



Legislative turnover trends in Nigeria: Challenges and implications

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Abstract

This paper examines legislative turnover trends in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, focusing on the challenges and implications for democratic governance. It adopts a desk research methodology, which entails the analysis of existing literature, official reports, and electoral data to provide an overview of the factors that influence legislative turnover and its impact on Nigeria's legislative processes. The paper adopts the institutional and principal-agent theories to explore the structural and systemic factors that shape turnover trends, and examine the relationship between legislators and constituents and how accountability mechanisms influence turnover respectively. It finds out that there is a persistent pattern of high legislative turnover in Nigeria's National Assembly, with significant implications for policy continuity, institutional memory, and legislative effectiveness. Key factors contributing to this trend include electoral malpractices, intra-party conflicts, and the monetization of politics, which undermine the stability and professionalism of the legislative body. The analysis underscores the detrimental effects of high legislative turnover, including the erosion of institutional knowledge, disruption of legislative initiatives, and weakened oversight functions. These challenges hinder the National Assembly's capacity to effectively represent constituents and perform its constitutional duties. As a result, the paper recommends a comprehensive electoral reform, enhanced political party structures, and capacity-building initiatives for legislators to mitigate the adverse effects of legislative turnover.

Keywords: Institutional memory, Legislative turnover, Policy discontinuity, Public perception

1. Introduction

Legislative turnover—the rate at which legislators exit and are replaced in parliamentary institutions—has long been a subject of scholarly interest within the field of legislative studies (Murana, Ambali & Bakare, 2017). Across democratic systems, the dynamics of legislative turnover carry significant implications for institutional stability, policy continuity, legislative effectiveness, and democratic consolidation (Onuigbo & Innocent, 2015). While established democracies often exhibit patterns of moderate turnover, reflecting both the benefits of fresh perspectives and the preservation of institutional memory, the phenomenon in emerging democracies like Nigeria presents unique challenges. Akinola and Mosunmola (2023) note that

Nigeria's legislative turnover rates have been consistently high since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999, raising questions about the stability and efficiency of its legislative institutions and their capacity to contribute meaningfully to democratic development.

Extant literature on legislative turnover has focused on various dimensions, including its causes, consequences, and broader implications for democratic governance. Scholars such as Hibbing (1991) and Schlesinger (1966) have explored the dynamics of incumbency, electoral volatility, and career ambition in influencing turnover in mature democracies. These studies highlight that moderate turnover rates can encourage political renewal and accountability while



preserving institutional knowledge crucial for effective lawmaking and oversight.

In Africa, research on legislative turnover remains limited but has gained attention in recent years. Studies by Murana, Ambali and Bakare (2017) and Akinola and Mosunmola (2023) examined legislative behavior and turnover in African legislatures, noting that high turnover often correlates with weak party systems, clientelistic politics, and institutional instability. In Nigeria, specific studies on legislative turnover have emerged, including works by Ojo (2012) and Akande (2017), which examined electoral competitiveness, the role of political godfatherism, and the influence of ethno-religious dynamics on the frequent replacement of legislators.

These studies have provided foundational data on the patterns and causes of legislative turnover in Nigeria but often focus narrowly on electoral processes or the role of individual legislators. For instance, Akinola and Mosunmola (2023) primarily attributed high turnover rates to the dominance of incumbents' patronage networks, while Imuokhome (2019) emphasized the role of political party structures and internal democracy in candidate selection processes. However, these analyses often fall short of integrating a comprehensive understanding of the broader implications of legislative turnover on democratic consolidation and institutional effectiveness in Nigeria.

The global discourse on legislative turnover is marked by ongoing debates regarding the optimal balance between legislative renewal and institutional continuity. On one side, scholars argue that high turnover can inject new energy, ideas, and perspectives into legislative bodies, potentially enhancing representation and responsiveness (Akinola & Mosunmola, 2023). On the other side, critics contend that excessive turnover disrupts institutional learning, undermines policy expertise, and weakens the legislature's capacity to serve as an effective check on

the executive (Akinola & Mosunmola, 2023).

In Nigeria, these debates are further complicated by the country's socio-political dynamics, including ethnic heterogeneity, weak political party structures, electoral malpractice, and the prevalence of patronage politics (Onuigbo & Innocent, 2015). Nigeria's electoral system—based on a first-past-the-post model—combined with volatile party alliances and the lack of robust intra-party democracy, often results in high turnover rates that appear less reflective of democratic accountability and more indicative of systemic instability (Imuokhome, 2019).

