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CHALLENGES TO THE 'COMMITTEE SYSTEM' UNDER THE NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL AND BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The committee system is an essential feature of modern legislatures, designed to manage complex law-making processes, facilitate oversight, and ensure the efficient performance of parliamentary functions. However, the effectiveness of committees varies significantly depending on the system of government in which they operate. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of the challenges confronting the committee system under presidential and parliamentary constitutions of Nigeria and the United Kingdom, respectively. It is against this backdrop that the authors argued that institutional design, party discipline, executive-legislative relations, and political culture impact the autonomy, capacity, and effectiveness of legislative committees in each system. Furthermore, the presidential systems tend to allow for more committee independence due to a formal separation of powers, which often suffer from gridlock, partisanship, and executive interference, unlike parliamentary systems which benefits from greater party cohesion and legislative-executive alignment, notwithstanding its potential to experience excessive executive dominance and weakened committee autonomy. The authors maintained the inherent structural and functional challenges such as limited resources, weak enforcement of recommendations, politicisation of committee leadership, and lack of transparency. Drawing from comparative constitutional and legislative practices, the paper concluded that effective reform must be context-specific, aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing procedural rules, and ensuring greater public engagement in committee processes.

Keywords: good governance, committee-system, democracy, legislative, parliamentary system, presidential system.

1 Introduction

In every democratic polity, the legislature is vested with core functions such as law-making, executive oversight, and representation of the people. Given the complexity, volume, and technical nature of legislative business in modern governance, legislatures have therefor developed internal mechanisms to manage their workload more efficiently. Chief among these mechanisms is the committee system, which enables parliaments and national assemblies to divide legislative responsibilities into smaller, more manageable units that can scrutinise bills, conduct investigations, and monitor executive activities with greater focus and technical depth.¹ Despite the centrality of the committee system to legislative efficiency and accountability, the effectiveness of the committee system varies significantly across different forms of government; particularly between presidential and parliamentary systems.

Presidential and parliamentary systems differ fundamentally in their separation or fusion of powers, executive-legislative relations, and institutional designs. In a presidential system, such as those of the United States and Nigeria, the executive and legislature are distinct and operate independently, often creating institutional tension.² In such systems, legislative committees are expected to play a critical oversight role to check executive powers and ensure policy accountability. The autonomy of committees is often greater in theory, as the legislature is not bound to the executive. However, this often leads to a gridlocked system where partisanship and executive-legislative antagonism undermine committee functionality.³

In contrast, parliamentary systems-as found in the United Kingdom, Canada, and India – are usually characterised by a fusion of powers in which the executive is drawn from and accountable to the legislature.⁴ Committees in parliamentary systems are often shaped by party dominance, government control of the legislative agenda, and limited separation between ministers and lawmakers.⁵ This fusion can weaken the independence of committees, as governing parties typically seek to shield

¹ A. Tomkins, *Public Law*, (Oxford University Press, 2003) 201

² B.O. Nwabueze, *Presidentialism in Commonwealth Africa* (C Hurst & Co 1974) 215

³ G. W. Noble, 'The Committee System in the US Congress: Institutional Development and Political Control' (2002) 34(3) *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 459.

⁴ V. Bogdanor, *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (Oxford University Press 1995) 88.

⁵ R. Blackburn and A. Kennon, *Griffith and Ryle on Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures* (2nd ed., Sweet & Maxwell 2003) 343.

their executive leadership from critical scrutiny. Consequently, parliamentary committees may face challenges of reduced autonomy, lack of enforceable powers, and tokenistic oversight.⁶

This paper strived to make a comparative analysis of the challenges confronting the committee system obtainable under both systems of government, drawing from diverse jurisdictions to illustrate the influence of institutional structure, political culture, party discipline, and executive control. It identifies common challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of technical expertise, poor enforcement of committee findings, and limited public engagement.⁷ However, it also distinguishes the unique systemic barriers faced under each system. For instance, presidential systems may struggle with partisan gridlock, duplication of committee roles, and executive defiance of committee summons.⁸ On the other hand, parliamentary systems may grapple with excessive government control over committee membership, limited media access, and the suppression of dissenting views within majority party structures.⁹

2. Nature and scope of the Committee System under Presidential Constitutions and Parliamentary systems

This segment strives to examine the nature and scope of committee systems both in parliamentary and presidential systems of governments. The first arm dwells on the presidential system, while the other arm focuses on parliamentary system.

2.1 Presidential system.

In presidential systems generally, committees are typically established within the legislature to facilitate specialization, efficiency, and accountability.¹⁰ The Nigerian National Assembly, and the US Congress, for example, has special committees, ad-hoc committees, joint committees, and standing committees. Committees under presidential systems of government, perform several key functions such as robust oversight of executive actions where committees scrutinize executive branch actions, conducting investigations and holding hearings.¹¹ According to Smith,¹² committees influence policy outcomes in the process of carrying out their drafting and mark-up of legislation.

⁶ M. Russell and A. Paun, *The House Rules? International Lessons for Enhancing the Autonomy of the House of Commons* (UCL Constitution Unit 2007) 14

⁷ J. Ibrahim, 'Strengthening the Role of Committees in the Legislative Process in Nigeria' *Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Working Paper Series* (2005) 5.

⁸ O. Ajulo, 'The National Assembly and the Principle of Separation of Powers in Nigeria' 2(1) *Afe Babalola University: Journal of Sustainable Development Law & Policy* (2014) 44.

