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PART 1

Editorial Preface

Understanding the role and challenges of the legislature in the Fourth Republic:
the case of Oyo State House of Assembly

A.T. Okoosi-Simbine

1-27

The Committee System and Legislative Efficiency:

The Case of Kwara State House of Assembly *J. Y. Fashagba*

28-43

National Assembly: The Limit of Party Politics in Legislative Process

Solomon Akhere Benjamin

44-72

Exploring the Parliament

Hassan A. Saliu and Abdulrasheed A. Muhammad

73-89

Fiscal transparency in Nigeria: An Evaluation of the
checks and balances in the 1999 Constitution *S.S.Maimako*

91-101

Power Sector Reform and National Development:

Time to commercialise the use of renewable energy technologies
in Nigeria *Patterson Ekeocha and Chigbo A. Mgbemene*

102- 123

Impact of political affiliation on bank profitability in Nigeria *U. T. Aburime*

124-140

Causes and Socio-economic consequences of HIV/AIDS in Kwara State

G.T. Ijaiya, A. Usman, M.A. Ijaiya, L. A. Alabi and M. Ijaiya

141-158

PART 2

LEGISLATIVE OPINION

Legislative committees and oversight functions in Nigeria *Gafar Ijaiya*

159-169

The role and challenges of parliamentary staff
in a nascent democracy *Ishaya .S. Habu*

170-180

EXPLORING THE PARLIAMENT

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Introduction

The legislature is an important feature of modern democratic practice. It is the arm responsible for making laws for the good governance of the society. Beyond this, it serves as arena for resolving and reconciling differences in opinion about policy matters within the state. Indeed, it is the branch of government to which popular complaints and demands for action are first articulated and channelled. This is by virtue of its essence as representing broader range of interests. While the parliament is not an invention of democracy as its existence predates modern democratic practice, it has, however, come to acquire significance as the main symbol of democratic governance. This is essentially so given the fact that irrespective of the nature of the government at any point in time (dictatorial or democratic), both the executive and the judicial arms maintain their existence, even if this will be in a somewhat perverted form. In other words, the legislative arm is usually the least institutionalized compared to other arms especially in countries with a long history of authoritarianism.

In both developed and developing democracies, the parliament plays significant roles in the day-to-day running of the government. The significance of these roles is evidenced in the growing topicality of the subject accompanied by a growing body of literature. Indeed, the literature is replete with discussions about the parliament in its relation to the executive arm (see, Davies, 1996; Aiyede, 2006; Bassey, 2006) as well as the role of the modern parliament in the governance process such as rule making and representation. Some others have focused on the legislature as an institution in different contexts (Olukoshi, 1999; Maduagwu and Oche, 1992; Keefe and Ogul, 1981; Salih, 2005). While these attempts are purposeful and insightful, little attention has been devoted to the emergence of this important arm and how the process of its emergence has impacted on its development through time and across different political systems. This paper is therefore an attempt to explore the parliament as an institution. Essentially, it seeks to delve into how it emerged? What are the transformations that have taken place in the course of its development? What accounts for the fluctuating fortunes of modern parliaments?

The article is structured into six sections, the first part being this introductory remark. The second part examines the evolution of the parliament while the third part focuses on a discussion of the generic roles of the parliament.

The fourth examines the extent to which contemporary parliaments discharge their generic functions while the fifth part discusses the fortunes of contemporary parliaments especially in relation to the executive arm. The sixth section concludes the work.

Origin of Parliament

As alluded to in the introductory remark, while the parliament is an important institutional structure of modern democracy, it has a long history which predates it. Its existence can be traced back to the *Witenagemot* of Anglo Saxon England which operated between the 7th and 11th centuries. This was an Assembly comprising mostly of powerful and important individuals constituted by the king to advise him basically on issues of war and imposition of taxes (Ahmadu, 2006; Weeds, 2003). Noteworthy is that, the assembly was merely advisory and its membership was at the exclusive discretion of the king. However, the continued dependence of the kings on such assemblies later resulted in a situation of functional reciprocity between the king and members of this assembly. In this case, for the king to gain the support of the assembly, some concessions necessarily needed to be granted to it. In some cases, agreements needed to be signed between the king and the assembly - a practice which later evolved into modern acts of parliament (Weeds, 2003).

