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## Parliamentary System in Nigeria: An Appraisal of its Practice and Challenges

*Isah Mohammed Abbass*

Department of Political Science and International Studies,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Nigeria's experience with the parliamentary system of government during the First Republic, 1960-1966, is appraised and evaluated based on the structural and contextual factors that shaped its practice and challenges. Drawn from its historical trajectories, parliamentary crises, and constitutional infirmity, the study critically examines how the Westminster model was engrafted, adopted and adapted within Nigeria's multi-ethnic federal framework. The architectural designs and foundations of both the parliamentary and presidential systems were established to serve vested interests; hinged on democratic corruption by usurping the principles of due process and rule of law. These are usually followed by excessive and abusive use of executive power. The paper further argues that while the system fostered regional party development and legislative debate, it was undermined by regionalism, weak party discipline, ethno-political rivalry, and the absence of a national consensus imbued within the system. The January 1966 military coup exposed the system's vulnerability to elite capture, manipulation and constitutional crises. The paper concludes that the collapse of the parliamentary system was not due to inherent flaws in the model alone but to its incompatibility with Nigeria's political sociology at independence. It further reflects on contemporary calls for a return to parliamentarism, highlighting lessons on executive-legislative relations, accountability, and national integration that remain relevant to Nigeria's ongoing constitutional quagmire.

**Keywords:** Parliamentary System; Regionalism; Presidential system; Corrupt leadership; Military Intervention; Executive-Legislature Relations

## **Introduction**

The continuing search for the practical solutions to Nigeria's myriad and protracted socioeconomic and political problems has, over time, become a mirage. A lot has been suggested but appears elusive or not working (Akinwade, 2009). Consequently, questions have emerged as to whether the problems are structural in nature or actually human. However, is it a local/domestic challenge that is the crux of the matter or an international/global issue, or a combination of the factors. In addition, is it an economic, social, cultural or political problem that has constituted the elusiveness in the search for solutions of the Nigerian state's inability to move forward, lead Africa and the black race?

Whereas most of the suggested panacea for the Nigeria problems has proved abortive, it means that such "problems" have not actually been identified. In essence, unless the real problems are identified, solutions can not be put forward to take care and chase the problems out. Perhaps the solutions so far advanced have only created more problems without getting the hitherto problems properly analysed and addressed. Hence, the proposed bill before the National Assembly to return the country to the parliamentary system of government by members of the National Assembly and some individuals in the society was essentially based on the need to reduce cost, bring about healthy public debates, good policy making and policy execution.

Advocates for the return of the practice of the parliamentary system of government in Nigeria have become much more confident in its workability and value since it was replaced by the current presidential system. The call and the need for the adoption of the parliamentary system of democracy have been argued due to the catastrophic failure of the presidential system since 1979. Those who converse this advocacy of Westminster parliamentarianism felt strongly that the character of the economy at that time, the constitution of the public servants, the structure of the country, the crop of politicians dedicated to national duty and patriotism could be reincarnated or resurrected. As a whole, they feel that the operating system of the parliamentary system was good, cost-effective, and less cumbersome (Akinwade, 2009).

The crucial question is whether it is the system of government that makes a country prosperous or the character of the people and constitution of leadership with a designed determination to make the system work? What actually is the crux of the matter? Invariably, different systems of government have, over time, been adopted in different states in order to

appropriately and sustainably suit their unique peculiarities and similarities of history, culture, economy, polity and other traditional heritage. The objectives in appraising the practice of the parliamentary system of government in Nigeria are to, among other things:

- a) Determine the historical value or worthiness in the introduction of the parliamentary system in Nigeria.
- b) Judge the performance of the parliamentary democracy in the search for a viable and sustainable democratic practice and development in Nigeria.
- c) Examine the structural practice in the operation of the parliamentary system as revealed under the first Republic of Nigeria.
- d) Assess the impact of the parliamentary system on the Nigeria's democratic journey and experiment.
- e) Explore common fallacies of parliamentary and presidential systems and show the tempting but misleading distinction between them.

### **The Purpose and Legitimacy of Government**

Governments exist for varied purposes. The primary purpose of any legitimate government is to protect people's lives and their property and ensure that the entire society is safe, as well as harmoniously organised. Generally, without the existence of government, people would be individually engaged for their security and welfare in protecting themselves and their property. They would, therefore, be involved in the task of ensuring their living conditions and the eruption of insecurity are constantly put in check. This is in order to prevent the escalation or development of anarchy with constant improvement of all methods and strategies towards guaranteeing the growth of societal wealth and delivery of goods and services.