⁹ M. Shepherd, *Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information* (World Bank Institute 2011) 27

¹⁰ L.D. Longley and W.J. Oleszek, *Bicameral Politics: Conference Committees in Congress* (Yale University Press 1989)

¹¹ J. D. Aberbach, *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Oversight* (The Brookings Institution 1993)

¹² S. S. Smith, *The Senate Syndrome* (CQ Press 2007).

Another important function of committees is representation. Hibbing & Smith submit that committees provide a platform for diverse interests and perspectives.¹³

Presidential systems typically have some distinguishing features one of which is the independence of committees. Jones argued that committees in presidential systems of government operate relatively independently of the executive branch.¹⁴ Another key feature of presidential systems of government is Bicameralism, as they often feature bicameral legislatures, with committees in both chambers.¹⁵ Cox and McCubbins identified partisan politics as a feature of presidential systems of government; they aver that committee membership and leadership reflect party divisions and essentially, committees are established in order to advance political parties' agendas.¹⁶

The committee system under the presidential system of government is central to the legislative process, serving as the backbone for the scrutiny, refinement, and development of laws and policies. This is the system of government in Nigeria where the National Assembly, comprising of the Senate and House of Representatives relies on committees to handle the vast array of legislative business. Legislative committees under the presidential system in Nigeria are characterized by their specialization, investigative powers, and their role in legislative oversight.¹⁷ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, stated in clear terms the purpose and importance of committees in the performance of legislative functions of the Nigerian National Assembly.¹⁸

With respect to the structure and functions of committees as provided in the Nigeria's Constitution in the Nigerian presidential system, the committee system has evolved into a complex structure that significantly influenced legislative decision-making. The National Assembly comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives rely extensively on committees to perform oversight duties and law making. The structure and functions of these committees reveal practical manifestations of the distributive, partisan, and informational theories of legislative organization.

A concrete illustration of the distributive theory is evident in the sharp increase in the number of standing committees in the Senate and House of Representatives. In the 9th Assembly, the Nigerian Senate operated with about 69 standing committees.¹⁹ However, under the leadership of the current

¹³ J. R. Hibbing and J.A. Smith, *Committee Assignments and Electoral Connection* (Allyn and Bacon 2004)

¹⁴ C.O. Jones, *The Presidency in a Separated System* (The Brookings Institution 1995).

¹⁵ G. Tsembeles and J. Money, *Bicameralism* (Cambridge University Press) 1997

¹⁶ G.W. Cox and M. D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (University of California, 1993)

¹⁷ J. Y. Fashagba, "The Role of the Committee System in Enhancing Legislative Efficiency in Nigeria: The Case of Kwara State House of Assembly," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, (2009) (10) (4)

¹⁸ Section 62(1) & (4) CFRN 1999

¹⁹ National Assembly, Department of Committees (Senate), List of committee Chairmen and Clerks (10th Senate)

President of the Senate, in the 10th Assembly, this number has surged to over 100 standing committees, while the House of Representatives also moved from 105 standing committees in the 9th Assembly to about 134 in the current Assembly.²⁰ This expansion aligns with Krehbiel distributive theory, which argued that legislators pursue committee assignments to deliver specific benefits to their constituencies and secure political advantages.²¹ By multiplying committees, the Senate President created more opportunities for senators to be appointed as chairpersons or vice-chairpersons, thereby satisfying demands for political patronage. While this tactics may address immediate political pressures and foster inclusivity, it undermines efficiency by causing overlapping mandates and bureaucratic redundancies.

In Nigeria, the National Assembly operates a bicameral legislature, and the committee system is a crucial mechanism for detailed examination of bills, oversight of the executive,²² and the formulation of policies. The committees in the National Assembly are classified into three main categories; special committees, standing committees and ad-hoc committees. This is the classification adopted by the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its Standing Rules of 2002.²³

Special committees are appointed at the commencement of each legislative session by the House and are assigned duties and responsibilities. The committees are considered special because of the crucial role they play in addressing pressing concerns that require specialized attention and expertise. These committees are:

- i. Committee of Selection
- ii. Committee on Rules and Business
- iii. Committee on House Services
- iv. Ethics, Public Petitions & Privileges Committee
- iv. Public Accounts Committee

Standing Committees are permanent committees established in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution,²⁴ and under the Standing Rules of the Senate and the House of Representatives for the duration of the House or until the committee stands dissolved.²⁵ They cover a wide range of sectors including committees on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Education, Science and

²⁰ National Assembly, Department of Committees (House of Representatives), List of committee Chairmen and Clerks (10th House of Representatives)

²¹ K. Krehbiel, Information and Legislative Organisation, University of Michigan, 1991

²² A.O. Kazeem, 'Legislative Oversight Functions in Nigeria – Odyssey of hunters becoming the hunted' (2013) *Acta Universitatis Danubius Juridica* (2013) (9) (2) 79-95

²³ J. J. Patrick, Understanding Democracy, Oxford University Press, 2006

²⁴ CFRN 1999

²⁵ *Ibid* Sections 62 and 103; See also Rule 98 Standing Rules of the Senate (2002).

Technology, Public Works, Finance, Health and Social Services, Communications, Defence, and etcetera.

The committees monitor the activities and operations of ministries, departments and agencies of government. They also perform oversight functions.²⁶ Each committee is tasked with overseeing specific ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), providing legislative scrutiny over the executive functions. Ad-Hoc Committees, on the other hand, are temporary committees set up by the House for specific purposes. Unlike standing committees which are of a permanent nature, ad-hoc committees are disbanded once they complete the assignment for which they are set up. They are usually set up to handle specific issues or inquiries such as investigation into civil unrest, emergencies, or religious crisis in any part of the country.

