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## **PARLIAMENTARY VERSUS PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT: THE QUEST FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA**

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### ***Abstract***

The quest for good governance is without a doubt the currency of the whole world today. This is why the paper focused on tracing the suitable platform under which good governance can be anchored and delivered to the people in Africa. Thus, the paper looks at the operations of the two major systems of government separately – the parliamentary and the presidential systems as practice today. The two systems were placed side by side together for a better perspective on which should be better for African countries, taking particular reference to the practice of the two in Nigeria. The hunger for good governance generally and in Africa in particular was painted. The paper concludes that, there is no problem with the structural organization of the two systems in question, but the operators of the two systems. The paper finally recommends the presidential system of government as fitting for most of the African countries, considering our peculiar nature as a people.

**Keywords:** Parliamentary, Presidential, Systems, Government, Quest.

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### **Introduction**

Parliamentary versus presidential systems of government are exemplified by most European countries for the former and the United State and Latin America for the latter; the two are the principal forms of democracy in the modern world. Their merits and demerits have been debated at first mainly by British and American political observers, but with increasing frequency in other parts of the world, not only in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but in Latin America and Asia as well (CGG, 1995). The recent world-wide wave of democratization has intensified both the debate and its significance on good

governance especially in Africa which is regarded as backward in terms of political development generally.

This topic is particularly important as it under scores the essence of government and what it meant to be as the huge chunk of the resources of the African countries are devoted to satisfying only a few. A situation where the mass majority of the population remained poor and indifferent thus, the major objective of this paper is to find out where the problem lays. Is it with the dominant systems of government in operation in most of the democracies in the African countries, is it with the managers of these systems of government or which is to be blame and what then can be the way out of this seemingly unending bad governance in Africa?

Therefore, the paper will dwell on the operations of the parliamentary and presidential systems of government as it relates to which will be appropriate to African continent to bringing about good governance. It will also depict the fact that, the African countries need to see themselves as unique in the scheme of governance in the world history and civilization. It will then, look at parliamentary and presidential systems of government separately and then juxtapose the two in bringing out their tenets; then it will look at the quest for good governance in relation to the type of system that will fit in for the African continent. It will then draw it conclusion and recommendations on which way and which is better for Africa to delivering the much desired good governance.

### **Parliamentary System of Government:**

The parliamentary form of government is also called the cabinet system but it is more appropriately called by its traditional name, which is a parliamentary system of government. It is not long ago when the term cabinet was substituted for parliamentary due to changes in the functional relationship between the legislature and the executive that is the cabinet branches which have resulted in the ascendancy of the latter over the former. In Britain where this system of government originated and where it is most institutionalized today, it is distinguished by the supremacy of the legislature or parliament over all other political institutions including the executive. In fact, the executive has traditionally and still is a creature of the legislature. The legislature is normally constituted through an electoral process that takes place at specified intervals that vary from one country to another. Among the countries operating this type of government are Norway, Netherlands, Israel, Sweden and Luxembourg. Nigeria also had a trial of this form of government from independence in 1960 until 1966 when the military terminated it.

There are certain characteristic features of a parliamentary form of government. There is always a dual executive. One executive is nominal and the other is real. In India for instance that also practices a parliamentary form of government, the nominal executive is the President of India and the real executive is the Prime Minister and the cabinet. In England, the king or Queen is the nominal executive and the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are the real executives. The nominal executive does not exercise any much power. All the powers are enjoyed and exercise by the cabinet, which is responsible to the legislature and through it to the people. The ministers are chosen from the members of the legislature and are also responsible to it for all their acts of omission and commission. They can be asked questions and supplementary questions. A vote of no confidence can be passed against them. They remain in office so long as they enjoy the confidence of the House. They have no fixed term of office. If they are defeated in the legislature, they either have to resign and make room for others or appeal to the people against the verdict of the members of the legislature. In a parliamentary government, the Prime Minister is the leader and it is he who makes a choice of the Cabinet and has the power to reshuffle this cabinet. He can include or exclude any member he pleases. However, he would normally include in his cabinet all the important members of his party. That is one of the basic ways to make his cabinet strong. There is the principle of collective responsibility of the ministers. The defeat of one minister in the legislature results in the fall of the ministry as a whole. That is one of the reasons why ministers help one another. The cabinet is the link between the legislature and the executive. Most of the legislations are initiated by the cabinet and the ministers are in-charge of these bills in the legislature.