The purpose and legitimacy of government are fundamental questions in political philosophy and political practice. However, there are various theories and perspectives that deal with this matter. (Buchanan, 2003, Tyler, 2001, Hud, 2007). For instance, the purpose of any system of government constitutes, among others, the Protection of Rights and Freedoms. In essence, governments are established in order to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens, such as life, liberty, and property. Since the purpose of government is also to maintain order and stability, this purpose, therefore, empowers governments to maintain order and stability by enforcing laws and resolving conflicts.

The purpose of the government via an established system of governance is, therefore, to enable people in the society to surrender some of their strategic freedom or liberty with the hope of gaining more liberties. This is in order to enable the state or community to move away from the

Hobbes' idea of being poor, solitary, nasty, brutish, and short (Hampton, 1986). Whereas a good government can make people's liberties well assured with enhanced prosperity and satisfaction, but immoral, unskilled and corrupt leadership in the state can destroy people's trust and confidence to breach social liberties with excessive and unbearable condition of living.

Furthermore, the promotion of common good in a civil society is the cardinal purpose of governments. Hence, governments' primary aim is to promote things that are essentially available, accessible and beneficial to members by regulating economic activities and addressing socio-cultural and environmental issues. In addition, representation of citizens' interests is another vital purpose that governments must be responsible for. In this context, governments should adequately represent the interests of citizens and make decisions on their behalf for their benefits.

Bad leadership in government makes excessive and abusive use of power, authority, and influence not for the good of all but to subject majority of people with harness. On the other hand, a government with good leadership, therefore, possesses legitimacy, capacity, and justification to overturn and set aside a bad situation into a better alternative. This is designed with convenience and determination of preventing disorder and discontent with a view to creating a viable and sustainable condition of a good life. Hence, this is transformed in the exchange of what people swap their liabilities in return to power they sacrificed in the hands of leadership within the framework and form of Hobbes', Rousseau's and Locke's social contract (Cress, 1987) and the actualization of the Aristotle's sense of good of life (Hampton, 1986).

In essence, the purpose of a government operating any system is to be responsible and accountable. For the government to be purposeful, it must legitimately establish and sustain itself to be strong enough which all the paraphernalia of force to be obeyed. This is to enable the government to carry out its duties effectively and efficiently and with the satisfaction of the citizens, especially in the delivery of goods and services. It is, however, not just enough for the government to be strong and do as it pleases, but to fulfil the parts of the social contract obligations. Hence, the character of politics being played in the state reflects on why the state is supported for the good of society. It is, therefore, dependent on the nature of its sovereignty and its ability or capacity to discharge social justice.

In this regard, the government is purposely responsible for protecting people from all forms and directions of internal and external attacks. Thus, trained and specialized armed personnel are expected to be raised to defend life and property, maintain law and order, and safeguard the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state and people. For the sake of the existence and purpose of government, its responsibilities and roles have

intrinsically extended to the economy, social settings, and public service. This is in order to bring about the planning and execution of viable programmes or projects, youth employment, delivery of goods and services, and enhanced prosperity.

On the issues of the legitimacy of government, certain considerations are central and fundamental. In the first place, the consent of the governed must be sought and obtained. Since governments derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, it should be obtained either through direct participation or representation. Based on the Social Contract Theory, for example, governments are formed through a social contract, where citizens surrender some of their natural rights in exchange for protection and services (to buttress this, see the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau).

Legitimacy is popularly hinged on democratic principles. It is generally believed that governments are legitimate only if they are based on democratic principles, such as free and fair elections, accountability, and transparency. Another form of legitimacy is on the basis of governments' inclination towards the protection of human rights. Hence, governments are legitimate if they protect and promote human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. An overall good government automatically makes it legitimate. The government should be able to regulate the general and specific parameters for the citizens' good conduct, behaviour, and patriotism. This is for their overall well-being and respect for the country. Invariably, laws, rules, and regulations are created for the ultimate necessity and other desirable factors in society. This is therefore dictated by the unlimited selfishness and desire for the lust of power and other interests in which people engage in fierce struggle to acquire property, privileges, and positions.