This is vital in ensuring that the executive arm of government remains accountable and that public funds are used judiciously. Committees are also empowered to conduct investigations, summon individuals to provide testimony, and demand documents from MDAs to aid their legislative functions. Furthermore, they provide a platform for diverse interests and perspectives, ensuring representation.

Committees in Nigeria are tasked with a wide range of responsibilities, from scrutinizing bills and conducting investigations to overseeing executive agencies. One of the most critical functions of committees is the examination of bills. In the National Assembly, every bill is referred to the appropriate committee after its second reading. These committees conduct detailed examinations of the bill, holding public hearings and consulting with stakeholders to ensure the bill is comprehensive and addresses the needs of the public.²⁷

The Appropriation Committee and the Public Accounts Committee are among the most prominent committees in Nigeria's legislature. The Appropriation Committee is responsible for scrutinizing the annual budget proposal, ensuring that it aligns with national priorities. The Public Accounts Committee, on the other hand, oversees government expenditures, auditing how public funds are utilized.²⁸ These committees are essential for maintaining fiscal responsibility and transparency within the executive branch.

²⁶ *Ibid*, at Ss. 88 and 123

²⁷ J.Y. Fashagba, "Legislative oversight under the Nigerian Presidential system, *Jnl. Of Legislative Studies*, 2009 (15) 4 439-459

²⁸ I.S Ogundiya, *Corruption: The Bane of Democratic Stability in Nigeria*, *Current Research Jnl. of Social sciences*, 2010, (2) (4) Pp. 233-241

2.2 The Committee system under the Parliamentary constitution of Britain

The parliamentary system of government, as practiced in the United Kingdom, has a well-established committee system that plays an integral role in scrutinizing legislation and holding the government accountable. Unlike the presidential system, where there is a clear separation of powers, the parliamentary system merges the executive and legislative branches, with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet drawn from the legislature. This setup provides committees with distinct features and functions compared to their counterparts in presidential systems.²⁹

A. Structure and Function of Committees in the UK Parliament

The UK Parliament operates with two houses: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Both houses have their own committees, but the more influential and active committees are found in the House of Commons, which is the primary legislative body. In the Commons, there are two key types of committees: Select committees, which are tasked with the responsibilities to carry out investigations of specific policy areas, conducting inquiries and gathering evidence; and public bill committees (formerly known as standing committees).³⁰

Select Committees are permanent and focus on the oversight of government departments and public bodies. They investigate specific areas of government policy and administration, taking evidence from Ministers, civil servants, experts, and stakeholders. Notable examples include the Public Accounts Committee, which examines the value for money in government spending, and the Foreign Affairs Committee, which scrutinizes the UK's foreign policy.³¹ The Public Accounts Committee plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency and accountability in government spending. As a parliamentary select committee, it scrutinizes the use of public funds, identifies inefficiencies and waste, and holds government departments and agencies accountable,³² and investigating major projects and programmes.³³

These tasks are performed using the following methods of investigation:

- i. Conducting hearings with government officials and experts.
- ii. Analysing financial reports and data.
- iii. Investigating specific projects or programmes.

²⁹ T. Siefken and H. Rommetvedt., *Parliamentary Committees in the Policy Process* (Routledge 2023).

³⁰ In 2006, the British Parliament renamed Standing Committees to Public Bill Committees. This change was made to more accurately describe their role in examining public bills in detail. The reform was part of efforts to enhance the legislative process by introducing evidence sessions, allowing Members of Parliament to receive input from experts and stakeholders during the scrutiny of proposed legislation. These reforms did not require primary legislation but were effected through changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, the rules governing parliamentary procedure

³¹ G. W. Noble, 'The Committee System in the US Congress: Institutional Development and Political Control,' (2002)

³⁴ (3) *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 459

³² UK Parliament (and.) Public Accounts Committee

³³ National Audit Office (NAO) reports

v. Reviewing National Audit Office (NAO) reports.³⁴

The Public Accounts Committee's work has a significant impact on government spending and financial management. Its investigations and reports have led to improved financial management and transparency, identification of cost savings and efficiencies, enhanced accountability and governance, and informed decision-making by policymakers.³⁵

Public bill committees, on the other hand, are temporary and are formed to scrutinize the details of proposed legislation. These committees go through the clauses of bills, debating and amending them before the bill returns to the House for further consideration. The legislative process in the UK heavily relies on these committees to fine-tune proposed laws and ensure that they are thoroughly examined before passing.³⁶

B. Legislative Oversight Functions and Accountability in Britain

The committee system in the UK Parliament is a key instrument for executive accountability. Select committees, particularly those in the House of Commons, have considerable powers to question ministers and government officials, request documents, and conduct inquiries into government activities. The committees' reports are often published and debated in the House, drawing significant media attention and public scrutiny. For example, the Treasury Select Committee plays a vital role in scrutinizing economic policy, as shown hereunder:

C. The Treasury Select Committee

The Treasury Select Committee³⁷ is one of the key parliamentary committees under the British Parliament. Tasked with overseeing the Treasury, financial sector, and economic policy, it ensures accountability and transparency in managing public resources and economic decision-making.