It should be noted that parliament from this period, began to witness profound growth in its powers to the extent that the practice was emulated in other parts of Europe. Also, the expansion in scope of the assembly's powers through time was informed by a host of factors that include (i) the logic of collective action by its members, and (ii) the tendency to allude to the fact of members representing different or specific interests. This was further strengthened by the fact that members of the assembly were usually influential personalities in the society. From this evolutionary process emerged the three generic functions performed by modern parliaments. That is, law-making; oversight and representation.

With the advent of modern democratic practice, the parliament emerged as a strong pillar of democracy given the fact that democracy is built on the active and informed participation of the people in the governance process. Such participation is usually exercised largely through representatives elected by the people themselves. Implicit in this is that, by virtue of the members of parliament representing peoples of different constituencies and interests, the parliament constitutes or is expected to constitute, on the one hand, an arena for reconciling differences of interests and on the other hand, the main pillar for the attainment of democratic ideals. In the latter context, the parliament amidst other arms of government (executive and the judiciary) is expected to be *primus inter pares*. However, this ideal of a strong parliament cannot be said to exist in practical terms as over the years and in different political systems it has continued to suffer fluctuating fortunes especially in its relation to the executive arm. Indeed, most parliaments have oscillated between being assertive and being passive in their dealings with the executive arm.

This is largely due to a host of factors that include the nature and organization of government, extent of the ruling party influence in parliament and susceptibility of parliamentarians to manipulation by the executive, among others. It needs to be pointed out that, in the parliamentary system, the parliament most often than not serves as arena for legitimizing the proposals of the prime minister. This may not be unconnected with the fusion of power that characterizes the parliamentary system which also makes a strong party influence possible. In the first place, the prime minister himself and members of his cabinet are usually elected and/or appointed from parliament.

In the presidential system, with its hallmark as the dispersion of governmental powers among the three arms of government, that is, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary (Okege, 2002; Linz, 1990; Oellinger and Meese, 2000), the legislature has a higher leverage of being assertive. However, this tendency has not cut across all presidential political systems as legislatures have remained particularly passive in some, while they remain assertive in others. Based on this trend, Johnson and Nakaruma (1999), in an insightful work have attempted a classification of the parliament. Providing a classical example for each, the authors came up with a four fold classification as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Typology of legislatures

Type	Internal structure/ Information Needed	Examples
Transformative legislature	Highly complex	US Congress
Arena legislature	Complex	British Parliament
Emerging legislature	Evolving	Bolivia Congress, Nigeria
Rubber stamp legislature	Little internal structure	Old-USSR, China

Source: Johnson and Nakaruma, (1999)

According to the authors, transformative legislatures are the rarest type of legislature. They are legislative bodies capable of both representing and shaping societal demands. They both articulate diverse societal preferences and serve as an independent shaper of the policies that emerge. For this reason, such legislatures require an internal structure capable of channelling conflict and reconciling differences, as well as information capacities up to the task of initiating and perfecting policies. On the other hand, an arena legislature is a place where societal differences are represented and articulated. Public policies are debated from different perspectives and actions of government are assessed by different criteria. Thus, they typically need some internal structure to advance both goals.

This includes a party leadership system which can organize debate, rules which permit orderly discussion, and a committee structure capable of channelling business.