In Britain, the term of a government is normally five years unless exceptional circumstances necessitate extension of the life of a parliament or its dissolution mid-way into its term, to enable elected officials to seek new mandates from the electorates. Whichever is the case, at the end of every election, the party that wins the highest number of seats and thus, enjoys the support of the majority of the members of the legislature is called upon by the Head of State to form the executive arm of the government that is the cabinet. It is for this reason that, an executive constituted through this process is referred to as cabinet government. It is also sometimes called parliamentary government because of its origin in the legislature. However, to be sure, parliament is the common name for the combination of the executive or cabinet and the legislature, rather than the latter alone (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008, Lipjhart, 1992, Jean & Muller-Rome, 1989).

### **Presidential System of Government:**

This is that form of government where the President is both Head of State and also Head of Government. In other words, the Chief Executive of his country here, the President and his Ministers or Advisers do not belong to the legislature. They form the presidential cabinet with the President as Chief Executive. In this form of government, the executive is not responsible to the legislature. According to Mahajan (1998), it "is a government in which the executive is independent of the legislature as regards its tenure and to a large extent as regards its policy and acts". Such a system exists in the United States and also in Nigeria. The American President is the executive and the congress is the legislature. The President is usually elected for a term of four years and can not be removed earlier except through impeachment. The members of the House of Representatives as well as the Senate are elected on a fixed term and can not be sent home earlier and will retire after the completion of their term respectively. No hostile vote in the congress can turn out the President and likewise no American President can dissolve the congress. Both the President and the congress look to the calendar and they are always sure of their future. The President and his ministers do not sit in the congress as noted elsewhere and consequently they can not be questioned on the floor of the congress. The ministers and the President do not occupy the same position as the ministers in England do. The latter are the colleagues of the Prime Minister and they represent the people as much as the Prime Minister does. However, the ministers of the American President are merely his subordinates or his political appointees who are put in-charge of various departments or ministries and they can be asked to get out anytime by the President. They do not represent the people and their tenure of office depends upon the will of the President. In a presidential system, there is no titular executive like the King or Queen of England or the President of India. The America President is the real executive and all powers rest in his hands. He occupies a position similar to that of the Prime Minister of England. The presidential system is based on the theory of separation of powers, although, it is difficult to achieve complete separation in actual practice. The Nigeria presidential system is modeled to that of American System.

According to Dr. Finer, the America Presidency has six outstanding characteristics. It is not made executive but it has grown. It is a solitary not a collective executive. It is popularly elected, although the constitution provides for an indirect election. It is more than an executive. It is separated from the congress. It may be tinkered with, but it cannot be reformed (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). In the presidential system of government, the President is usually voted into

office by the electorates. After the election, he chooses his ministers, in most cases from outside the legislature. The legislature does not decide for the President. He is free to choose members of his cabinet from anywhere, including the legislature subject to approval by the senate. If a legislator is chosen, he or she must resign his or her seat. The President can dismiss any of his ministers without consulting the legislature.

The principle of collective responsibility does not apply to the presidential system of government, that is the President as a person or he and his ministers as a group are not responsible to the legislature. In this system, cabinet ministers are responsible only to the President. The presidential system also illustrates the practice of checks and balances very well. Even though the President is the Chief of the executive branch of government, his actions are monitored by the legislature to ensure that he does not abuse his office. For instance, in the United States of America, the constitution requires that the congress, that is the legislature should approve the appointment of Secretaries and Advisers of the President before they take office. Also the annual budget or the decision to send American Soldiers to fight outside America must be approved by the legislature. All these are meant to prevent the abuse of office by the President. But the President also has the right of veto, that is, the right to reject any bill passed by the congress which does not favour his government. Sometimes a two-third majority vote in the congress is needed to nullify the President's veto. For instance, in 1987, ex-president Reagan of the USA vetoed a bill by the congress mandating him to impose economic sanctions against South Africa because of the latter's apartheid policy.