The Treasury Select Committee comprises Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by their peers, ensuring a democratic selection process. This composition reflects the political diversity of the House of Commons, allowing for balanced scrutiny. The Chairman, who is often elected from the opposition party, underscores the committee's independence. According to Kelso, this structure fosters impartial oversight and enhances the credibility of the committee's inquiries.³⁸

The committee's core mandate is to scrutinize the Treasury's activities and policies, particularly in areas such as taxation, public spending, and macroeconomic management. It also oversees major

³⁴ D. A. Heald, 'Varieties of Transparency,' in D. Heald and R. Hodgkinson (ed.) *Transparency in Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2006

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ T. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party, and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester University Press 1996) Pp.67, 89

³⁷ [Hereafter, The TSC]

³⁸ A. Kelso, at note 4

financial institutions, including the Bank of England, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

The responsibility of the Treasury Select Committee include the following:

- a. Assessing Fiscal Policy: Reviewing the impact of government spending and taxation policies on economic growth and public finances.
- b. Examining Monetary Policy: Holding the Bank of England accountable for decisions on inflation control and interest rates.
- c. Conducting Inquiries: Investigating pressing economic issues, such as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change finance, and digital currencies.
- d. Regulatory Oversight: Evaluating the effectiveness of financial regulations to ensure the stability of the UK's financial system.
- e. Engaging Stakeholders: Soliciting evidence from experts, organizations, and the public during its inquiries to provide comprehensive recommendations.

These activities enable the committee to influence economic policy-making significantly, as noted by Norton,³⁹ who highlights the committee's role in shaping public debates on fiscal and monetary matters.

The Treasury Select Committee is indispensable in maintaining accountability within the British Economic governance framework. By scrutinizing policies, engaging stakeholders, and fostering transparency, it ensures that public resources are managed effectively. However, enhancing its capacity to address emerging financial complexities and strengthening the implementation of its recommendations would further its effectiveness. As Norton⁴⁰ argues, parliamentary committees like the TSC are pivotal in upholding democratic accountability, particularly in areas as critical as economic policy.

D. Structure of the Committee System in Britain

The British parliamentary system employs various types of committees, with Select Committee being the most prominent. Select Committees are established to scrutinize specific areas of government policy and to monitor the work of government departments. These committees are empowered to call government ministers and civil servants to account, and they conduct detailed inquiries that often shape government policy.⁴¹ The public Accounts Committee (PAC), for instance,

³⁹ P. Norton, 'Introduction: The Institution of Parliaments' in Philip Norton (ed.), *Parliaments and Governments in Western Europe*, New York: Rutledge, 1999; M. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures* (Duke University Press 1979).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ P. Norton, 'Introduction: The Institution of Parliaments' in Philip Norton (ed.), *Parliaments and Governments*

is considered one of the most influential committees in Parliament, as it is tasked with overseeing government expenditures and ensuring value for money in public spending.

Public Bills Committees (formerly known as Standing Committee) are another essential part of the UK's committee structure. They are formed to scrutinize bills in detail after the second reading in the House of Commons. The renaming from standing committees to Public Bill Committees in 2006 was aimed at emphasizing their role in public legislation. The renaming of Standing Committees as Public Bill Committees in the UK House of Commons in 2006 was achieved through a resolution of the House. This change was part of a broader set of procedural reforms aimed at improving the scrutiny and effectiveness of committees in the legislative process.

The reform was implemented following recommendation by the Modernization Committee of the House of Commons, which had reviewed the operation of committees and suggested ways to make them more effective. The specific changes, including the renaming, were approved by vote in the House of Commons as part of updated Standing Orders, the rules that govern parliamentary procedure.

These committees have the power to suggest amendments to bills and hear evidence from experts and stakeholders. However, their influence is often limited by party politics, as the government usually holds a majority on these committees.

In addition to these, Joint Committees and Ad Hoc Committees are established to address specific issues, often involving both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. These committees contribute to the broader scrutiny of government actions, ensuring that there is a comprehensive oversight mechanism in place across different policy areas.

E. Key Features of an Effective Committee System in Britain

One of the hallmarks of the British committee system is its operational independence. Committees, particularly Select Committees, are known for their ability to function independently of the executive.⁴² The chairs of many Select Committees are elected by MPs, which enhances their legitimacy and reduces the likelihood of political interference. This independent structure allows committees to produce reports that are often critical of the government, promoting accountability and transparency.⁴³

in *Western Europe*, New York: Rutledge, 1999; M. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures* (Duke University Press 1979).

⁴² S. Malcolm, 'Parliamentary Committees: A global perspective' *Journal of Legislative Studies* (1998) (4)(1), L.D. Longley, and R.H. Davidson, 'Parliamentary Committees: changing perspectives on changing institutions' *Journal of Legislative Studies* (1998) (4) (1)

⁴³ General Committees House of Commons Information Office (Facts sheet 16)

Furthermore, committees in Britain are well-resourced. They have access to a range of research services, including parliamentary researchers and external experts. This enables committees to conduct in-depth inquiries and produce high-quality reports. For example, the Foreign Affairs Committee regularly produces reports on UK foreign policy that are based on extensive research and consultations with experts from various fields.⁴⁴ The availability of such resources allows committees to scrutinize complex issues effectively.⁴⁵

Another feature that enhances the effectiveness of committees in Britain is their ability to call for evidence and witnesses. Committees regularly summon ministers, civil servants, and external stakeholders to give evidence on various issues.⁴⁶ This process allows MPs to ask direct questions and gather a wide range of perspectives on matters of public interest.