For an emerging legislature, it is one that is in the process of change from one type to another. Such legislatures, initially, may be lacking in internal structure and capacities but eventually try to develop more of the things necessary to play a larger role in governing a society. Examples of such legislatures, according to Johnson and Nakaruma (1999), include Bolivia, a number of other Latin American legislatures, and many of those found in the former Soviet Union and its satellites. But it must be added that, because of its emergent nature, such legislatures are transient as they have the potential of evolving into transformative legislature or some other forms. In the case of rubber stamp assemblies, they are legislative bodies that simply endorse choices made elsewhere in the society.

The most frequently cited examples are those drawn from authoritarian and totalitarian countries where legislatures are largely symbolic bodies endorsing the decisions of leaders. This is also common in democracies where, for a number of reasons, the executive arm succeeds in exercising profound influence on the legislature and its activities. For instance, in Senegal, out of the 100 member senatorial seats, 35 are indirectly elected while the remaining 65 members are appointed by the president (CIA, 2008). Since rubber stamp legislatures merely endorse decisions made elsewhere, they typically require little in the way of internal complexity and information processing capacity.

While it is possible to classify legislatures according to types, it should also be noted that there could be 'some migration between types at different historical points' (Johnson and Nakaruma, 1999). The various categories notwithstanding, modern legislatures have come to be associated with specific roles and functions in the democratic governance process, although with variations in the intensity with which these are performed.

Functions and roles of Parliament

Modern legislatures perform a myriad of functions and roles which derive from their constitutional position in a democracy as well as from the fact of their existence and activities overtime. But as diverse as these functions are, scholars seem to agree more on three functions as most essential and central to the legislature. These are rule-making, oversight and representation. It should also be pointed out that these functions performed by modern parliaments have evolved along with the development of the parliament and stabilized as the institution continues to be institutionalized. In other words, the three functions are more or less generic to the parliament irrespective of the nature of governmental arrangement.

Rule making

The task of law making remains central to the existence of any legislative institution and even the entire governance process. If governance is taking to incorporate the entire process of public policy formulation and delivery including reconciling societal differences, then, the legislature in its task of rule-making becomes the first point of reference. This is because, not until rules are made can they be enforced by the executive arm. Similarly, it is in the process of enforcing such rules or decisions that a disaggregate preference will emerge thus creating the need for an independent arbiter to intervene in the form of judicial adjudication. Indeed, law making by the legislature consists of finding compromises between ideas and interests that emerge in the process of governance. It is what truly portrays the legislature as an arena for reconciling opposing and at times conflicting interests within the political system. Such opposing interests could be between the state and the citizens or part of the state institution or between different segments of the society. However, it must be stressed that, the mere fact of the legislature having the primary responsibility of law making does not imply that it initiates all legislations. As Keefe and Ogul (1981:16) have observed, for the infusion of ideas and the origination of most legislation, the legislature is dependent upon familiar "outsiders" in this respect.

These include the executive arm and its agencies, political parties and other interest groups. Indeed, these "outsiders" more often than not set the legislative agenda in form of bill proposals. Thus, after going through series of scrutiny and shuffling, legislative proposals are passed in the form of Acts of parliament.

Oversight

Legislative oversight is a process by which the legislative body takes active role in understanding and monitoring the performance of the executive arm and its agencies. The demand of modern democratic practice in terms of accountability has created a situation where it is not only enough that laws (including appropriation laws) should be passed but such must also be implemented. Oversight activities take place after a law is passed and involves monitoring executive activities for efficiency, probity and accountability. Although most legislatures have the constitutional power of oversight, its nature makes it a more complex and demanding activity because it requires acquiring a great deal of information about the executive arm and its activities. While in the presidential system, oversight power is usually exercised through specialized parliamentary committees, in the parliamentary system, oversight usually occurs through a process of question time in parliament by which members of cabinet are expected to provide details of activities of their respective agencies. In specific terms, among the primary objectives of oversight are, to:

- identify and avoid inefficiency and waste in government. This objective includes identification of extravagance, fraud, and misuse of public funds as well as identification of functions which are duplicative, overlap, or for any other reason warrant redefinition, redirection, redistribution and/or restructuring;
- determine the extent of government's effectiveness in carrying out public policy as set by the Legislature;
- determine whether responsible parties are administering the law fairly and properly throughout the state; and,
- increase the knowledge and understanding of governmental programmes.