Challenges to government legitimacy are predominant in all systems, whether presidential or parliamentary. Both systems are characterised by corruption. The legitimacy of governments is questioned, and they may lose legitimacy if they are corrupt or perceived as corrupt. Another serious challenge to government legitimacy is being characterised by inequality and discrimination in its statecraft or management of affairs. Governments may lose legitimacy if they perpetuate inequality or discrimination against citizens. When governments abuse the sources of their power, they may automatically lose their legitimacy if they, for example, violate human rights.

Lack of accountability and responsibility in governments may make them lose legitimacy if they are not accountable to citizens or do not provide transparent decision-making processes. The purpose and legitimacy of government are, therefore, complex and multifaceted. These have been debated by philosophers, politicians, and citizens throughout history. While

there are various theories and perspectives on this subject, the fundamental principles of protecting rights and freedoms, maintaining law, order, and stability, promoting the common good, and representing citizens' interests remain at the core principle of government legitimacy.

### **The Foundations of the Nigerian State and Government**

The state is the highest institution of power and influence, with a clear presence of domination, unchallenged, and unparalleled authority. Hence, fundamental issues related to the conception and realities of the state are class division, interests, and conflicts within the threshold of class struggle. Thus, the state, as a necessary evil, often constitutes and masquerades itself as a monster against the wishes and aspirations of the citizens in the operations of its primary role and functions. This suggests that the state is expressed as merely the organised power of one class for the oppression of another (Miliband and Saville, 1975).

The modern Nigerian state evolved out of British colonialism and imperialism. The emergence of the Nigerian state was, therefore, sequel to the fierce European powers in the scramble for colonies that forcefully partitioned Africa amongst them (Ade-Kurawa, 2005:18-21). Hence, the British occupation of Nigeria led to the incorporation of the modern Nigerian state under its political, economic, and social orbit. The Selbourne Report of 1898 laid down the foundations and evolution of Nigerian state and governmental processes. The major issue in the Nigerian state is, therefore, its relations with the subjects based on its formation and orientation (Selborne, 1989). Therefore, the evolutionary processes and impacts of the Nigerian state on society have invariably transformed it as a state of exploitation, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. These processes were characterised by corruption, which accounted for high rates of unacceptable backwardness and underdevelopment.

All these have subsequently transformed the Nigerian state with a predatory character that is greedily destructive, ruthlessly aggressive with a constant determination to steal (Abbass, 2017:2539). These have further turned the Nigerian state with enormous power to extract massive resources through its established agencies or institutions. All these have continued to be rendered wasteful with all forms of corrupt practises and dismal failure to deliver services.

With all the other structures of imperial power therein established, vital complementary colonial administrative organisations were enforced. These were further followed by some networks, patterns, and trappings of imposed colonial economic systems along with the concomitant imperial management policies and politics of exploitation and domination. These further consolidated the integration of the Nigerian state and economy into

the network of global imperialism. Thus, since its establishment, the character of the Nigerian state, its role, trends, and structure have been shaped and patterned to satisfy the needs of imperialism and enhance the objectives of colonialism. These also have continued to serve a few local interests.

Hence, colonial foundations of the Nigerian state and the imperial imposition of the British structural mechanisms of governance and the operations of state system, have constituted some of the fundamental factors and forces in appreciating and appraising key issues that have engulfed the central challenges in the Nigerian political practice. Such a colonial heritage and imperial expediency had facilitated the introduction and practice of parliamentary system akin to the British cabinet style during and immediately after the Nigeria's political independence in 1960.

The foundations of state and the adoption of the form of government, based on the distinctions between the parliamentary and presidential systems, are justified on a number of common fallacies. The architectural foundations of the two systems were designed and constructed in the same setting to serve the same purposes and interests. That is why fundamental differences do not exist except similarities and harmony of interests. Hence, the historical evolution of the two systems can be traced to ancient Greece and Rome when the concept of representation and accountability sprouted and citizens surrendered their liberties to elected representatives to decide on their behalf. This was further developed in medieval Europe towards curbing the excessive powers of monarchs. The Industrial Revolution and other events in Europe and America further consolidated the systems and created powerful executives since the 19th century.

The common fallacies of both systems indicate that they are highly vulnerable to corruption, as those in power, more often than not, use their positions for personal gain. The abuse of executive power by the presidential system significantly undermines and corrupts other branches or arms of government, especially by usurping the principles of due process and rule of law. In the same way and manner, the parliamentary system makes party politics take precedence over national interest with decisions that significantly benefit party and party members rather than the citizens and the country.