In 2011, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee summoned media mogul, Rupert Murdoch to answer questions related to the phone-hacking scandal, demonstrating the power of committees to hold influential individuals to account.⁴⁷ This scandal, primarily involving journalist from News of the World, revolved around the illegal interception of private voicemails to obtain stories, including those of public figures and crime victims. The incident revealed serious ethical lapses in journalistic practices and raised broader concerns about media regulation, corporate governance, and the relationship between powerful media conglomerates and public institutions.⁴⁸ The inquiry demonstrated the effectiveness of UK's parliamentary committees in holding even the most influential individuals and organizations accountable. The committee exercised its authority under parliamentary privileges to compel testimony, ensuring transparency, and robust scrutiny. The inquiry contributed to the closure of News of the World, which had operated for 168 years.

It further underscores the critical role of legislative committees as instruments of democratic accountability, capable of investigating complex issues involving powerful individuals and entities. It also highlights the importance of maintaining robust oversight mechanisms to safeguard public trust in governance and institutional integrity.

⁴⁴ House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations, 'UK foreign Policy in a shifting world order' (5th Report of Session 2017-19).

⁴⁵ T. Pettinger, *The Foreign Affairs Select Committee and UK Foreign Policy* (Open University Press: Milton Keynes 2012).

⁴⁶ The powers of select committees originated from the authority of the House and are governed by the Standing Orders. These committees, including their sub-committees, are empowered to "send for persons, Papers, and records" relevant to their terms of reference. However, the enforcement of these powers, Particularly the ability to punish for contempt of the House, remains the sole prerogative of the House as a whole and cannot be exercised by individual Select Committees.

⁴⁷ House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Report: *Nes International and Phone Hacking* (2012)

⁴⁸ T. Watson, and M. Hickman, *Dial M for Murdoch: News Corporation and the Corruption of Britain* (Allen Lane 2012)

3. Challenges and Prospects of the utilisation of Committee System in the National Assembly and British Parliament

Committees are designed to enhance legislative efficiency, providing lawmakers with smaller, specialized bodies capable of focusing on specific areas of governance. In Nigeria, the National Assembly has developed a robust committee system, with standing and ad-hoc committees playing pivotal roles in law-making, oversight, and representation. However, the effectiveness of these committees is often hindered by several systemic and operational challenges.

3.1 Challenges to the Effectiveness of Committee system in Nigeria

The committee system in Nigeria holds significant potentials. Its effectiveness is often undermined by several factors. One of the primary obstacles is the politicization of committee leadership. Committee chairmanships are often distributed based on political alliances rather than expertise. This can lead to committees being led by individuals who lack the requisite knowledge or experience to effectively scrutinize legislation or hold the executive accountable. For example, during the 8th National Assembly, tension between the executive and legislative branches resulted in committee chairmanships being awarded to political loyalists, which impacted the ability of those committees to function impartially.⁴⁹

Another critical issue is the underfunding of committees. Effective legislative oversight requires adequate resources, including funding for investigations, research, and expert consultations. In Nigeria, many committees lack the necessary budget to carry out these functions effectively. This financial constraint limits their ability to conduct comprehensive oversight of government ministries, departments, and agencies. Rt. Hon. Yakubu Dogara highlighted the issue of inadequate funding for the National Assembly and the link between financial resources and legislative performance when he remarked,⁵⁰ that many might find it surprising to hear that the National Assembly is underfunded. However, the cost of engaging constituents, whether through digital platforms or physical public hearing is substantial. The legislature cannot afford to broadcast its sessions live on television or radio, nor can it fully air investigative hearing during or after they occur. Yet, public access to legislative processes is central to our democratic journey. There is,

⁴⁹ C. Kargbo, 'Relationship between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary in the Nigerian Fourth Republic as an Engine of an unbalanced One: A Study of 1999-2019,' *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* (2007) (4) (1)

⁵⁰ Y. Dogara, 'The Legislature and the Stability of Nigerian Democracy' (being keynote address delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the 2016 National Political Summit at the International Conference Center, Abuja, 25th January 2016).

therefore, a need for a national conversation on the true cost of running the legislature in Nigeria. Dogara acknowledged the limited resources available to the current government in implementing ‘pro-people and pro-poor agenda.’ He emphasized that the legislature, as a co-equal arm of government, is willing to make necessary financial sacrifices. However, he appealed for greater public understanding of the financial demands placed on the legislature in fulfilling its mandate of good governance.

This statement underscores the critical relationship between resource availability and capability in driving success. Adequate resources provide the foundation needed to accomplish committee tasks, while competence ensures these resources are utilized efficiently and effectively.⁵¹ In many cases, committee investigations are superficial due to the lack of resources to conduct thorough enquiries or audits.

Furthermore, executive dominance remains a significant impediment to the effective functioning of legislative committees in Nigeria. Although the constitution provides for the separation of powers, the executive often wields substantial influence over the legislature. This dominance is particularly evident in the passage of budget bills, where the executive tends to frustrate legislative oversight role, as seen in cases where the executive disregards committee findings or recommendations without consequence.⁵²

3.2 Challenges to the Committee system in the British Parliament.

Notwithstanding their effectiveness, parliamentary committees in the UK face several challenges. One major issue is the limited time and resources available to committees. While committees are expected to carry out in-depth investigations, they often struggle with tight schedules and insufficient staffing, which can limit their ability to conduct comprehensive inquiries⁵³.