Ongoing debates also center on the consequences of Nigeria's high legislative turnover for policy continuity and governance. While some argue that frequent turnover offers an opportunity to replace underperforming legislators and strengthen democratic accountability (Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), 2023), others highlight the detrimental effects on legislative capacity, including reduced policy expertise, weakened oversight functions, and growing influence of the executive over a fragmented legislature (King, 2022).

The role of political parties in mediating legislative turnover presents another focal point in recent debates. While parties are expected to provide institutional stability through candidate selection, ideological coherence, and legislative support, Nigeria's parties have been criticized for their lack of internal democracy and weak organizational structures, leading to unpredictable electoral outcomes and frequent shifts in legislative composition (Saliu & Ifejika, 2016).

Despite the growing body of literature on legislative turnover in Nigeria, significant gaps remain. Most existing studies tend to focus either on the causes of turnover—such as electoral dynamics, party politics, or socio-cultural factors—or on specific



legislative periods without offering a comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of turnover trends across multiple legislative cycles. Indeed, there is a lack of in-depth research that examines how recurring high turnover rates impact the effectiveness of Nigeria's legislature in fulfilling its core democratic functions—namely lawmaking, representation, and oversight. In the same vein, there is limited scholarship on the broader implications of legislative turnover for Nigeria's democratic development, particularly in terms of institutional capacity-building, policy continuity, and the balance of power between the legislature and the executive. While studies such as Bussiness Day (2023) have touched on the weakening of legislative oversight due to inexperienced legislators, there remains a dearth of empirical analysis that connects these findings to broader issues of democratic consolidation and institutional stability. In fact, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of key stakeholders—including policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations—on the challenges posed by high legislative turnover and potential strategies for mitigating its adverse effects. As a result, this paper contributes to the discourse on legislative turnover in Nigeria by analysing its causes, challenges, and implications.

Statement of the Problem

Legislative turnover in Nigeria presents a critical challenge to democratic governance, policy continuity, and institutional stability. According to Bassey and Onuoha (2020), the high turnover rates observed in Nigeria's National Assembly since 1999 have led to the frequent replacement of legislators, disrupting legislative processes and diminishing institutional memory. This issue is compounded by weak party structures, a volatile political environment, and a lack of robust mechanisms to encourage legislative retention, all of which contribute to an unstable legislative

framework. The replacement of lawmakers every election cycle also disrupts the legislative learning curve, leaving a significant number of legislators without sufficient experience to effectively carry out their constitutional functions (Oloruntoba, 2021).

Mainly, scholars attribute the high legislative turnover to various factors. For example, Ezeibe, Okwuosa, and Nwankwo (2022) observed that electoral processes marred by irregularities, including vote buying and judicial annulments, have become a recurring theme, weakening the electorate's ability to retain experienced legislators. In the same vein, Ogundiya (2023) alluded that internal party conflicts and the monetization of political nominations further exacerbate turnover, as political parties often prioritize financial contributions over competence or legislative track records. Consequently, many experienced legislators are unable to secure party tickets, leading to their replacement by less experienced individuals, thus affecting the legislature's overall performance.

The implications of legislative turnover extend beyond individual legislators. At an institutional level, frequent turnover weakens the capacity of the legislature to perform its oversight, representation, and lawmaking functions effectively. As Adekeye and Yusuf (2020) noted, legislative committees, for instance, often lose experienced members, leading to a decline in the quality of deliberations and oversight activities. High turnover also undermines public trust in the legislative institution, as citizens perceive a lack of stability and professionalism within the National Assembly. Against this background, this paper addresses the causes, trends, and impacts of legislative turnover to develop actionable strategies for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.



2. Methodology

The paper utilizes secondary data obtained from a wide range of credible sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy reports, magazines, and reputable internet sources. Key legislative studies and comparative analyses were consulted to contextualize Nigeria's legislative turnover within both domestic and global frameworks. Databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest were instrumental in sourcing scholarly articles, while official reports from Nigeria's National Assembly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and civil society organizations provided critical empirical data.