It is instructive to note that it is in the course or aftermath of parliamentary oversight that the legislature may gain sufficient ground for the institution of disciplinary measures including impeachment proceedings against the executive arm.

Representation

Like the earlier functions of the legislature discussed, the idea of a representative assembly dates back to the pre-modern democracy era but became standardized in the age of democracy. In general context, Edigheji (2000:96) has noted that the idea of representation dates back to the latter centuries of Rome, when the prince was regarded as the representative of the Roman people as a collective. This continued through the medieval period with the recognition of monarchs, emperor, pope and other privileged citizens as representatives of the people or peculiar interests. One striking feature of representation at this period is that representation was not by election but by appointment or heredity. However, this notion of representation has changed fundamentally over the years.

In the age of democracy, the legislature represents a key institution of political representation. This is because members are known to represent the interests of different constituencies and groups within the political entity. In this light, the fulcrum of legislative activity is expected to be the articulation and aggregation of diverse interests of the represented constituencies into the policy process. Indeed, from a historical point of view, the logic of being representatives of the people or particular interests was a major factor in the expansion of the powers of the parliament as against that of the monarchs in the formative years of the parliament. Underscoring the significance of the representative functions of the parliament, Johnson and Nakaruma (1999) observe that, where they function, legislatures are useful 'nerve endings of the polity' in the sense that they are often the branch of government to which popular complaints/dissatisfactions/demands for actions are first articulated or channeled. This they hinge on the belief that legislators typically operate with greater transparency, or at least with less secrecy, in comparison with either the judiciary or executive.

This belief, however, may not be absolutely plausible given the fact that variations exist across different political systems with regard to how the legislature operates or the extent of its transparency or secrecy. All the same, the legislature in the discharges of its representative function is expected to come up with laws that help advance the democratic ideals and ensure overall socio-economic development of the polity.

Beyond the three conventional functions of the legislature discussed above, scholars have identified quite a number of roles which the legislature in modern context is capable of playing. Keefe and Ogul (1981:24) write that one function of the legislature, which is often easily overlooked, is the function of informing and instructing the public. Through parliamentary debates on bills and in the course of oversight activities, parliament's actions serve an important purpose of educating the public about government policies and programmes. Given the fact that in most countries, parliamentarians and opinions expressed in parliaments are constitutionally protected, parliamentarians are usually able to speak their minds on issues and this enables the public to acquire better insights and adequate knowledge on the issue concerned.

In the African context, following the emergence and imposition of western-styled political institutions as a fall-out of the colonial experience, parliaments became the rallying point embodying the new hope for an Africanized machinery of government operating under the Africanization banner (Salih, 2005:7). But because the apparatus of government was essentially colonial, the role of parliaments 'which were sought to prepare Africans for constitutional sovereignty' was very much limited in the sense that even where there were African members of parliament, such members wielded no influence much as they were nominees of the colonial government.

This notwithstanding, Salih (2005:7-8) identifies the dominant governance role of parliaments during this time to include, the task of political modernization, political socialization, constitutional development, legislation and representation. Also writing in a similar context Mazrui (2000) notes that historically the legislature has been an instrument of liberation. First, representation on the colonial legislative council was seen by African nationalists as a measure of progress in their demands for self-government and independence. The progression from nominated African members to elected members, therefore, was an indication of the parliament's role in political liberation. At another level, the parliament serves as an arena for cultural liberation. According to Mazrui (2000:2), Tanzania's policy of *Swahilization* of the legislature at independence has been a case of legislative cultural liberation. This, no doubt, enhances political participation as it enlarges the pool from which candidates for parliamentary seats may be elected. This idea of parliament as an instrument of liberation has also found relevance in the issue of gender parity in governance. Indeed, several countries have embarked on affirmative action as a means of increasing the level of participation of women in governance.