The presidential and parliamentary systems are characterised by practices that are imbued with inequality and irrepresentation. Both practitioners of the systems have struggled to maintain a state of inequality and fake representation for self-interest. Electoral fraud and corruption have made a large number of people nonrepresented, underrepresented, or marginalised. The practices of the electoral college system and a vote of no confidence by the presidential and parliamentary systems create instability

and undermine transparent and effective governance with popular candidates removed or not given the people's choice.

Other common fallacies associated with parliamentary and presidential systems show that there is a deficiency in transparency and efficient decision-making. Decisions are generally based on political motives to advance personal interests rather than national interest without due respect to national security. Lack of accountability in presidential system, due to corruption, the legislature is weakened. Whereas weakened checks and balances in parliamentary systems are due to compromised power relations.

The exigencies of weak and ineffective oppositions in parliamentary systems and imperial presidencies in the presidential system have continued to hold both systems unaccountable and irresponsible. The manipulation of ethnic, religious, and regional politics, as well as other political polarization in the society will greatly undermine the system. Ultimately, the common fallacies of parliamentary and presidential systems of government highlight the need to appreciate the designs of the two systems. This underscores the imperatives to understand the weaknesses of each system by creating and taking steps to mitigate the fallacies by designing an effective but home-grown and developed system of governance that is more accountable and responsible.

### **The Practice and Performance of Parliamentary Government in Nigeria**

The practice of any system of government has to generally be focused on an examination of the source and distribution of its power, authority, and influence. This is also followed by the processes of the discharge of public goods and services as well as other forms of governance. These aspects of the practice of government, therefore, bring about the classification of the types of such government referred to as either presidential or parliamentary and so on as a case may be. This further leads into an analysis of the performance of the government based on the discharge of responsibilities of the other units or levels of government.

Hence, with a defined role among the established actors in exercising power, the government maintains and adopts a specific machinery for the operation or running of the system. This is based on its capacity to exercise the monopoly of legitimate coercion in protecting society. Thus, the capacity of any form of government to cater to the needs of the society is an important characteristic of the practice and performance of government.

A typical system of a democratic government, from the popular Western viewpoint, may be classified to consist of a parliamentary procedure and form. This system, therefore, indicates and shows that the parliament, as a source of power and authority, is supreme. The prime minister, who is the head of government, is intrinsically responsible to parliament and thus holds

office at the pleasure of the parliament. In addition, the mandate to form government is, therefore, dependent on the plurality of seats won by a political party. The government can, therefore, fall only when there is a vote of no confidence by the parliament; sequel to the change in the parliamentary party membership after a new election to parliament. However, the president, who is the head of state, is merely a figure or ceremonial head.

At independence in 1960, the Nigerian state and a former British colony operated three regional constitutions: the constitution of the Northern Nigeria, the constitution of the Western Nigeria, and the constitution of the Eastern Nigeria. These tripartite constitutions operated by the three dominant regional parties were contained in the relevant schedules to the order in council of 1960 (constitution) promulgated by the colonial government. These constitutions remained in force until 1963 when Nigeria was transformed as a republic. This development became the bedrock in the introduction and practice of the parliamentary system in Nigeria during the first republic.

The 1960 constitution of Nigeria provided for the national parliament with a constitutional monarch (the Queen of England) as the head of the Nigerian state. At the federal level, the parliament consisted of the senate (upper house) and the house of representatives (the lower house). Each of the regions also had bicameral legislatures - the house of assembly and the house of chiefs. The head of state and commander-in-chief (the Queen) was, therefore, part of both the federal and regional legislatures. This vested the executive power of the federation and the regional governments on the monarch, particularly on matters to make laws. These powers were thus exercised on behalf of the Queen by the Governor-General (for the federal government) or regional governors (for the regional government), as the case may be.

The appointment of the prime minister was made by the governor-general, while the regional governors appointed regional premiers. They were appointed based on who appeared to command the highest support of members of the House of representatives (as prime minister) and regional assemblies (as premiers). The apparent objective was to enhance the needed political unity, ala stability of the country by the mechanical provisions that did not allow the executive powers of the regions to impede or prejudice the executive powers of the federation in the sustenance of the federal system, legacies of colonialism and the spirits of imperialism.