If the president goes against the law or the constitution of the country, he could be impeached and removed from office if found guilty. In this case, there is no collective responsibility. He is removed but his ministers and advisers could remain in office to work with a new president, who in most cases is the Former Vice President. Much as the executive headed by the President is checked by the legislature, the judiciary checks the legislature from making laws that are inimical to the constitution. It can declare a law unconstitutional, null and void. In this process by which the legislature checks the executive and the executive and legislature are checked by the judiciary in a presidential system called the process of checks and balances (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008, Lipjhart, 1992, Jean & Muller-Rome, 1989).

### **Parliamentary Versus Presidential Systems of Government:**

Parliamentary government is one of the most popular forms of government in the world today. Some observers have attributed its popularity to the belief that it

promotes orderly and peaceful governance which in a sense will invariably leads to good governance. It has been argued that one of the important factors that contributes to the stability and smooth functioning of this system of government is the strategic role of the office of the Head of State (Nzongola-Ntalaja and Lee, 2000). If this is true, then it is only one of the factors. Another contributory factor, at least to its success in Britain, is the existence of a small number of large parties, whose members are disciplined and strongly attached to the ideals and programmes for which their parties stand. Parliamentary regimes with large numbers of small and fractious parties advocating various kinds of narrow ideologies or interests tend to endanger political instability as the Italian system shows (Diamond, 1999). Italy has had over sixty changes of government since the end of World War II. The multiplicity of parties advocating diverse policies often makes it difficult for any single party to appeal to a wide cross-section of the electorates that can enable it to win a clear-cut majority in an election. The situation often forces parties to enter into coalition arrangements, which in many cases, collapse due to differences in attitudes and opinions on how the government should be run and for what ends.

However, the number of parties may not be the decisive factor that determines the correlation between parliamentary government and political stability. As the stability of the Scandinavian parliamentary regimes with multiplicity of parties as that of Italy illustrates, it is not the number of parties that matters but the diversities of interests or ideologies that they advocate that is crucial for the success of this system of government. The extent of ideological diversities among the Scandinavian parties is not as wide and deep as is the case in Italy. Hence the relative consensus in the former parliamentary systems ensures their stability more than in the latter's. Ideally, parliamentary systems tend to function well and promote stability when one of the parties control majority in the legislature (Diamond, (ed) 1993). Contrasting the parliamentary regime with its fusion of powers is the presidential system. The organizing principle on which presidential government is based is separation of powers. Popularized by a Frenchman, Montesquieu, the principle of separation of powers is underlined by the fear that those entrusted with powers of government may use it to oppress the citizenry if they are not checked or restrained (Huntington, 1991). In order to guarantee individual liberty, the principle advises that government power should be disaggregated into three key component parts and each of them assigned to a separate institution of government to exercise. The legislature will make the laws, the executive will administer them and the judiciary will settle conflicts, punish offenders, interpret the laws and decide on the constitutionality of

legislative and executive acts. Furthermore, in anticipation that these arms of the government, which are theoretically separate may in practice, collaborate to foist some sort of oppressive rule on the people, each of these institutions is empowered to prevent the others from acting unilaterally or arbitrarily. This is a complement to the principle of separation of powers which is known as checks and balances as the case may be (Mahajan, 1988).

The system of government based on this principle as we observed elsewhere is called presidential system of government. However, it is not the theoretically relationship posited among the three arms of government that distinguished presidential from other forms of government. Similar division of labour, as we have explained, also characterizes the functional relationship among these arms under the parliamentary type. What really distinguishes presidential from the parliamentary government centres not merely on the constitutionally prescribes, but an actual functional relationship among these institutions in the governance process, a process that leads to delivering the dividends of good governance to the people.