A major area where this is currently and profoundly manifesting is in the area of parliamentary representation. In an insightful work detailing the increasing role of African women parliamentarians and attitudes towards quota system of representation, Tripp (2005) notes that:

"By 2005, approximately 23 African countries (half of all African countries) had adopted some form of legislative quotas for women; some, like Angola, had plans to adopt quotas, while others, like Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria, were engaged in ongoing debates on quotas."

While the above trend may be attributed to quite a number of factors that include domestic challenges and changing international norms with regard to gender representation in governance, it nonetheless buttresses Mazrui's conception of the parliament as an instrument of socio-cultural and political liberation.

Contemporary parliaments and the discharge of legislative functions

Legislatures across different systems perform multiple functions. But as implicit in the previous section, the task of making laws for the good governance of the state, overseeing administration and providing effective representation for the people represent a general tendency for all legislatures from the classical to contemporary period. The question then is: how are contemporary legislatures coping with these tasks and the associated challenges?

First, it must be stated that, all legislatures, no matter their size or nature, make laws. Indeed, most constitutions give the legislature supreme authority over all legislations. In the US, for instance, the supremacy clause as contained in Article VI, section 2 emphasizes that the law of congress "made in pursuance" of the constitution "shall be the supreme law of the land". Similar powers have been conferred on Nigeria's National Assembly by the 1999 and previous constitutions. However, given the centrality of the law making function to the existence of legislative institutions, can one say this is often fully exercised by the legislature?

The legislature's activity of law making is of course the most challenging and often time consuming one. This is because effectiveness of legislation requires a clause by clause consideration of the bill proposals, before they are passed. Yet this may be difficult to implement. Bello-Imam (2004: 409-410) observes that:

"Every provision of a law requires to be framed with the most current and long-sighted perception of its effect on all the other provisions; and the law when made should be capable of fitting into a consistent whole with the previously existing laws. It is impossible that these conditions should be in any degree fulfilled, when laws are voted clause by clause."

However, most modern parliaments barely have the time to go through this nitty-gritty. At one level, this may be attributed to the effect of parliaments' pre-occupation with other matters including time spent in mending fences between parliamentarians and that devoted to issues of party politics.

At another level, some or many legislators may not necessarily have the time or patience of scrutinizing proposed legislations. For instance, in a survey of the 95th congress of the US, Keefe and Ogul (1981:38) have observed that while 73 per cent of the legislators considered law making as a very important aspect of their job, only 25 per cent of the members 'report that they spent a great deal of their time studying proposed legislation'. The effect of this is that there could be a yawning gap between the number of proposed legislations and the actual number of bills that are passed. Little surprise therefore that of the 589 bills read on the floor of the Nigerian senate between 1999 and January 2006, only 92 were actually passed (See, Namnani, 2006:7). But it must be added that, as earlier indicated, discrepancy between proposed regulations and actual laws passed may not be a mere fallout of the volume of time required in scrutinizing bills but may be a fallout of a host of other factors affecting legislative activity, including inadequate technical manpower, weak information processing, power tussle with the executive, among others.

Second, and with regard to the oversight function of the parliament, it can be argued that given the magnitude of oversight activities and sometimes the lack of incentive for the legislators to engage in it, most parliaments often find oversight to be very challenging and daunting. Also, because oversight involves monitoring the activities of the executive, it requires on the one hand quite a great deal of information about the executive branch and its agencies. This is not unconnected with the fact that access to quality information equips the decision maker with informed alternatives pertaining to a particular subject (Serema, 2000). On the other hand, oversight functions require huge experience on organizing hearings and mobilization of members to project sites. Given this scenario, it is to be expected that while no comprehensive data may be readily available on how legislatures perform their oversight function, considerable variations will exist in the extent and effectiveness of their activities, depending on the resources available and constraints of the legislature in different political systems.