Hence, any laws that were made by the regions but became inconsistent with the principles of federation were declared void by the federal parliament (the House of Representatives). This brought about the division of the legislative powers between the federal and regional legislatures with the provision of the exclusive list and the concurrent list as

provided for in the 1960 Nigerian independence constitution (Akindele, 1996:9, Fajana, 1996:107).

On October 1st, 1963, the republican constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria came into force. This was perceived as an indigenous constitution enacted by the national parliament. Under this new constitution, the Queen was removed as the head of state and thus had nothing to do with the legislative houses in the country. The republican constitution, therefore, reflected the firm adoption of the federal system of government with various regional constitutions, including the newly created Midwestern region under the British model of cabinet system and practice.

In the instantaneous provision, therefore, the head of the Nigerian state, upon the removal of the Queen, was the elected president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president was to be elected by secret ballot by members of the parliament at a joint meeting of the senate and house of representatives. Thus, the president and commander-in-chief exercised the executive authority of the federation in consonance with the advice of the council of ministers. Hence, such a tripod arrangement and position of the fragile independent state, gradually began to produce distress and fatigue in the system due to the different stands and operations of the regions as well as the personalities in the regions.

### **Appraisal of the Parliamentary System in Nigeria's First Republic**

The independence and the republican constitutions of Nigeria, 1960 and 1963 respectively, did not make any fundamental change in the power relations between the centre (federal) and the regions as obtained during the era of colonial rule. For example, whenever a regional law conflicted with a federal law, the federal law took precedence over the regional law. Again, the federal legislature had more powers to make laws for the federation which however meant that the central government could take over the legislative powers of the regions, particularly on issues of intergovernmental relations (Ayoade, 1996:50).

With the power at the centre, the first republic was imbued with conflicts. The first republic was, therefore, impregnated by the inbuilt colonial divide and rule devices that caused suspicions and rifts among the regions and people. Hence, major features of the current crisis in Nigeria emerged due to the installed rivalries in the perpetrated tactics of the British colonial regime (Ayoade, 1996:59). During the first republic, such installed rivalries amongst the major or dominant groups, along with the minorities, have caused profound and fundamental distractions or even destructions at all levels of the political divide (Abbass, 2018:25).

Hence, the existence of mutual suspicions and fears of domination were strategically nurtured and developed by colonialism. These tendencies

and orientations were further heightened by the political elites seeking political relevance that witnessed violent political conflicts in the country. The types, dimensions, and structure of such conflicts gradually developed over time with the concurrent imperceptible growth of the power and authority at the centre (Akindele, 1996:128131).

It should be noted that the ultimacy of the Nigerian state for the adopted centrality of power was derived from hitherto colonial practices. This was because authority was actually guaranteed and thus derived by the practice of unitary form generated from the single colonial source of power. Even though regional governments were run at separate entities since the colonial era, the British colonial system of administration failed to establish a unified and communality of shared institutions designed to strengthen the regions in harmony but in conflict with each other.

Such institutionalised measures of variance in regionalism had provided and thus increased wide latitude for each region to pursue its own course of developmental needs separately. These have invariably produced fragmented rather than a united Nigeria (Akindele 1996:19). The semiautonomous regions lived with bitter competition for supremacy of power at the centre, along with intense suspicions and other forms of intergovernmental conflicts.

The so-called 1960 independence constitution of Nigeria was, therefore, a product of all the constitutional conferences, and particularly the 1954 resumed London conference. This was enacted, presented, and ratified by the British parliament. Even though it lacked the popular legitimacy but notwithstanding, it received the blessings of the popular Nigeria party leaders. Similarly, the 1963 republican constitution also lacked such a popular base as it was indeed decided by the regional premiers and the prime minister.

Practically, neither the 1960 nor the 1963 Nigeria constitutions ended the legacy of the colonial heritage and the structure and operation of the state. There were, therefore, no far-reaching attempts to change the face and pace of the Nigerian political practice, particularly in the adoption of the so-called liberal democratic practice of the Westminster Model from the British extraction. The parliamentary system operated in Nigeria under the 1960 and 1963 constitutions was characterised by some important British features of government.

These features included the parliamentary character of the executive. These made members of the executive be members of the parliament simultaneously. The political party that commended the largest electoral votes formed the cabinet (government). As the greater responsibility of the executive was to the legislature, the latter had greater control of the cabinet while the legislature and executive were fused to ignite a responsible

governance. Another crucial feature of the system was the separation of the head of state and head of government. Furthermore, the plurality of the executive indicated that while the executive was plural which the prime minister as *primus inter pares* and thus head of council of ministers. Again, the responsibility of the ministers to the legislature was also an important feature of the parliamentary system operated under the first republic.