In terms of executive-legislative relations, for example, the difference between the two systems of government is substantial. The hallmark of presidential system of government is the concentration of executive power in one person. Executive power under it is unified and entrusted to a single individual who is usually elected on an electoral slate that is not tied to that of members of the legislature. In other words, the chief executive or president and the member of the legislature are elected separately. The President is both Head of State and Head of Government. This is against the practice in parliamentary systems where executive power is shared between an often unelected Head of State performing essentially ceremonial functions and elected Head of Government who exercises effective political authority under the presidential system. The President exercise both the symbolic and substantive political powers vested in the executive arm by the constitution. For instance, according to the constitution of the United States, a country operating the oldest presidential system of government, which has served as a model for several countries around the world, the president is the sole executive. Unlike the parliamentary system whose executive is collective. Presidential system of government entrust executive power to an individual who is expected to be the chief initiator of policies, manager in- chief who sees to the faithful implementation of all laws, chief spokesman of the entire populace, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the nation's number one citizen and symbol, defender of national interest, foreign policy initiator and negotiator. Though a team of appointees known as the cabinet assist him, it is not a cabinet

in the same sense as that of a parliamentary system (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008, Lipjhart, 1992, Jean & Muller, 1989).

### **The Quest for Good Governance in Africa:**

The African political terrain has witnessed a remarkable change from the 1990's as many regimes in the continent felt the necessity to democratize their political system towards delivering the dividends of good governance for its people. Consequently many African States embarked on the democratization process leading to the termination of military and one party authoritarian rule. There was also the expansion of the democratic space, restored freedoms of assembly, association and expression of various freedoms, as well as competitive reform, legitimizing multi- party political system and competitive elections (Wiseman, 1995). In the course of time, several sit tight military dictators like Eyadema of Togo and Babangida in Nigeria and civilian life-president, Banda in Malawi and Bongo in Gabon were forced to organized democratic elections. These elections not only resulted in the defeat of some incumbent regimes by opposition political parties and a peaceful transfer of political power in Benin, Cape Verde, Mali and Zambia, but also in the overthrown of some of the most notorious and repressive regimes in the continent like the one in Malawi, Liberia, and Togo. Indeed, the 1990's witnessed, as it were the organization and conduct of multi-party democratic elections in many African States resulting in their democratically elected government (Ake, 1996). Democratization has since then continues to date.

Thus, one of the definitions of government by the World Bank states that, government is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. The World Bank has identified three distinct aspects of governance, the reason why we choose the definition and these three are:

1. The form of political regime
2. The process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country economic and social resources for development;
3. The capacity of government to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge function (the World Bank, 1994).

It is along this line that the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan gave one of the definitions of good governance as ensuring respect for human right and the rule of law; strengthening democracy; promoting transparency and capacity in public administration (Annan, 2000). Good governance involves those structures



and processes that support the creation of a participatory, responsive and accountable polity that is good political governance embedded in a competitive, non-discriminatory, yet equitable economy that is good economic governance (Zacher, 1999). This requires the resources contributed by people to be ploughed back to serve their basic human needs, which will in turn expand the opportunities open to them; People must be given the ability to self-organize, that is a good civic governance. Bounded together by such principles as ownership, decency and accountability, the components of good governance are inextricably linked.

It was perhaps in response to the challenge of having good governance in place, in Africa and to debunk the 'ten myths' about democracy in Africa that led to among other factors, the formulation and adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in October 2001 as an African led strategy for poverty reduction/eradication and sustainable growth and development. Its main objective is the consolidation of democracy and economic management through promoting peace and stability, democracy and sound economic management and people-oriented development (NEPAD 2001). A unique feature of NEPAD is the democracy and political governance initiative, where the African states pledged to respect core components of democracy such as political pluralism, as well as open, democratic and periodic elections. The initiative consists of three elements:

- i. A series of commitments by participating countries to create and consolidate basic governance processes and practices
- ii. An undertaking by participating countries to support initiatives that will foster good governance and
- iii. The institutionalization of these commitments by ensuring that the core values of the initiative are abided by (NEPAD 2001).

In order to strengthen the political and administrative machinery of African countries based on the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human right and promotion of the rule of law, NEPAD placed emphasis on five areas for institutional reforms:

- i. Administrative and civil services
- ii. Strengthening parliamentary oversight
- iii. Promoting participatory decision making
- iv. Adopting effective measures to combat corruption and embezzlement and
- v. Undertaking judicial reforms.