As mentioned in the previous section, the logic of a representative assembly is informed by the need to take care of peculiar interests of the people/the represented. Indeed, a representative parliament is the distinguishing hallmark of representative democracy. In order to facilitate the work or business of representation, parliaments often provide support for their members. For instance, in most parliaments, members are provided with funds to establish electorate or constituency offices and employ staff. The essence of this is to enable them maintain a close link with the electorate and put the job of representing the people on a more professional platform. In Nigeria, a fund for constituency offices is provided for lawmakers to enable them

establish and maintain close links with the electorate in the constituencies. The underlying philosophy here is that constituents have a sense of belonging when representatives pay close attention to them. This is because, grievances and demand could easily be reported at the constituency office of the lawmaker, who is expected to process and channel this for onward discussion in the parliament. By implication, therefore, several of legislative proposals that eventually become laws are expected to be a reflection of the desires and aspirations of the people as expressed through their representatives. However, there seem to be a contrasting reality to this situation. In a survey of selected parliaments of the world by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1992, government bill ranks highest as percentage of total bills in majority of the countries. With the exception of two countries (Portugal and Ireland), all others passed an overwhelming percentage of government bills as table 2 shows below.

Table 2: Government bills passed as percentage of total governments bill

S/N	Countries	Govt. Bill as % of all Bills	% of Govt. Bills passed
1.	Netherlands	98	85
2	Luxembourg	94	100
3	UK	92	92
4	Norway	90	99
5	Ireland	90	10
6	Greece	87	77
7	West Germany	74	100
8	Portugal	70	14
9.	Australia	65	96
10	Denmark	59	84
11	Finland	48	100
12	Italy	29	51
13	Belgium	23	100
14	France	22	82
15	Spain	5	88
16	Nigeria	58	30*

Source: IPU, 1992 cited in Newton and VanDeth, 2005

* NASS 2009

Given the situation described above, we may not be able to say in categorical terms that contemporary parliaments have served as truly representative institutions or, at best, they have provided symbolic representation. Again this needs not be conceived in absolute sense as there could be exceptions. For instance, in a country such as Nigeria, out of the 1,222 bills received between May 1999 and August, 2009, 517 (42.4%) originated from the executive, while 703 (57.6%) were initiated by private members. Out of the bills received only 360 (30 %) were passed into law (NASS 2009). On a comparative note, it could be asserted that

the origination of bills has to do more with the strength and organization of the legislature in different political contexts. The bottom line of our argument here is that contemporary legislatures differ in the extent to which they discharge their functions. This we may attribute to the series of challenges and constraints facing the institution. This border, on the one hand, on capacity of the institution to cope with the complexities that often emerge from time to time in the process of governance as well as the willingness and attitude of each law maker towards legislative activities and, on the other hand, it has to do with its relative power and relation to other arms of government, especially the executive arm.

Executive dominance versus legislature's decline

One area that has attracted and continued to attract serious attention from scholars on legislative institutions is the aspect of its relation with the executive arm of government. In particular, scholars have alluded to a declining legislature in comparison to the powers and popularities of the executive arm. This constitutes another area of challenge for the legislative institution as it tries to assert its independence and control over the executive. According to Ray (2004:221), "if a general survey is made of the position and workings of the legislature in the present century, it would be evident that barring a few important and striking exceptions, legislatures have declined in certain important aspects and particularly in respect of powers in relation to the executive power of governments". This needs not be surprising given the wide range of experiences among parliaments around the world. Indeed, Watts (2006:105) maintained that 'in a minority of countries' legislatures constitute an essential part of the decision making process, while in some (including most western liberal democracies), they have been dominated by the executive. Also, in several other cases, the legislatures are manipulated by authoritarian governments, and in a very few cases they are actually abolished or suspended, perhaps as a result of some form of military coup. The above simply highlights the dilemma of the legislative institution in comparison to an ever-burgeoning and dominant executive arm.