A purposive sampling approach was employed in selecting sources that specifically address legislative turnover, electoral dynamics, and democratic consolidation. The selection process prioritized literature published within the last five years to ensure the inclusion of recent developments and debates in legislative studies. However, seminal works and foundational texts were also incorporated to provide historical context and theoretical grounding.

The paper employs a thematic analysis approach to interpret the collected data. Thematic analysis allows for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data. Through this method, the paper organizes findings into key themes that address definitions and typologies of legislative turnover, factors influencing turnover, and the broader implications for Nigeria's democratic development.

Thereafter, the findings are presented thematically, highlighting areas of implication for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations. Each theme integrates conceptual discussions with empirical evidence, offering a well-rounded analysis of legislative turnover and its impact on

Nigeria's legislative institutions and democratic stability. The thematic structure also facilitates targeted policy recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the study.

3. Literature Review

Legislative turnover involves various dimensions that shape its understanding and implications. This section explores its conceptual foundations, focusing on three major themes: definitions and typologies of legislative turnover, factors influencing legislative turnover, and implications of legislative turnover.

Definitions and Typologies of Legislative Turnover

Legislative turnover refers to the process by which legislators are replaced within a parliamentary body, typically during elections or through other institutional mechanisms. The concept encompasses both the rate and pattern of changes in legislative membership. Researchers have identified two primary typologies: voluntary and involuntary turnover. According to Carroll and Jenkins (2021), voluntary turnover occurs when legislators choose not to seek re-election or retire from politics, while involuntary turnover arises from electoral defeat, legal disqualifications, or other external factors. These typologies are critical in distinguishing between turnover driven by individual agency and systemic dynamics. In recent years, scholars like Johnson and Smith (2022) have argued that high legislative turnover rates disrupt legislative continuity and weaken institutional capacity. For example, turnover often results in a loss of institutional knowledge and expertise, particularly when experienced legislators exit the assembly. This is evident in developing democracies, where training and capacity-building mechanisms are limited, making the legislature heavily reliant on institutional memory for effective policymaking. Empirical studies confirm these concerns.



Nwagwu and Aina (2020) highlight that institutional memory is crucial for effective lawmaking and oversight functions, and frequent turnover disrupts parliamentary processes. This challenge is further pronounced in African legislatures, where legislative stability enhances policy consistency, as observed in studies in Latin America and Uganda (Jones et al., 2021; Mutibwa, 2020).

Adebayo et al. (2021) also highlight the distinction between legislative churn and stable turnover. Legislative churn refers to frequent, erratic changes in membership within short periods, often driven by electoral volatility or party instability. In contrast, stable turnover reflects a predictable and manageable rate of replacement, fostering a balance between renewal and institutional continuity. Understanding these typologies helps contextualize turnover trends and their implications in Nigeria's political landscape. Empirical studies confirm that African parliaments experience higher turnover rates due to structural deficiencies in the political system (Rakner & van de Walle, 2019).

Indeed, the definition of legislative turnover is not static; it evolves with political contexts and institutional reforms. For instance, in African democracies, the concept is often broadened to include the dynamics of party defections and post-electoral litigation, which significantly affect legislative composition (Oladipo et al., 2020). This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where between 1999 and 2023, the National Assembly witnessed turnover rates averaging 65%, with variations between the Senate and the House of Representatives (Ibeanu & Orji, 2020).

Factors Influencing Legislative Turnover

Legislative turnover is shaped by various factors, ranging from institutional arrangements to sociopolitical dynamics. Expectedly, the electoral system influences legislative turnover. For instance,

proportional representation systems tend to have lower turnover rates compared to majoritarian systems, as the former allows for greater representation of minority groups and political parties (Chukwuma & Ibezim, 2022). This aligns with findings from Dalton and Wattenberg (2020), who note that proportional representation reduces intra-party conflicts and fosters legislative stability. Conversely, majoritarian systems, such as Nigeria's first-past-the-post system, contribute to a winner-takes-all culture, intensifying turnover by marginalising smaller parties and reducing electoral competitiveness.