One of the high points of the quest for good governance in Africa was the Declaration on Democratization, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, which was adopted by the Summit of African Union in Durban, South Africa in June, 2002. The Declaration is a manifestation of the commitment of African political leaders to democracy and good governance initiative. In the Declaration, Africa Heads of State and Governments agreed to work together in policy and action in pursuit of:

- i. Democracy and good political governance
- ii. Economic and corporate governance
- iii. Socio-economic development and
- iv. African Peer Review Mechanism.

In support of democracy and good governance, the Heads of State and Government committed themselves to the promotion of democracy and its core values in particular, they expressed their determination to enforce:

- i. The rule of law
- ii. The equality of all citizens before the law and the liberty of individuals
- iii. Individuals and collective freedoms, including the constitution
- iv. Equality of opportunity for all
- v. The inalienable right of the individual to participate by means of free, credible and democratic political process in periodically electing their leaders for a fixed term of office and
- vi. Adherence to the separation of power including the protection of the independence of the judiciary and of effective parliament.

They stated their believed in just, honest, transparent, accountable and participating government and probity, which retards economic development and undermines the moral fabric of society.

To fulfill their commitment to these principles, the Heads of State and Governments adopted a plan of action:

- i. To ensure that national constitutions reflect the democratic tenets and provide for good and demonstrable accountable governance.
- ii. To provide political representation and allow all citizens to Participates in political process in a free and fair political environment.
- iii. To enforce strict adherence to the position of the Africa Union on unconstitutional changes of government,

- iv. To establish and strengthen electoral administration and oversight bodies and provide resources that is necessary for the conduct of free, fair and credible election
- v. To reassess and strengthen the continental and sub- regional election monitoring mechanisms and procedures and
- vi. To heighten public awareness of the African Charter on Human and People's Right.  
In support of good governance, Heads of State and Governments agreed to
- i. Adopt clear codes, standards and indicators of good governance at the national, sub-regional and continental levels
- ii. Inaugurate accountable, efficient and effective civil service
- iii. Ensure the effective functioning of parliaments and other democratic practices including parliamentary committees and anti-corruption bodies and
- iv. Ensure the independence of the judicial system to prevent abuse of power and corruption.

Lastly, the Heads of State and Governments agreed to establish an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) on the basis of voluntary association to promote adherence to and fulfillment of the commitments contained in the Declaration (UNECA, 2006). The Summit of African Heads of State and Governments Implementation Committee (HSGIC) adopted the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in March, 2003. Based on agreed values, it is a permanent and voluntary mechanism for the pursuance of standards and practices relating to democracy and political, economic and corporate governance, as well as socio-economic development. This is with the aim of sharing experiences and reinforcing successful best practices. The mechanism is executed in four stages: First, states are required to set up national structures to manage the process. Thereafter, a national commission consisting members of parliament and representatives of civil society carries out a self-evaluation of governance. This will lead to the evolution of a plan of action identifying areas for future intervention and lastly, a team of experts is expected to meet and discuss the country's report with all stakeholders. In short, the mechanism is a way of auditing the Africa democratization process with the aim of supporting countries that are well established on the road to democratic consolidation and encouraging those grappling with problems. According to Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian President, through the mechanism, African leaders are now in a position to peer review, assist, and pressurize one another with the aim of learning the best

practices from one another (NEPAD, 2001). The usefulness of the mechanism was evident when pressure was brought to bear on Sao Tome and Principe, Guinea Bissau and Togo when regimes that were regarded as unconstitutional usurped power.

Thus, the question may be asked, why does governance matter in Africa? The simple answer is that government and system of government put in place matters because it is the vehicle for political and socio-economic development which translates to good governance that is so much desirable in Africa. It is not only about the efficient management and distribution of assets and resources to ensure poverty alleviation; it is also about putting people at the centre of the political and socio-economic development. It is therefore, not surprising that the concept of good governance has emerged to be the single most important issue in securing the political and economic future of Africa. Not only are they at the heart of the challenge facing the African continent today, there is a consensus that, it is by addressing these issues that the continent can resolve the question of economic growth and sustainable economic development (UNDP, 1997). Indeed, securing democracy and good governance is critical to all efforts at generating an African renaissance and the continent's ability to generate a free and prosperous society and to promote social justice, transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs; it must therefore, command the full attention of African and African development partners and the system of government fitting for Africa.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