Watts (2006) has aptly provided what is considered as evidence of the weaknesses of contemporary legislatures which further reinforce the tendencies towards executive dominance. These include (i) the increasing tendency of the legislature to react to policy initiatives from the executive more than they create policy (see Table 2 above); (ii) legislatures lack of support services (independent budget facilities and adequate staffing) compared to that available to the executive; (iii) the technical expertise and knowledge available to legislatures are far less than available to the executive; (iv) governments monopolize parliamentary time, often forcing bills through by procedural devices; and (v) the fact that most legislators today emanate from the executive and not the legislatures contrary to what obtained in the middle of the 19th century when most social improvements were brought about on the initiatives of private members. However, a common argument against the fact of legislature's decline is that, on the one hand, the legislature can refuse the passage of executive proposals as a

form of control, and on the other hand, every legislature possesses the power to remove an overbearing executive through impeachment or a vote of no confidence. However, the reality is that cases of successful impeachments are fewer than the weight and potency of the power suggest.

Similarly, some scholars have tried to justify why most executive proposals scale through in parliament by alluding to Karl Freidrich's law of anticipated reaction which states that "wherever there are mutually dependent power relations, those involved will try to anticipate the reaction of others and modify their own behaviour accordingly" (quoted in Newton and VanDeth, 2005: 106). When applied to relations between the executive and the legislature, it follows that both arms would have or are expected to develop mechanisms that would help anticipate the likely consequences or reactions to the other's proposal or initiative. This is usually done through a set of institutions, officials or committees (including party committees or caucuses and sometimes called "wheeler-dealing" or "horse-trading". It must be acknowledged that while this is true of virtually all political systems around the world, there is yet an addition which is quite peculiar to African parliaments. One factor that could help explain legislature's decline or apathy in Africa as against their European counterparts is the different contexts from which they emerged. Parliaments in Africa and parliaments in Europe emerged from different backgrounds. While parliaments in the European context emerged first as advisory councils to the kings, they were soon to become established as indispensable bodies in the administrative process. Indeed, such bodies became so powerful that the kings did not often risk the consequences of disobeying their advice (Weeds, 2003).

Second, they were soon known to be representing specific interests in the society. In the African context, however, parliaments emerged from a colonial background. Since the hallmark of colonialism was the subjugation of the natives, there was therefore no attempt to develop the parliamentary arm of government. This is evidenced in the fact that even when legislative councils were established as in British colonial territories, such bodies were merely advisory to the colonial government. Equally, majority of members were handpicked or nominated and had no clearly defined interests different from those of the colonialists. Thus, it could be asserted that the development of the parliament or its degree of assertiveness is still as it was in the beginning, tied to the pleasure of the executive arm of government which manipulates its composition and is not obliged to accept its decisions. The adoption of the parliamentary system at independence by most African countries did not help the situation in anyway. The inherent fusion of legislative and executive functions ensures that the parliament remains subservient to the executive. This is further accentuated by the phenomenon of authoritarian and military rule that pervades countries of the continent and its attendant impact on the institutionalization of the legislative arm.

Paradoxically, however, while the legislature in Africa could be considered underdeveloped, there seems to be a growing confidence of the citizens in the ability of parliament as depicted by the Afro barometer survey in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Trust in parliament in percentage of population

Country	Percentage of Population
Botswana	54.4%
Ghana	74.1%
Lesotho	44.6%
Malawi	35.0%
Mali	63.3%
Namibia	61.3%
Nigeria	59.3%
South Africa	35.3%
Tanzania	90.7%
Zambia	25.2%
Zimbabwe	19.5%
Average of African countries	51.2%