The 1963 republican constitution was not fundamentally different from the 1960 independence constitution. Relating to the legislature, for example, the increase in the membership of the senate was from the newly created Midwestern region. Membership of the House of Representatives was equally increased. On the executive side, the new constitution made a provision for the removal of the prime minister by the president due to a vote of no confidence cast in the government on the floor of the house. This also provided that the parliament be dissolved without necessarily for the prime minister and ministers to resign.

On the judiciary, the 1963 constitution provided for the appointment and removal of judges with the abolition of the judicial service commission and the appeal to the judicial committee of the privy council in England. Hence, all the supreme court judges, the chief judge of Lagos and chief justice of the republic, were appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister in due consultations with the regional premiers. In addition, regional judges were similarly appointed by regional governors on the advice of the premiers. The removal of the judges could only be done by the president after a two-thirds vote had been obtained by both houses of parliament. Each region was provided with a court of appeal with the director public prosecutions under the direct control of the federal attorney-general.

Under the 1963 constitution, the governor-general was replaced by a Nigerian president. The president was chosen for a tenure of five years by a secret vote of the joint seating of the Senate and House of Representatives. The president could only be removed by the two houses of parliament on a two-thirds vote decision. Even though the first president was not elected, the special clause of the 1963 republican constitution stated that Dr. Namdi Azikiwe, who was hitherto the governor general, should automatically be the first president of Nigeria.

The post-independence political issues and challenges in Nigeria can, therefore, be better appraised by examining functions and events at both the federal and regional levels and their interrelationships. Much of the issues leading to the Nigerian crisis in 1966 could be well directly traceable and related to such function and event factors. Functions and personalities in the conduct of the state activities, as earlier on performed, remained unchanged, especially with regard to the prime minister and the president (hitherto

referred to as the governor-general). Since the prime minister was the chief executive of the government, the president was merely a titular head devoid of effective political power. His role was only effective in appending his signatures to bills passed by parliament. His power to dissolve the parliament was only effective with the support and advice of the prime minister; no matter how he considered it in the interest of the nation. The regional, tribal and other forms of bias politics could only add salt to injury in the heated political practice of that time.

The parliamentary system, therefore, provided for an executive prime minister and a nominal president as the head of state which had made the operations of the cabinet system of government to largely depend much on the personality of the holder rather than the system. It should be noted that the government was formed as a result of the uneasy alliance or coalition of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) (Forrest, 1995:29-30). Hence, bearing in mind of the existing constitutional roles and political personalities involved in the system, it was obvious that uneasy lied a head burdened with volatile political practice and crises among and within the regions as well as in the federal structure.

Nigeria inherited the structure and operations of public service from its British colonial overload. Such traditions and legacies were adhered to in the operations of the parliamentary system in the first republic. The public service was, therefore, an important component of the arm of government that was responsible for the day-to-day running of the government, manned by public servants. The public service was organised into various government departments that dealt with various specialisations and functions. These were put under the supervisory roles of the ministers as the political heads of respective ministries.

In the running of the parliamentary system of government in Nigeria, public service commissions for the federation and regions were established and institutionalised. These commissions were, as constituted, responsible for the appointment, promotion, discipline, and dismissal of erring servants. As constituted at the federal and regional levels, the commissions were composed of chairmen and other members appointed for a tenure of five years on the recommendation of the prime minister or premier as appropriate. Other paraphernalia of staff were also appointed in order to enable the commissions to discharge their varied duties satisfactorily.

The commissions, however, delegated some parts of their powers to the respective permanent secretaries as it was impossible for them to discharge all the assigned responsibilities. These assigned responsibilities were related to the middle and lower levels of public servants. Other categories of public servants, such as the Supreme Court, the Nigerian police

etc., were not to be directly controlled by the commissions. Hence, the nature of the public service of the federation of Nigeria under the parliamentary democracy had its own peculiar features.

