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An Expository Analysis of the Nature and Essence of Constituencies in Contemporary Democratic Practices

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Abstract

Legislative governance in process illuminates symbolic relevance of constituency. This discourse in ontological sense reexamined concept and essence of constituency as observed across democracies. In a qualitative methodological perspective, the data of this discourse were collected through secondary sources (text, articles, documentary reports) and content-analyzed to reveal that constituencies reflect in electoral and representative significance showing models in mainstreaming public interests in legislative processes. In addition, the discourse acknowledged the import of grassroots constituencies to further reveal that there are currently 8,809 electoral wards represented by 419 and 355 local legislative councils respectively in North and South regions of Nigerian federation. The discourse concluded that constituency in its classifications convey a sense of "identity and voice" to assess primacy, scale and impact of legislative governance to popular and minority expectations.

Keywords: Constituency, Democracy, Legislative Governance and Representative Government.

1. Introduction

Democracy in its forms and practice across time and space remain popular preferences on how state power should be used in public interest. The import of democratic government and process resonate with *the people* to illuminate essence of liberty and popular mandate. Modern political governance process thrives in *voice and response* as a representative government to accentuate the essence of public expectations in policies and development. Further indication in the drive of a representative government underlined the imperatives of legislative institution and process in constant interface with *the people* in expectations, identity persuasions and communities delineated for election and representation (constituents and constituency).

Citizens of every democratic state are found and identified in constituencies for partisan and governance exigencies. Constituency or constituencies provide avenue for contact between candidates, political parties, election practitioners, legislators and the people. In this vein, constituencies therefore represent the cradle for mobilization and participation in election and government processes. In other words, the study of constituency in its formations and value is expedient to advance *the science of the people* from the lens of how popular choices and expectations influenced election and governance outcomes. In this sense, the study of constituency is critical to political development in index of liberty and participation as hallmarks of democratic and democratizing states. From this background, this discourse reexamines conceptualizations of constituency and its rationale in modern states and democracies for further insights. In this vein, this study is streamlined in this introduction, explication in conceptual and empirical insights, essence of constituency in representative democracy and conclusion.

2. Explication in Conceptual and Empirical Insights

Observably, the concept of constituency in the literature of political science appears to be consensual in scholarly interpretations as an 'electoral demographic area' (Constituency Handbook for Elected Representatives, 2021; Oni, et al, 2021; Bishin, 2000; Arnold 1990) but nuanced in practice. In a similar

sense, Pitkin (1967) conceived constituency as a 'complex concept'. However, from a broad insight, constituency is defined as an electoral unit where citizen's vote is counted for the purpose of electing a political representative (Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). In addition to this definition, constituency is an electoral district area that vote to elect representative or representatives to serve in government (Ayo 2017). From the indication of Awofeso and Irabor's, and Ayo's conceptual inclinations, constituency serve election purposes in voters' advocacy and mobilization, voters' awareness towards polls and voters' preferences between candidates and political parties for legislative seats in government. However, constituencies exist beyond electoral imperatives to find currency in representation.

In this perspective, constituency is also defined as a community or an area represented by an officeholder. The office holder representing the constituency is usually elected by the constituents to National or State Assembly (Atairet, et al, 2021). In same vein, Benjamin (2014) opined that constituency is an electoral district/area/section that had been divided for elections from which the legislative members are elected to serve in a parliament. Also, Madubuegwu (2010) viewed constituency as an electoral geographical unit which comprises people and towns represented in parliament of a national or provincial government. From Atairet, et al's, Benjamin's and Madubuegwu's, constituency also served purpose of representation in legislator-constituents' relations, legislator's motions, bills and debates in the parliament for welfare and security.

However, the definitions of constituency are not only limited to electoral geography (district/area) represented in parliament but as a social reality that find relevance in governance process and outcomes. In governance process, constituency is also defined as people identified in peculiar plights and expectations represented in legislative organ of government. In other words, constituencies reflect in identity of peculiar interests and opinions *finding voice* in legislative advocacy for policy. In this idea, constituency is not limited to geographical area/district but extends to *shared identity and interest* that seek for government indulgence in *affinity of anxieties and expectations* for policy, impact and feedback.

Most importantly, every constituency is made up of people known as *constituents*. The Report of United Nations Development Programme (2015) embellished the following category of constituents in constituency as expressed below: (a) The general public (b) The voters (c) The voters who are members of political parties (d) Organizations in cultural, religious, economic and social identities. The constituents at level of individuals and collectives elect and indulge the representative/representatives on exigencies and aspirations for welfare and development. Furthermore, classifications/types of constituencies emerge in credence to *purpose*. For instance, constituencies serving election purpose is broadly classified as Single-Member and Multi-Member seen in practice across electoral democracies from Europe to other parts of the world. In a Single-Member Constituency, the voters elect a candidate (among other competing candidates) to serve as a representative in the parliament. It therefore implied that each constituency (regardless of size in communities and population) is allotted "a seat" in the legislature. In a Multi-Member Constituency, the voters elect two or more than two candidates to serve as representatives in the parliament. It implied that two or more than two seats are allotted as legislative seats for a constituency. From these electoral-classified constituencies, Madubuegwu (2010) revealed import and limitations to indicate that managed cost in resources and logistics, equity in allocation of parliamentary seats, suitable for homogeneous nationality, and, mutuality and fraternity in legislator-constituent's relation while adversely delineation exercises are often vulnerable to abuse for gerrymandering to conflict of primordial interests in constituency representation and its susceptibility to election infractions are often witnessed in Single-Member Constituency. For Multi-Member Constituency, its essence resonate with enhanced and inclusive representation, multi-party competition to advance liberal democracy, effective legislative governance to suitable model to heterogeneous population while adversely limited in lack of mutuality in the relation among representatives, expectations of the constituents may not be effectively