Source: Adapted from Doorenspleet, 2006 p. 86

In contemporary times, scholars have tried to understand the basis of an executive dominance among the three arms of government. In this connection, Newton and Vandeth (2005:103) identified a number of factors that include (i) increasing government complexity. On the one hand, this has to do with the growing complexity and interdependence of the social, political and economic world which give a new importance and role to the executive and thus require a single centre of coordination and control. On the other hand, there is the increasing need to keep the multifarious agencies, departments and units of government moving in the same direction. This, as noted by the authors, is an executive rather than a legislative function; (ii) the increasing use of delegated legislation as a result of contemporary experiences that emanate in the process of governance; and (iii) the organizational advantage which the executive enjoys over the legislature when it comes to organizing for power. Such organizational advantage includes the fact that the executive is usually small in number which makes it easy to unite around a common interest; its being supported by large and well funded staff in presidential and prime ministerial offices and the direct relation/dealings of executive heads with the population. Others identified by the authors include use of the mass media to "exploit every ounce of favourable publicity they can get" through the maintenance of effective press offices; and the nature of party organization i.e. the stronger the party system / organization, the stronger the executive among others.

While all these factors have been advanced as responsible for the increasing dominance of the executive, it is also considered (directly or indirectly) to impact on ability of the

legislature to perform effectively. But more cogent is the issue of non-institutionalization of the legislature especially in emerging democracies. This is because, while the case of executive dominance may be regarded as an inevitable universal phenomenon owing to the reasons highlighted above, the issue of legislative decline tends to be more problematic in developing democracies. It should therefore be clear that while legislatures in developed democracies may be able to respond swiftly to executive recklessness, those of developing democracies may find this a Herculean task.

Conclusion

Our findings so far have revealed that the parliament emerged through a historical process that predates modern democracy but has become a cardinal institution of democratic practice. From Anglo-Saxon England, it spread to other parts of Europe and then to other parts of the world. Equally, the functions which parliaments perform are intricately woven into its process of development, although the complexities associated with modern democratic practice have created a situation whereby other new roles have come to be associated with the parliament such as political education, integration and instrument of liberation, among others. It is also observed that the extent to which these functions are performed and the degree of freedom expressed by parliaments varies in different political systems and contexts thus giving rise to categorization of parliaments according to its internal capacity and relation to the executive arm. Equally derivable from our exploration is the fact that contrary to what obtains in the formative years of the parliament where the kings could not do without the consent of the parliament, modern parliaments have continued to survive on a fluctuating fortune especially in its relation to the executive arm. In other words, the idea of the parliament being *primus inter pares* among the three arms of government is more of an ideal than reality.

All these are in turn a function of a myriad of factors that include governmental and party structure, among others.

In the final analysis, contemporary parliaments are faced with challenges at two levels. First, developing an internal capacity to effectively perform its constitutional responsibilities and second, winning the fight and being assertive against an overbearing executive arm. In the light of this, it is suggested that there is the urgent need for countries to develop the capacity of the legislative institution. This necessarily entails reinforcement of legislative committees with adequate and supportive staff with vast experience and training in different strands of policy area. Equally important is that technical and organizational expertise available to the legislature must be ensured to parallel executive ministries and agencies to facilitate balance and even exchange of ideas on prospective laws and policies. Second, there is the need to strike a balance between party interests and the need for legislative effectiveness. This requires deliberate and conscious efforts on the part of stake-holders in the political system, and third, an independent budget for the legislative arm is quite essential. This must, however, be accompanied by vibrancy on the part of civil societies and sustenance of a vibrant political community to ensure legislative accountability.

Fourth, parliaments need to embark on programmes and policies that would help build confidence in the electorate about their ability to truly and effectively represent them. This can be made possible where parliamentarians are more committed to their constituencies and the adoption of an open door policy in parliamentary debates. Lastly, since information is key to effective performance, modern parliaments must necessarily build their information base in order to improve the quality of legislation and oversight activities. The use of modern information and communication technology in parliamentary works would not only expand the horizon of each parliamentarian but will, as well, provide useful comparative insights in the business of legislation. This way, it is believed that the legislature, apart from overcoming its present challenges, would be better positioned to meet future exigencies of a modern and complex democratic polity.

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