Part of the features of the parliamentary government on the public service showed that public servants were permanently appointed based on merit or competence. Such a secure permanent service in the system guaranteed continuity and progression in service with pension on retirement except otherwise dismissed. However, the impartiality of public servants was for all purposes and intentions of the service irrespective of the party controlling the government. The views of the public servants were, by and large, kept to themselves in order not to allow such views to influence their official conduct. Since political parties and government were transient but public servants remained permanently in office with proper advice to ministers. This enabled ministers to make policies and execute them appropriately as approved by the cabinet.

In planning and executing detailed roles and responsibilities of public officials, anonymity in the discharge of such administrative and technical works was highly exhibited during the first republic. These allowed the respective ministers in charge to take the credit and the blame, too. Public servants were always behind the stage unseen and unheard. This tradition and legacy of anonymity and impartial public service was bequeathed to the Nigerian state by the colonial administration akin to the British parliamentary system of government. All these were designed in order to protect the service from undue patronage, harassment and political influence.

Since liberal democratic governments are differentiated and thus divided into unitary and federal forms, they are, therefore, classified as either presidential or parliamentary governments. The parliamentary system invariably indicates that the parliament is supreme. The prime minister, as the head of government, is responsible for parliament and holds office at its pleasure. Since the majority or plurality of seats won by a political party provides a mandate to form a government, vote of no confidence and changes in parliamentary party membership sacks the government. Under such a provision, the president is by and large a figurehead.

Much of the concern of the parliamentary democratic government of the first Republic consisted of the problems, issues, and challenges. These concerns were associated with the complexity of politics and the increasing responsibilities of state officials and a range of other state officers in the discharge of state duties. Whereas the challenge in the 1960 constitution was on how to deal with the way British parliament and the Queen determined a lot in the state administration, the 1963 constitution did not bring about fundamental change and a departure from the past.

Another important issue was how the cabinet form of decentralised decision and representative government worked. This greatly depended on how political parties related to each other on the workability of government with installed harmony and stability within the political system. However, the different structural and regional rules, the impact on decentralised and democratic forms of government had caused serious hiccups in cabinet action with installed instability; particularly related to the political issues and events leading to the western crisis. The coalition of parties of the parliamentary government of the 1960s, where the foundations of the parties were with high diversities and instability in the cabinet system, was highly predicted to occur.

The replacement of the Nigerian colonial system by the post-colonial state did not, however, bring about a distinctive difference. With the trappings of colonialism and imperialism, the instruments of control for vested interests had been institutionalised and oriented with the colonial social, economic, and political formations. The post-colonial state of Nigeria at independence had invariably demonstrated similar character played by its predecessor. With greater scope for expression and power devolved to indigenous elements, the advancement of the potential interest and concern within the contours of colonialism and imperialism had invariably been unleashed.

The threats of political conflicts and challenges of structural operations of the Nigerian state were rooted and underpinned by the parliamentary system. Hence, the continuing imperial domination, arising from the colonial circumstances, enabled the indigenous state actors to use the instrumentality of regional power to actualise the apparent regional projects without minding the neo-colonial threats and primordial interests. Hence, the crystallization of the Nigerian settings, characterized as too weak or fragile and too internally confrontational, had made the entire society and economy vulnerable and highly compromised and guaranteed for the imperial interests.

Such weaknesses of the system and in the leadership had reflected on the very serious created gaps in the people with intense economic, political, and social contradictions underpinned by other external forces. This new brand of weaknesses had found its primary expressions in the political sphere, which had reflected directly on the economy that shed real light in the understanding of the real problems involved. This uneasy state of the Nigerian dependant social formation had not given rise to a real nationhood but nevertheless failed to provide a state that guaranteed political stability and prosperity.

With the nature of state challenges well understood, the political practice of the Westminster cabinet system in Nigeria had manifested these

and other forms of weaknesses. This is reflected in the failure to organise politically specific and nationally-based political parties accepted nationally. This had also reflected on where the political elites in the regions failed to sustainably share any politically stable parties amongst them due to regional differences (Forrest 1995:17-19). The regions and the republic were further characterized with polarisation of parties along ethnic, class, and other cleavages specific to the Nigerian context.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In the semblance of the practice of parliamentary democratic system in Nigeria that took about six years (1960-1966), characterized with loose hegemonic structures and feature within the dominant political and economic configurations, the first republic was highly weakened and doomed to fail. This was originally reflected in its incapacity and inability to effectively discharge strategic roles and responsibilities domestically as well as project its own sovereignty against external incursions and sabotage. Every political or democratic system has its advantages and disadvantages. But the most critical aspect in bringing its advantages to the fore and understanding that appears adequate and satisfying are the character and direction of the operators of the system.