At the party politics level, internal party dynamics, such as candidate selection processes and party loyalty, significantly affect turnover rates. Scholars have noted that in Nigeria, the dominance of party elites in candidate selection often leads to a lack of internal democracy, resulting in high turnover when incumbents fail to secure party nominations (Eze et al., 2023). This is consistent with empirical findings from Ghana, where competitive party primaries frequently lead to the replacement of incumbents (Osei & Paller, 2021). In addition, party politics is further compounded by the monetization of politics, where financial considerations outweigh merit and performance in candidate selection.

Socioeconomic factors, including the financial burden of electoral campaigns, also influence legislative turnover. In Nigeria, the high cost of running for office discourages many qualified candidates from seeking re-election, leading to a reliance on wealthy individuals rather than experienced legislators (Adeola & Yusuf, 2023). Empirical studies confirm that the monetization of politics remains a significant factor driving legislative turnover in Nigeria, where financial capability often outweighs legislative competence in determining electoral outcomes (Ojo et al., 2022).



Adding another layer is the issue of electoral violence and insecurity. Indeed, Umar and Bello (2022) demonstrated that in regions prone to electoral violence, legislators are less likely to seek re-election due to safety concerns. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where electoral violence remains a persistent challenge, undermining the democratic process and contributing to high turnover rates. Additionally, judicial interventions in post-electoral disputes have exacerbated turnover. In Nigeria, frequent court rulings overturning election results disrupt legislative stability, as they often lead to the replacement of sitting legislators. Ibrahim and Okafor (2023) conclude that judicial interventions in post-electoral disputes reflect broader issues of electoral malpractice and judicial activism, highlighting the need for institutional reforms to ensure electoral integrity and reduce turnover volatility. This is reinforced by Akande (2023), who emphasizes that post-election litigations frequently lead to the annulment of election results, contributing to instability in the legislature.

Implications of Legislative Turnover

Legislative turnover has implications both on the legislature as an institution and the broader democratic system. Notably, institutional memory and legislative professionalism stand out as one of its most significant impacts. According to Johnson and Smith (2022), high turnover rates result in the loss of experienced legislators, weakening the legislature's capacity to perform its constitutional functions effectively. This challenge is particularly acute in developing democracies, where the legislative process relies heavily on the institutional knowledge of long-serving members. Empirical studies confirm that legislative committees, which depend on experienced members, often struggle to maintain their effectiveness due to high turnover (Nwagwu & Aina, 2020).

Legislative turnover also affects policy continuity, as frequent changes in legislative membership disrupt ongoing policy initiatives, delaying implementation and reducing the effectiveness of governance. For instance, in Nigeria, Adebayo et al. (2021) linked high turnover rates to stalled legislative projects and inconsistent oversight of the executive branch. Similarly, Okoye (2021) attributes the failure of several electoral reform bills in the 8th National Assembly to the high turnover of legislators who had championed these reforms.

Chukwuma and Ibezim (2022) highlight the impact of legislative turnover on legislative independence and accountability. As Chukwuma and Ibezim argue, high turnover rates make legislators more susceptible to external influences, including party elites and special interest groups. This reduces the legislature's ability to act as an independent check on executive power, compromising its role as a cornerstone of democratic governance.

The relationship between legislative turnover and public trust is also pronounced. To Eze et al. (2023), high turnover rates can erode public confidence in the legislature, as they are often perceived as a sign of instability and inefficiency. This perception is exacerbated by the frequent replacement of legislators, which disrupts constituency relationships and weakens representation. Finally, Adeola and Yusuf (2023) pointed out that legislative turnover has implications for gender and minority representation. Specifically, high turnover rates disproportionately affect female and minority legislators, who often face greater barriers to entry and re-election. This perpetuates existing inequalities in political representation, as confirmed by studies emphasizing the need for reforms to promote inclusivity (Adebayo, Ojo, & Ibeanu, 2021). To mitigate these challenges, Adebayo et al. (2021) advocate for electoral reforms that enhance



transparency and reduce the influence of money in politics, alongside capacity-building and mentorship programs to improve legislative effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the foundation for understanding the factors influencing legislative turnover in Nigeria and its broader implications for governance and democracy. Two theories are adopted in this paper. They are, Institutional Theory and Principal-Agent Theory. These theories provide the framework to conceptualize the structural and systemic drivers of legislative turnover and the relationships between legislators and the electorate in a representative democracy.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory has its roots in sociology and political science, where it emerged as a framework for understanding the behavior of organizations and actors within formal structures. Early proponents, such as Max Weber, emphasized the role of bureaucracy and rational-legal authority in shaping institutional behavior (Scott, 2020). Over time, the theory evolved to incorporate the role of norms, values, and informal rules alongside formal institutions.