Looking at the foregoing discourse therefore, one is force to assert that parliamentary system of government may not be good for African countries towards the realization of the much desired good governance. This is so, because of the provision in parliamentary system for the offices of Head of State and Head of Government occupied by two different persons. Even though the functions of these two State officials are often spelt out in the constitution, there could be the possibility of overt or covert conflict of authority, power or personality clashes between the Prime Minister and the Head of State. For instance, it is widely believed that the breakdown of the NPC – NCNC coalition (the former led by the Prime Minister and the later by the President) before the December, 1964 Federal General elections and the formation of the NNA (NPC – NNDP coalition) and UPGA (NCNC – AG coalition) during the election of the year showed signs of disharmony between President and the Prime Minister. This situation might have been avoided if one individual had combined the two offices.

A parliamentary or cabinet system of government as noted elsewhere allows for the fusion of executive and legislative powers of government, thereby making the officials in government an elite group of super powerful politicians who could manipulate the executive and legislative process of government invariably to suit their selfish ends. A situation in which the leader of the party with a majority in the national legislature – the parliament – is chosen as Prime Minister to Head the executive arm of government as well tends to concentrate too much governmental power in one person. Power, it is said corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Another thing is that, the Prime Minister in a cabinet system of government is not directly elected by the people. He becomes Prime Minister by virtue of his leadership of the political party with the majority of seats in the parliament. The consequence is that the electorates vote for political parties and not individuals as such with the result that a Prime Minister – who may not be generally accepted by the people might assume office. Sometimes, there could be sectional or general disaffection with such a Chief Executive.

There is also the issue of emphasis on multi party politics and Party Patronage more than on national politics which sometimes is detrimental to the nation's interest. This often leads to extreme partisanship and even corruption of the party leaders with regard to national goals. During Nigeria's trial at the parliamentary system, government officials were in fact, more of party representatives than government officials. A situation where one's political office, portfolio, conduct and longevity in office are decided solely by one's political party does not augur well for democracy. A government official should endeavor most of the time to think of the nation's interest not necessarily party interest. Over emphasis on party politics bring about coalitions and counter-coalitions which tend to destabilize the government. The multiplicity of parties advocating diverse policies often makes it difficult for any single party to appeal to a wide cross-section of the electorates that can enable it to win a clear cut majority in an election. This situation often forces parties to enter into coalition arrangement which in many cases, collapse due to differences in attitudes and opinion on how the government should be run and for what ends. In Nigeria, the NPC-NCNC, the NPC-NNDP and the NCNC-AG coalition of 1959 were examples that really confirm the political problem associated with multi-party politics, the type found in the parliamentary system. In Italy and Israel today, the emphasis on multi-party politics makes the government of the two states vulnerable at any time (Olisa, Okoli & Nwabufo, 1990, Ayeni-Akeke, 2008).

There is also the provision for official opposition or shadow government, The consequence of this is that some times the institutions of official opposition is used in deliberately destabilizing the existing government or even subverting the nation. The official opposition in Nigeria under the parliamentary system was accused in 1963 of using its position to plan an over throw of the Federal Government (Olisa, Okoli, & Nwabufo, 1990). Thus, parliamentary system of government may not be desirable for the African continent. It is therefore, clear from above that based on the history and nature of the African continent with its diverse ethnic and religious groupings, a presidential system of government is assumed here fit for Africa as the recommendation of this paper. This is first of all good for Africa because of the functions vested in the office of the president, that it is indeed very powerful. This power is reinforce by the relative independence, which the presidency enjoys in its relationship with the legislative arm. Unlike the parliamentary system where the fusion of powers locks the cabinet and legislature together and often compels the former to heed the wishes of the latter, on a pain of censure, the president enjoys great freedom. In the United States for example, the President's term of office is not the same as that of the legislature. In addition, except he is found guilty of an impeachable offence he can not be removed from office for any other reason before his constitutionally permitted time expires. In other words, he remains in office for eight years-two terms of four years each unless he is found guilty of impeachable offence or he loses an election after the first of the two terms to which he is entitled. He enjoys the veto power with which he can over rule legislative opposition and compel it members to agree to his wishes or at least, makes them to reconsider a particular policy. Often, the president is able to win because of the great influence that he wields in the nation. The derives in part, from the fact that he is the only public official who can claim to know and speak for the general interest. A national electorate usually elects the president, directly or otherwise, whereas much smaller electorates at local constituencies elect members of the legislature .even though the president may exercise veto over unwanted legislation, the right of the legislature to control executive actions by refusing to approve funds for implementing them negates this power.