The so-called check and balance provision adduced to the parliamentary system has invariably opened a wide gulf of opportunity for the character of the Nigerian politicians to exploit and transform it into a see-saw political game. This sort of opportunism has adequately provided for the pivot point at the centre of the see-saw with the presidential and parliamentary systems at either edge of the swinging pendulum. At the centre, where the pivot point is screwed constitutes the economy and people that propels and provides the piece of the political playground equipment that radiates the comfortable seats that swing for political fortunes of the politicians. This makes no winner, no loser for the politicians as the pendulum swings from parliamentary to presidential systems whereas the greatest losers are the people.

It is advocated that the parliamentary system encourages harmonious cooperation between the executive and legislature. The team-work spirit is enhanced with coordinated powers and interdependent relations between the organs, which can foster a sense of collective political responsibility. Again, the unified power or government under a majority ruling party promotes political stability, especially in a unified and harmonized culture. The parliamentary system is further said to be devoid of the monopoly of power by a single executive with provision for a check on excessive executive and veto power based on the scrutiny of debate and decision in the cabinet. All these attributes are not, therefore, exclusive to any particular system. It

should be emphasized that the constitution of operators largely makes the system work, not the other way round.

It should be recalled that the fragility in party coalitions during the first republic had resulted in the enhancement of the growing tension and political instability between the north and the south, especially the south-east. Invariably, coalition governments often face instability in the maintenance or sustenance of unity of interest and other forces or factors underpinning the varied party interests, particularly in the regions. Again, the opposition parties can potentially pose serious challenges and bring difficulties to the government, which can result in critical political standoffs. All these scenarios in the Nigeria's first republic culminated in the bloody military take-over in 1966 and the subsequent events that led to the eventual civil war.

By and large, the presidential system of government has been instituted since 1979 but with intermittent military regimes. This system should be thoroughly modified to suit our circumstances and needs. All the existing gaps in the system should be filled, and all ills in the system should be removed. If there are observed good practices inherent in the parliamentary system, appropriate to our needs as aspirations, they should be fused with the presidential system in order to adequately deal with our uniqueness and needs. In essence, we shall not be swinging from one foreign system to another. Local state and national conferences should be organized to adopt the best system that best suits our circumstances in our quest to nurture and develop a home-grown political system.

A home-grown and developed system of governance that prioritizes not only accountability and responsibility but profoundly places premiums on delivery and satisfaction is hereby advocated. This unique and innovative approach is a potential framework for such a governance system that actually serves the needs of the people by ensuring that all government officials and institutions are accountable to the people through regular audits, evaluations, and feedback mechanisms. Another core principle of this system is its design to foster a culture of responsibility among government officials, where they take ownership of their actions and decisions and are held accountable for their outcomes.

Furthermore, this home-grown system is focused on delivering tangible results and outcomes that improve the lives of citizens rather than just focusing on policies and plans. On citizens' satisfaction of deliverables, this should prioritize citizen needs by engaging with various communities to understand such needs and ensure that government services meet people's expectations. Hence, key components of the citizen-centric governance must design government services and policies around the needs and expectations of citizens rather than just following traditional bureaucratic processes.

Other priorities include the decentralization and devolution that empower local governments and communities to take ownership of their development and provide them with the necessary resources and support. Thus, the direct participatory involvement of citizens in the budgeting process, to ensure that government spending aligns with their priorities and needs. This also relates to performance-based management in the evaluation of government performance based on outcomes and results, rather than just inputs and processes. In addition, these would empower and provide citizens with access to vital information in advancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

On the whole, these features can potentially establish innovative and robust citizens' feedback mechanisms on complaints systems to ensure that citizens' voices are captured and heard. However, government-citizen partnerships are crucial in fostering government-citizens nexus and other stakeholders to co-create solutions and deliver services that meet citizens' and state needs.

The roadmap and implementation strategies to realise these would need to encourage innovation and experimentation within the government to find new and better ways of delivering services and solving problems. This requires the culture of using data and evidence to be the basis of decision-making in order to make policies, programmes, and projects more effective, efficient, and productive. With short, medium, and long-term frameworks, the new home-grown governance system can be consolidated with greater gains and outcomes. This is based on institutionalizing the new governance system through capacity-building and cultural transformation.

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