In political science, institutional theory gained prominence in the mid-20th century with the work of scholars such as Douglas North, who highlighted the role of institutions in economic and political development. North (1990) argued that institutions are the "rules of the game," influencing the behavior of individuals and organizations within society. Contemporary developments in the theory focus on the interplay between formal structures, such as electoral systems, and informal practices, such as political patronage (March & Olsen, 2019).

Notably, institutional theory emphasizes the enduring influence of structures and rules in shaping political outcomes as its core strength. Thus, providing a robust framework for understanding how

electoral systems, party dynamics, and legislative procedures contribute to legislative turnover. The theory also highlights the importance of institutional memory and stability in fostering effective governance (Scott, 2020).

However, critics argue that institutional theory overemphasizes structure at the expense of agency, ignoring the role of individual actors in shaping institutional change. Additionally, DiMaggio and Powell (2021) note that its focus on stability and continuity makes it less effective in analyzing periods of rapid political transformation or upheaval.

However, institutional theory is particularly relevant to the study of legislative turnover in Nigeria, where the electoral system, party structures, and legislative processes significantly influence turnover rates. For example, Nigeria's first-past-the-post electoral system fosters intense competition, contributing to high turnover rates as incumbents face significant challenges from both intra-party rivals and opposition candidates (Nwangwu & Oni, 2021). Party structures also play a critical role, with issues such as lack of internal democracy and frequent defections undermining legislative stability.

Institutional theory helps explain how these formal structures, combined with informal practices such as vote-buying and political patronage, create a system where turnover is both frequent and disruptive. It also underscores the importance of institutional reforms, such as strengthening party systems and promoting electoral transparency, in mitigating turnover challenges.

Principal-Agent Theory

The principal-agent theory originates from economics and was first formalized in the 1970s to address issues of delegation and accountability in contractual relationships (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The theory was later adapted to political science to explore the relationship between elected



representatives (agents) and their constituents (principals). At its core, the theory examines how principals delegate authority to agents and the mechanisms used to ensure that agents act in the principal's best interests.

Subsequent developments in the theory have focused on the challenges of information asymmetry and moral hazard, where agents may pursue their interests at the expense of the principals. In the political context, this translates to legislators prioritizing personal or party interests over their constituents' needs (Besley, 2020).

Of note, the principal-agent theory's primary strength lies in its ability to analyze accountability mechanisms in representative democracies. It highlights the importance of electoral processes, party discipline, and public oversight in ensuring that legislators remain responsive to their constituents (Fearon, 2022). The theory also provides a framework for understanding voter behavior, including why constituents may choose to replace underperforming legislators, thereby contributing to legislative turnover.

However, the theory has limitations. Its emphasis on rational choice and utility maximization may oversimplify the complexities of political behavior, particularly in contexts like Nigeria, where cultural and historical factors also play significant roles (Strom, 2021). The theory also assumes that principals (voters) have sufficient information and resources to hold agents accountable, which may not be the case in societies with low levels of political literacy or media access.

Nevertheless, the principal-agent theory provides a framework for understanding how the electorate's dissatisfaction with legislative performance drives turnover in Nigeria. Legislators, as agents, are expected to perform core functions such as lawmaking, oversight, and representation. When constituents perceive that these functions are not being effectively

performed, they may vote for new representatives during elections (Ojo, 2023).

For instance, the high turnover rates in Nigeria's National Assembly have been linked to public dissatisfaction with the handling of constituency projects and the perceived lack of accountability in legislative oversight functions. The theory also explores how factors such as information asymmetry and weak public engagement exacerbate turnover challenges. In many cases, voters may lack the information needed to accurately evaluate legislative performance, leading to decisions based on party affiliations or campaign rhetoric rather than substantive achievements.

Overall, institutional theory and principal-agent theory are complementary in analyzing legislative turnover in Nigeria. Institutional theory provides a macro-level perspective, focusing on the structural and systemic factors that shape turnover trends, such as the electoral system and party dynamics. In contrast, principal-agent theory offers a micro-level perspective, examining the relationship between legislators and constituents and how accountability mechanisms influence turnover. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges and implications of legislative turnover in Nigeria.

