabara's leadership from the period of 2003 - the 5th of April 2005 [Omotala: 2010].

Sequel to Ken Nnamani's tenure as Senate President, David Mark became Senate president from the year 2007-2015 following his re-election. He functioned in the office of the Senate President from the 6th National Assembly up to the 7th National Assembly. The principal officers of the Senate in the 7th National Assembly include David Mark representing Benue state and the People's Democratic Party respectively, Ike Ekweremadu representing Enugu state who was the then Deputy Senate President. Victor Ndoma Egba was the majority leader of the Senate, Ahmed Abdul Ningi functioned as the Deputy Majority Leader of the Senate. George Akume of Benue State was Minority Leader of the Senate. Ahmad Rufai Sani functioned as Deputy Minority Leader amongst other principal officers were Amelio Oladele Bello representing Oyo state. He was Deputy Chief Whip and Ganiyu Olanrewaju Solomon was a Minority whip in the Senate representing Lagos State. Bello Hayatu Gwarzo was Chief Whip Senate of the 7th Nigeria National Assembly. The composition of the Senate of the 8th Nigeria National Assembly was a total of 109 for which 59 were elected on the platform of the APC and 44 elected were on the platform of the People's Democratic Party. Only six Senators elected were women. The women elected were Stella Oduah, Uche Ekwunife, Monsurat Sunmonu, Fatimat Raji Rasaki, Grace Okoji, Oluremi Tinubu, and Binta Garba. The peaceful and positive outcomes of the 2015 elections came as a surprise to many considering the challenging political and security conditions in which the elections were conducted. The 2015 Nigerian general elections had a positive ripple other were elections that were yet conducted or inconclusive [Orji: 2015].

The 9th National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a bicameral legislature inaugurated on the 11th of June 2019 and the Assembly will run its course until the 11th of June 2023. Principal Officers of the Senate include Ahmed Lawan as Senate President, Ovie Omo-Agege as Deputy Senate President, Abdullahi Yahaya as the Senate Majority Leader, Ajayi Boroffice as Deputy Majority Leader Senate, Eyinnaya Abaribe as the Senate Minority Leader, Emmanuel Bwacha is the Deputy Minority Leader Senate, Abdullahi Sabi as Deputy Chief Whip Senate, Phillip Aduda as Minority Whip Senate and Orji Uzo Kalu as Chief Whip Senate.

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