However, the power of the legislature to check the executive is immense. Apart from the fact that it is derived from the constitution, it is reinforce by the freedom which the legislature enjoys vis-à-vis the executive. As both are constituted through separate elections; this means that, there is no connection between either the presidency and the legislative leadership or the party having majority in the legislature. It often happens that the party that is controlling legislative majority is not the one that is controlling the executive. Legislative freedom is also facilitated by the fact that the executive can not coerce or dissolved the legislature. In the same way that the legislature can not control the executive, same also can the judiciary the watchdog of the constitution refrain both organs. The constitution and not the executive or legislature is supreme under a

presidential system. The judiciary which guards the constitution enjoys tremendous influence and powers over the executive and legislative arms. Thus the principle of checks and balances is practiced under the presidential system. The basic features of presidential system of government highlighted here are those of the United States variant. This is because presidential system evolved there and has probably, because of its stability and efficiency, served as a model for virtually all other countries that adopted this system of government. However this model has had to be modified in those other countries for various reasons. In Nigeria, for example where American presidential form was copied almost in totality, some features have had to be modified taking cognizance of the historical and cultural peculiarities of the country. Similarly a close examination of the presidential system as practiced in countries such as Argentina, Mexico and so on will reveal modifications which can be attributed to similar reasons. This means that there is not one single type of presidential system of government. A classification of this type of government will probably reveal a spectrum like distribution with the balance United States model at the centers, a host of more centralized types to the left and more decentralized type such as the semi-presidential semi-parliamentary system developed in France to the right (Ayeni – Akeke, 2008). No wonder therefore, in recommending and ratifying the choice of Presidential System for Nigeria within a federal framework in 1979, members of the Constitution Drafting Committee and the Constituent Assembly were informed by the fact that one of the main handicaps of the parliamentary system of democracy adopted by the country after independence was apparent separation of the function of the Head of the States from that of the Head of Government which actually amounted to a division between real authority and formal authority. This was succinctly expressed in the report of the Constitution Drafting Committee which states that;

*“...the division between real authority and formal authority in the African context is not only meaningless but difficult to maintain in practice...the lesson of African experience shows that no African Head of State has been known to be content with position of a figured head”(Olisa, Okoli & Nwabufo, 1990).*

The presence of a plural executive during the First Republic in Nigeria had therefore, served to underline responsibility, first through the weakened authority of the Prime Minister to enforce collective responsibility and second by making it difficult to determine on whom the blame or punishment for error should fall. The ultimate result was political instability and conflict that was worsened by personality clashes between the Prime Minister and the non-executive President created by the 1963 Republican Constitution of Nigeria. Nigeria thus, adopted a presidential system of government in 1979 where there is direct election of the chief executive, who unlike previous system of government could only be elected often broad based support especially as the

whole country was treated as a single constituency. This direct election of the president gave him an independent right to govern with the people's mandate instead of the situation under the First Republic in Nigeria where the President's right to govern is derived from the legislature a situation that hampered effective government that could not possibly leads to delivering good government to the people.

The above exposition has provided an insight into the structure and working of the presidential system of government as the preferred choice for the achievement of the much quest for good governance in Africa. Though presidentialism may seem not to have worked well for instance in Nigeria at least when it was adopted, the seeming present failure of the presidential system of government in Nigeria is not actually due to any inherent deficiencies in the system but in the unwillingness of the political actors to abide by the tenets of presidential system of government which is believe to be the way out for good governance in Africa as far as the paper is concern.

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