For example, institutional theory explains how the lack of internal party democracy and weak electoral laws contribute to high turnover rates, while principal-agent theory highlights the role of voter dissatisfaction and accountability in driving these trends. By integrating these theories, the study captures both the structural and behavioral dimensions of legislative turnover, offering depth into its causes and consequences.

Trends in Legislative Turnover in Nigeria

According to MacEbong (2022), since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in



1999, the National Assembly has experienced significant legislative turnover, with an average of 67% in the Senate and 72% in the House of Representatives. The percentage of legislative turnover between 1999 and 2023 is presented in the Table below.

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S/N	Term	% Turnover	Description
1.	1999-2003	70%	Establishing Democratic Norms
2.	2003-2007	70%	Political Realignment and Stability
3.	2007-2011	70%	Persistent High Turnover
4.	2011-2015	65%	Slight Decline in Turnover Rates
5.	2015-2019	75%	Renewed High Turnover
6.	2019-2023	70%	Continuation of High Turnover

Source: MacEbong (2022)

As shown in Table 1, the 1999 elections marked Nigeria's return to democratic governance. The National Assembly, comprising 109 senators and 360 representatives, was populated by individuals new to legislative functions. The 2003 elections resulted in a turnover of approximately 70% in both chambers, reflecting the electorate's desire for effective representation. The 2003–2007 legislative period was characterized by political realignments. Despite these shifts, the turnover rate remained high, with about 70% of legislators not returning. This period highlighted challenges in legislative continuity and the consolidation of democratic norms.

The 2007 elections continued the trend of high legislative turnover, with approximately 70% of incumbents in both chambers not returning. This persistent high turnover raised concerns about the development of legislative expertise and the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight. The 2011 elections saw a marginal decline in turnover rates, with about 65% of legislators not returning. While still high, this slight reduction suggested a potential move towards greater legislative stability.

The 2015 elections reversed the previous trend, with turnover rates increasing to approximately 75% in both chambers. This surge was attributed to anti-incumbency sentiments and the electorate's demand for change, reflecting the dynamic nature of

Nigeria's political landscape. The 2019 elections maintained the pattern of high legislative turnover, with about 70% of incumbents not returning. This persistent trend underscores ongoing challenges in achieving legislative continuity and the institutionalization of democratic practices.

Challenges of Legislative Turnover in Nigeria

High legislative turnover in Nigeria presents significant challenges that impede the effectiveness of the National Assembly. This section identifies and explains three primary challenges, viz: erosion of institutional memory, policy discontinuity, and weakened legislative oversight.

Erosion of Institutional Memory

Institutional memory is the collective knowledge and experiences accumulated within an organization over time. In legislative bodies, this encompasses understanding procedural rules, historical precedents, and the nuances of policy development. High turnover rates disrupt this continuity, leading to a loss of expertise and experience. New legislators often require time to acclimate to their roles, during which the legislative process may suffer from inefficiencies. Akinola and Mosunmola (2023) highlight that a high turnover rate can adversely affect the legislature's efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly, the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) emphasizes that continuous



training is essential due to the high rate of turnover, which averaged 74.5% over the last three elections.

Expectedly, the erosion of institutional memory also leads to a lack of continuity in legislative initiatives. Experienced legislators are often the custodians of ongoing projects and policies; their departure can result in these initiatives losing momentum or being abandoned altogether. This discontinuity hampers the development of long-term strategies essential for national growth and development. Furthermore, the frequent influx of inexperienced legislators necessitates repeated investment in capacity-building programs, diverting resources that could be utilized for other developmental purposes.

Policy Discontinuity

High legislative turnover often leads to policy discontinuity, as incoming legislators may not share the same priorities or possess the same level of commitment to ongoing projects as their predecessors. This shift can result in the abrupt termination or alteration of policies and programs, undermining their effectiveness and wasting resources. Saliu and Ifejika (2016) note that high turnover rates can lead to policy inconsistencies and a lack of sustained legislative agenda. The World Bank Institute (2018) also emphasizes that policy discontinuity can impede development planning and investment analysis.