Moreover, the executive’s control over the legislative agenda can sometimes diminish the influence of committees. Although committees can make recommendations to the government there is no obligation for the government to act on these recommendations, and committees have no formal powers to enforce their findings. This can weaken the committee’s role in shaping policy and ensuring that government actions are aligned with the public interest.⁵⁴ In addition, Russel and Cowley argued that government’s resistance or delays in adopting its recommendations can reduce

⁵¹ L. Hamalai, Dan-Azumi and S. Omotola, ‘Resource Competence and Legislative Performance in the National Assembly’ *National Institute for Legislative Studies, National Assembly, Nigeria, Occasional Paper series*, 2016

⁵² Y.T. Baba, ‘Executive Dominance, Party Control, and State Legislatures in Nigeria: Evidence from Three States in the Northwest Geopolitical Zone,’ in A.C. LeVan, J.O. Fashagba, E.R. McMahon (eds.) *African State Governance*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015

⁵³ D. Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (Penguin, 2003) P. 198

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *supra*

the impact of its work.⁵⁵ Giddings submitted that select committees perform an important function of scrutiny but they do not have real power over the things that matter to government – the passage of legislation, the voting of taxation and expenditure, the continuation of ministers in office, and etcetera.⁵⁶

3.3 Prospects on Effective Committee Work in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the adumbrated challenges, there are instances where the committee system in Nigeria has demonstrated effectiveness. For example, the House of Representatives Committee on Finance played a crucial role in 2012 when it investigated the management of fuel subsidy funds, uncovering widespread corruption and inefficiencies in the administration of the subsidy. The findings of the committee led to widespread public outcry and the eventual prosecution of key figures implicated in the scandal.⁵⁷

Similarly, the Senate Committee on Power has been instrumental in reviewing and investigating the performance of Nigeria's power sector reforms. In 2015, the Senate constituted an ad-hoc committee to probe the management of funds allocated to the power sector since 1999, leading to reforms in the management of public resources within the sector.⁵⁸ These examples demonstrate that, when adequately empowered and resourced, committees in Nigeria can play a vital role in promoting accountability and transparency.

Flowing from the above, there are other challenges confronting the committee system in Nigeria. One major issue is the politicization of committee work.⁵⁹ Often, committee chairmen and members are appointed based on political patronage rather than expertise, which compromised the committee's ability to perform its functions impartially. This is especially prevalent when the ruling party seeks to protect the executive from scrutiny, thus undermining the independence of committees.

Another challenge is the lack of adequate resources. Committees are often underfunded, making it difficult for them to carry out investigations or meet frequently enough to handle the volume of work required. Additionally, there is a shortage of technical expertise, as committees may lack the necessary personnel or consultants to help analyse complex issues, especially in sectors such as finance or technology.

⁵⁵ M. Russell and P. Cowley, 'The Policy Power of the Westminster Parliament: The "Parliamentary State" and the Empirical Evidence' *Governance* (2015) (29)(1).

⁵⁶ P. Giddings, 'Select Committees and Parliamentary Scrutiny' *Parliamentary Affairs* (1994) (47) (4).

⁵⁷ M. Mark, 'Nigeria Fuel Subsidy Scheme hit by Corruption' *The Guardian* (Lagos, 19 April, 2012).

⁵⁸ T. Enietan-Matthews, 'Senate sets up committee to investigate power sector' *Daily Post* (14 August 2015).

⁵⁹ M.K. Aliyu, and I.H. Amoge, 'Analysis of the Challenges of Legislative oversight on Good governance in Nigeria,' *Developing Countries Studies*, 2018 (8) (8) Pp. 147-157

3.4 Prospects of the Committee System in Britain

The effectiveness of the committee system in Britain, especially within the context of the parliamentary system of government, has been widely recognized.⁶⁰ The UK parliament operates through a series of committees that have grown in both importance and influence over time.⁶¹ These committees play a critical role in scrutinizing legislation, overseeing the executive, and ensuring accountability in governance. The British committee system is generally seen as more effective than its Nigerian counterpart, largely due to its structure, operational independence, and resourcing.⁶²

4. Highlights on the ‘Committee system’ in the Presidential system of government in Nigeria and the British Parliament

In comparison to the United Kingdom’s parliamentary system, the committee system in Nigeria faces more structural and operational challenges. In the UK, committees such as the Public Accounts Committee have a long history of holding the government accountable and are well-resourced, allowing for detailed investigations into government activities.⁶³ The ability of UK committees to summon ministers and public officials for questioning has always provided them with a robust mechanism for ensuring executive accountability. In Nigeria, although committees have the authority to summon officials, the response from the executive is often lackadaisical and lukewarm. The UK parliamentary committee system benefits from the presence of select committees that specialize in specific areas of government policy, such as health, education, and foreign affairs. These select committees regularly publish reports on their findings, which are debated in Parliament and often lead to changes in government policy. Nigeria’s legislative committees, while similar in structure, do not always produce reports that usually lead to concrete policy changes, partly due to executive dominance and weak enforcement mechanisms.

The committee system in Nigeria, while established as integral to the legislative process, struggles with several limitations that affect its effectiveness. For instance, issues such as political interferences, underfunding, and executive dominance undermine the ability of committees to carry out their functions fully. However, examples of successful committee investigations show that there are ample potentials for improvement, if these structural issues are addressed. Strengthening the

⁶⁰ House of Commons Liaison Committee Report (2019)

⁶¹ M. Russell and D. Gover, ‘Analysis of the Influence of Parliamentary Committees on Government Legislation,’ *Parliamentary Affairs*, (2011 Parliamentary Affairs) (64) (4) 808 - 825

⁶² B.J. Gains, M. Goodwin, and S.H. Bates, ‘The Study of Legislative Committees,’ *The Journal of Legislative Studies* (2019) (25) (3)

⁶³ I. Mattson and K. Strom, ‘Parliamentary Committees’ in H. Doring (ed.), *Parliament and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 1995

independence, resourcing, and enforcement powers of legislative committees would significantly enhance the legislative oversight function and improve governance in Nigeria.