Policy discontinuity can also erode public trust in the legislative process. When citizens observe frequent changes in policy direction, it can lead to perceptions of instability and unpredictability in governance. This perception may reduce public engagement and confidence in democratic institutions. Moreover, international investors and development partners may be hesitant to commit resources to a country where policy directions are unstable, potentially

affecting economic growth and development.

Weakened Legislative Oversight

Legislative oversight is crucial for ensuring accountability and transparency within the executive branch. High turnover rates can weaken this function, as inexperienced legislators may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively scrutinize government activities. Nwaegbu (2018) asserts that effective oversight requires a deep understanding of legislative procedures and the sectors being overseen, which is often lacking among new legislators. The National Assembly's role as the heartbeat of democracy is compromised when legislative oversight is weakened due to high turnover (King, 2022).

Weakened legislative oversight can lead to unchecked executive actions, increasing the risk of corruption and mismanagement of public funds. It can also result in the inadequate implementation of laws and policies, as there may be insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place. This deficiency undermines the principles of checks and balances that are fundamental to a functioning democracy. Indeed, the lack of robust oversight diminishes the legislature's credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public, potentially leading to political apathy and disengagement among citizens.

Implications for Nigeria's Democracy

High legislative turnover in Nigeria has significant implications for the nation's democratic processes. This section examines these implications focusing on legislative effectiveness, policy continuity, governance, and public perception. For instance, frequent legislative turnover disrupts the accumulation of institutional knowledge essential for effective law-making. Experienced legislators contribute to a deeper understanding of parliamentary procedures and complex policy issues. High turnover rates impede the development of such expertise, leading to a



less effective legislature. Saliu and Ifejika (2016) argue that high turnover rates hinder legislative performance, as incoming legislators require time to acclimate to their roles, resulting in a loss of continuity and efficiency.

In contrast to Nigeria, established democracies often experience lower legislative turnover rates, allowing for the development of experienced legislators and stable policy environments. The high turnover in Nigeria presents challenges in achieving similar levels of legislative effectiveness and democratic consolidation. As Akinola and Mosunmola (2023) suggest, while moderately low legislative turnover might result in an efficient and effective legislature, very high turnover rates can have adverse effects on the legislature as an institution.

In the same vein, the frequent replacement of legislators can also lead to policy discontinuity and implementation. Legislators often spearhead specific initiatives; their departure may result in the abandonment or alteration of these projects. This inconsistency hampers long-term policy planning and implementation, affecting national development. According to BusinessDay (2023), high turnover rates disrupt ongoing legislative initiatives, leading to policy inconsistencies and setbacks in governance.

Undoubtedly, when policy discontinuity and implementation are the order of the day, effective governance and legislative oversight become impaired. Effective governance relies on the legislature's ability to oversee the executive branch. High turnover rates can weaken this oversight function, as inexperienced legislators may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to hold the executive accountable. This deficiency can lead to unchecked executive actions, undermining democratic checks and balances. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) (2023) notes that high turnover rates in Nigeria's parliament result in a lack

of experienced legislators, weakening legislative oversight and diminishing the quality of governance.

As effective governance and legislative oversight are questionable due to inadequate policy implementation emanating from high legislative turnover, public perception and Trust in democratic institutions begin to be eroded. The public's perception of the legislature is crucial for the legitimacy of democratic institutions. High legislative turnover can erode public trust, as it may be perceived as a sign of instability or inefficiency. Moreover, if turnover is driven by undemocratic practices such as electoral malpractice or lack of internal party democracy, it can lead to public disillusionment with the democratic process. A study by the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (2020) indicates that the high turnover rate of legislators contributes to a negative public perception of the National Assembly, affecting its legitimacy and the public's trust in democratic institutions.

As a consequence, high turnover rates necessitate continuous investment in training new legislators, diverting resources that could be used for other developmental projects. This constant need for capacity building can strain the legislature's budget and affect its overall efficiency. BusinessDay (2023) reports that substantial funds are expended in building the capacity of new legislators due to high turnover rates, impacting the scarce resources available to the legislature.

Strategies for Addressing Legislative Turnover Challenges

Legislative turnover in Nigeria can be addressed by incorporating strategies that emphasise three pivotal areas: electoral reforms, capacity building, and political party reforms. The suggested strategies are further discussed below:

Electoral Reforms

Implementing comprehensive electoral reforms is essential to mitigate high



legislative turnover. For instance, strengthening the legal framework governing elections can enhance transparency and credibility, thereby fostering public trust in the electoral process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the National Assembly have undertaken reforms to address flaws in previous elections, aiming to improve the overall electoral system (International IDEA, 2023). Key reforms include the introduction of technology in voter accreditation and results transmission, which can reduce electoral fraud and ensure that election outcomes accurately reflect the electorate's will. Such measures lead to more stable legislative tenures by ensuring that only genuinely elected representatives assume office.

As Okereke (2024) alludes, providing INEC with financial independence is crucial for the effective implementation of electoral reforms. Indeed, adequate funding enables the commission to execute its mandate without undue influence, thereby promoting free and fair elections (Okereke, 2024). Legislative support for INEC's autonomy can further strengthen the electoral process, contributing to reduced turnover rates by ensuring that elections are conducted impartially.

Capacity Building for Legislators

Enhancing the skills and knowledge of legislators is vital for effective governance and can contribute to reducing legislative turnover. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training workshops and educational programs, equip lawmakers with the necessary tools to perform their duties efficiently. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) has been instrumental in organizing such programs, aiming to improve legislative processes and policy strategies (NILDS, 2024a). By strengthening legislators' capabilities, these initiatives can lead to increased public confidence in

their representatives, potentially resulting in longer tenures.

Moreover, sustained capacity development can address challenges within the legislature by promoting informed decision-making and effective governance. Professor Abubakar O. Sulaiman emphasizes that continuous training is essential for legislators to adapt to evolving democratic demands (NILDS, 2024b). Such efforts enhance legislative performance, thereby reducing the likelihood of high turnover rates.

Political Party Reforms

Reforming political parties is crucial to addressing legislative turnover. Internal democracy within parties ensures that candidate selection processes are transparent and merit-based, reducing the incidence of imposition of candidates and promoting the emergence of competent legislators. Strengthening party structures and promoting internal democracy can lead to the selection of candidates who are more likely to gain public support and retain their legislative seats.

Furthermore, addressing issues of elite clientelism within parties is essential. Studies indicate that clientelistic practices weaken party structures and contribute to legislative turnover (Demarest, 2021). Implementing reforms that promote transparency and accountability within parties mitigates these challenges, leading to more stable legislative tenures.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

High legislative turnover in Nigeria poses significant challenges to the effectiveness and stability of its democratic institutions. The frequent replacement of legislators disrupts the continuity of legislative processes, hampers the accumulation of institutional knowledge, and undermines the development of robust policy frameworks. This instability results in inconsistent policy-making and a lack of long-term strategic planning, which are detrimental to national development.



Several factors contribute to this high turnover, including internal party dynamics, electoral malpractices, and the influence of state governors in the selection process. These issues erode public trust in the legislative process and impede the legislature's ability to effectively represent the electorate's interests. Moreover, the lack of experienced legislators results in a dependence on external experts and aides, which can compromise the quality and independence of legislative decisions.

Therefore, approaches that include electoral reforms, capacity building, and the promotion of internal democracy within political parties are needed to address these challenges. Accordingly, the paper recommends as follows:

- 1) **Implement Electoral Reforms:** Revise electoral laws to ensure transparency and fairness in the electoral process, reducing undue influence and promoting merit-based selection of candidates.
- 2) **Promote Internal Party Democracy:** Encourage political parties to adopt democratic practices in candidate selection to ensure that competent and popular candidates emerge.
- 3) **Enhance Legislative Capacity Building:** Invest in continuous training programmes for legislators to improve their legislative skills and policy-making capabilities.
- 4) **Strengthen Legislative Independence:** Implement measures to protect the legislature from executive interference, ensuring that legislators can perform their duties without undue pressure.
- 5) **Encourage Constituency Engagement:** Promote regular interaction between legislators and their constituents to ensure that legislative activities reflect the electorate's needs and preferences.
- 6) **Establish Mentorship Programmes:** Create mentorship initiatives where experienced legislators can guide

newcomers, facilitating knowledge transfer and continuity.

7) **Monitor and Evaluate Legislative Performance:** Develop mechanisms to assess legislators' performance, providing feedback that can inform future improvements.

8) **Promote Civic Education:** Educate the public on the importance of legislative stability and the impact of their electoral choices on governance.

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