In contrast, the implementation of committee recommendations in the UK parliamentary system is more robust, though it is still not without challenges. The UK Parliament has a long-standing tradition of respecting the findings of its committees, particularly those of Select Committees, which are tasked with holding the government accountable in specific areas such as public expenditure, foreign affairs, and social services.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), one of the most powerful committees in the UK Parliament, frequently makes recommendations regarding government spending and efficiency. The executive is required to respond to the PAC's reports, and there is a strong expectation that recommendations will be implemented. In cases where the government fails to act, the media and public often exert pressure, contributing to greater accountability. For example, PAC recommendations regarding the misuse of public funds during the 2012 London Olympics were largely implemented due to the high level of scrutiny and media attention (House of Commons, 2012).

Furthermore, the UK's committee system benefits from a well-developed mechanism for follow-up. Committees such as the Environmental Audit Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee routinely track the government's responses to their recommendations and public updates on the implementation status. The Liaison Committee, which is composed of the chairmen of all the Select Committees, also plays a crucial role in ensuring that the government is held to account for the recommendations it receives. This system creates a culture of accountability, where committees are able to continuously monitor the implementation of their recommendations.⁶⁴

It should be noted that there are several factors contributing to the more effective implementation of committee recommendations in the UK compared to Nigeria. One key factor is the independence of the committee system. While party politics can influence committees' work in both countries, UK committees – particularly Select Committees – enjoy a level of independence from the executive that allows them to be more critical and thorough in their investigations. The election of committee chairmen by MPs from all parties, rather than appointment by party leaders, helps to enhance this independence.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ 'House of Commons Select Committee on Procedure', *Select Committee Effectiveness: Report of the Procedure Committee*. (2005) London: The Stationery Office,

⁶⁵ 'House of Commons Select Committee' *The Impact of Senate Committees on Government Policy and*

Additionally, the media's role in publicizing committees' findings is a significant force in the UK. British media outlets frequently report on committee investigations and their recommendations, which create public pressure on the government to act. This contrasts with Nigeria, where media coverage of committee findings is often less sustained, and public pressure on the government to implement recommendations is weak.⁶⁶

Furthermore, UK committees tend to have access to better resources, including legal and technical experts, research staff, and financial backing, which enhance their ability to produce high-quality reports and follow up on the government's actions.⁶⁷ In contrast, it has been observed that Nigerian committees often operate with limited resources, which hampers their ability to ensure that their recommendations are effectively implemented.

There are inundations of significant factors inuring in favour of committee systems in both jurisdictions. There is the stakeholders' participation and inclusiveness which are critical components of the committee system. These elements ensure that the legislative process is participatory, transparent, and accountable to the electorate and other relevant actors. Effective stakeholder engagement allows committee to benefit from diverse perspectives, ensuring that legislative decisions are informed by expert advice, public opinion, and interests of marginalized groups. This section compares the participation and inclusiveness of stakeholders in Nigeria's presidential system and the UK's parliamentary system, identifying the strengths and challenges in each context.

Significantly, in Nigeria's presidential system, stakeholder participation in the legislative process through committees is generally recognized, but the degree of involvement often varies depending on the nature of the issue under consideration. Key stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and the public, are invited to provide input during committee hearings or consultations. For example, during discussions on major policy areas such as budget allocations, tax reforms, or infrastructure projects, various professional bodies and interest groups are often called to give evidence or submit memoranda.

However, stakeholder participation in Nigeria can be limited by several factors. First, there is a lack of formalized mechanisms for ensuring consistent stakeholder involvement in committee deliberations. The invitation to participate is often selective, and not interested or affected parties

Legislation' (2019) The Stationery Office London.

⁶⁶ E. Jones, and T. Jenkins, 'The Media and Public Accountability in the UK Parliament' *Parliamentary Affairs* (2014) (67) (67) (3)

⁶⁷ 'House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee' *Greening the Government's Fiscal Policies* (2019), London the Stationery Office. The report demonstrated the importance of evidence-based recommendations and how data and expert testimony influence government decisions.

may have the opportunity to present their views. In some cases, the process is criticized for being politically driven, with committees inviting only those stakeholders whose views align with their political interest.⁶⁸ Additionally, the role of civil society in influencing committee decisions is constrained by inadequate resources and limited access to vital information. This can hinder Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other interest groups from effectively contributing to the committee's work.

Moreover, the inclusiveness of the Nigerian committee system is often compromised by socio-political factors. Gender representation, for example, remains a significant challenge. Women, who make up more than fifty per-cent of the Nigerian population, are underrepresented in legislative committees, both in terms of membership and participation in committee consultation.⁶⁹ Similarly, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups are often left out of the decision-making process. The absence of these groups in committee proceedings can lead to the exclusion of critical perspectives that would enrich the legislative process and ensure that the laws and policies being considered reflect the needs and aspirations of all Nigerians.

On the other hand, the UK parliamentary system is widely regarded for its inclusive approach to stakeholder participation in the legislative process.⁷⁰ Committees, especially Select Committees, regularly engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, experts, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and the general public. The public is encouraged to submit written evidence or appear as witnesses before committees, which enhances the quality of deliberations by ensuring that multiple viewpoints are considered. This open approach has made the UK parliamentary committee system a model of transparency and public accountability.⁷¹

One of the strengths of the UK system is its structured and institutionalized process for stakeholder engagement. Committees are required to publish calls for evidence when conducting inquiries, ensuring that a broad range of stakeholders can contribute. These calls are often widely advertised, and written submissions are made publicly available. Furthermore, committee hearings are generally

⁶⁸ F. Mijiga, 'Public Participation in the Legislation Process,' (A summary of Results from a Nation-wide Regional Survey and a National Conference Conducted by the National Council and the National Democratic Institute between April and October 2000).

⁶⁹ A. Yusuf, 'Women and Power Dynamics in NASS,' *This Day* (Lagos, 12 March 2025). According to the writer, women have 2.7% and 4.7% representation in the Senate and the House of Representatives respectively; representing 4.2% of the 469 member National Assembly.

⁷⁰ M. Flinders, 'Shutting the Back Door? The Perils of Efficiency Reform and Stakeholder Participation in the UK Parliament' *Parliamentary Affairs* (2002) (55) (1)

⁷¹ P. Norton, *supra*

open to the public, and the proceedings are often broadcast on television or streamed online, enabling wider participation and fostering public trust in the legislative process.⁷²

Inclusiveness is also a key feature of the UK committee system. Efforts have been made to ensure that underrepresented groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, have a voice in the legislative process. For instance, most committees frequently hold targeted consultations with minority communities or seek input from organizations elite interest that reflects the diverse views and needs of the population.⁷³

Nevertheless, challenges remain in achieving full inclusiveness in the UK committee system. Despite efforts to engage various stakeholders, there are concerns that the influence of corporate interests and well-funded lobby groups can sometimes overshadow the contributions of smaller, less resourced stakeholders. This issue is particularly evident in policy areas such as health, finance, and defence, where large corporations and industry associations have considerable access to and influence over committee deliberations. Ensuring that the views of ordinary citizens and marginalized communities are not drowned out by more powerful actors remains an on-going challenge in the UK system.

A comparative analysis of Nigeria and the UK reveals significant differences in the extent of stakeholder participation and inclusiveness in the committee systems of both countries. In the UK, the process is more institutionalized and transparent, with clear procedures for engaging a wide range of stakeholders. The use of public calls for evidence, open hearings, and the involvement of minority and marginalized groups contribute to a more inclusive and accountable legislative process. In contrast, Nigeria's stakeholder engagement process is less formalized with limited public participation and fewer opportunities for marginalized groups to influence committee decisions.

One major difference between the two systems is the role of civil society. In the UK, civil society plays an integral role in the committee system, with numerous advocacy groups and research organizations regularly contributing to legislative inquiries. By contrast, Nigerian civil society organizations face significant challenges, including lack of funding, limited access to information, and political interference, which hamper their ability to engage meaningfully with the legislative process.⁷⁴

⁷² M. Russell & M. Benton, at note 62

⁷³ O. Nnoli, 'Participatory Democracy and Stakeholder Engagement in Nigeria Examining Inclusiveness in Local Governance' *Journal of African Political Economy* (2018) (9)(4)

⁷⁴ I.T. Akindele, and D.O. Ayoola, 'Challenges of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in influencing Democratic Governance in Nigeria,' *African Journal of Management* (2017) (2) (2)

Another important distinction is the influence of political interests on stakeholder participation. In Nigeria, committees often prioritize stakeholders who align with their political objectives, which can undermine the inclusiveness of the process. By contrast, the UK system, while not immune to political influence, has stronger institutional safeguards to prevent committees from favouring specific interest at the expense of others.

5. Conclusion

The committee system is a vital organ of the legislative branch in both presidential and parliamentary systems of government. It functions as a strategic platform for dissecting complex policy issues, scrutinising executive actions, engaging the public, and enhancing the quality of legislation. However, it has been demonstrated that the structure and effectiveness of legislative committees are deeply shaped by the broader constitutional frameworks and political cultures of the systems within which they operate.

In presidential systems such as those of Nigeria and the United States, committees often enjoy greater formal independence due to the separation of powers doctrine. Committees serve as powerful instruments for oversight and legislative investigation. Yet, this institutional autonomy is frequently undermined by executive interference, intense partisanship, bureaucratic resistance, and weak enforcement of committee resolutions. Moreover, the lack of cohesion between the executive and legislative branches can lead to policy stalemates that obstruct committee efficiency.

On the other hand, parliamentary systems like those in the United Kingdom and Canada feature a closer relationship between the legislature and the executive. While this alignment can facilitate policy implementation and reduce friction, it often comes at the cost of committee independence. Committees in parliamentary systems may be constrained by strong party discipline, executive dominance, and limited capacity to hold ministers accountable—especially when the majority party controls both the government and the legislature. Consequently, the oversight functions of parliamentary committees may become perfunctory or highly politicised.

As an aftermath committees across both systems face common structural and functional challenges. These include inadequate funding and staffing, poor access to technical expertise, opacity in proceedings, and limited engagement with civil society. Furthermore, committees in both systems occasionally suffer from reputational crises due to perceived ineffectiveness, political bias, or lack of follow-through on findings and recommendations.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis underscored the fact that there is no perfect model of committee operation; rather, each system presents unique opportunities and constraints. What is essential is the recognition that effective committee systems require more than just procedural rules—they demand strong political will, institutional safeguards, adequate resources, and a culture of accountability. Reforms aimed at depoliticising committee leadership, professionalising legislative support staff, enhancing transparency, and empowering committees to enforce their mandates are necessary steps toward strengthening democratic governance. Ultimately, whether in presidential or parliamentary systems, the quality of legislative democracy is closely tied to the functionality of its committee system. An empowered and independent committee system not only enhances the legislature’s capacity to fulfil its constitutional roles but also reinforces the principles of checks and balances, good governance, and public accountability.



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