communicated and represented to desperation and election violence as candidates that emerge may not reflect popular votes (Madubuegwu, 2010). To add, these electoral constituencies in their respective classifications have over the years experimented different systems/models of determining poll results through First-Past-the Post/Simple Plurality System/Simple Majority System, Absolute Majority System, Alternative Voting System, Single-Transferable Vote to Proportional Representation (Amucheazi, 2009 and Madubuegwu, 2010).

Subsequently, these constituencies beside its electoral purpose are represented in the parliament as earlier indicated. From this indication, allocation of legislative seats reveals how countries across the world proportionate representation to serve citizens' expectations. In this vein, Report of European Commission for Democracy (2018) documents that in United Kingdom there are 650 parliamentary seats in the House of Commons (allocated in 533 for England, 59 for Scotland, 40 for Wales and 18 for Northern Ireland). It is also pertinent to note that the parliamentarians were elected to represent 650 single-member constituencies. In United States, it is a mixed system of constituency representation where two senators were elected from multi-member constituencies to represent each state while at House of Representatives, 435 lawmakers were elected to represent single-member constituencies. Furthermore, Portugal practised Multi-Member Constituency Model as Austria's 183 legislative seats in National Council are occupied by lawmakers who were elected from multi-member constituencies. Also, the legislative seats in Federal Senate and Chamber of Deputies in Brazil are occupied by parliamentarians who were elected from multi-member constituencies.

Also, there is National Constituency model practised in single-member and multi-member constituencies for purpose of representations. National Constituency otherwise known as nationwide constituency is non-geographical designed for enhanced consciousness of national interest in legislative governance. For more illustration, List-Party electoral system is often adopted to differentiate votes/mandates polled by political parties in nationwide constituency election as Proportional Representation electoral system is used to allocate legislative seats for the elected lawmakers who represent and speak on behalf of the nation as a "single constituency". In practice, a national parliament of 490 legislative seats may decide to reserve 167 seats which represent 34 percent (by approximation) for national or nationwide constituency. From this process, three competing political parties polled the following votes in contest for the 167 reserved nationwide constituency-legislative seats:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. White Party | 435, 000 votes |
| 2. Yellow Party | 630,000 votes |
| 3. Blue Party | 195,000 votes |
| Total | 1,260,000 votes. |

From the practice of Proportional Representation electoral model (that advances the ratio between secured votes and seats) elected representatives of White Party will occupy 58 legislative seats (34.73 percent) as representatives of Yellow Party will serve in 83 legislative seats (49.70 percent) and candidates of Blue Party elected to represent in 26 legislative seats (15.57 percent) designated for nationwide constituency or single-constituency of a nation or nation-state.

In addition, it is also pertinent to note that constituencies designated as National Constituency is practiced in models of Single-Member and Multi-Member Constituencies. Comparative Report on Constituency Delineation and Seat Allocation (2017) revealed that in Andorra (a small country in Southwest Europe sharing close border with France and Spain) practiced 14-seat nationwide constituency on a ratio of 7 constituencies with 2 legislative seats in Multi-Member Constituency Model. Also, Georgia (transcontinental country in Caucasus region) has nationwide constituency with 77 seats and 73 single-member constituencies while Hungary (a central

European country) has 106 parliamentarians elected from single-member constituencies with a Nationwide Constituency of 93 legislative seats as Morocco (in Maghreb) has nationwide constituency of 90 seats with 92 legislative seats serving multi-member constituencies. Interestingly, Russian Federation divided its 450 seats in State Duma (lower legislative chamber of its bicameral national parliament) between nationwide constituency of 225 legislative seats and 225 lawmakers elected from single-member constituencies.

Again, there is also Special Constituency model practised in Single-Member and Multi-Member Constituencies for purpose of representation. Special Constituency is defined as people or an area of peculiarity with reference to status and identity represented in government through legislative advocacy. In other words, Special Constituency is a reference to people with peculiar and identifiable status, plight, interest and expectation seeking for *voice and recognition* in legislative governance. The representation of special constituency is classified as *Resemblance Representation*. For instance, some countries that practice representative democracy designate some national legislative seats for special purpose to advocate and promote interests of women, physically challenged persons, virtually impaired children, Diaspora voters, minority groups, etc. Similarly, Comparative Report on Constituency Delineation and Seat Allocation (2017) also revealed that Algeria has special constituencies for voters living abroad. The country has consular constituencies for voters abroad as some special legislative seats are allotted to the Diasporas as provided in the National Electoral Act. In same trend, France and Portugal respectively reserved special legislative seats for Diaspora voters. In addition, Special Constituency model also exist for the interests of minorities like in Croatia. In Demark, special legislative seats are reserved for Faroe Islands and Greenland while in Finland, Aland Islands is designated as a special constituency.

Most importantly, special constituencies in some countries are entitled to a non-voting MP (Members of the Parliament) as observed in the United States House of Representative though not seen in the Senate (Report of European Commission for Democracy, 2018). In explicit sense, the lawmakers who occupy special legislative seats in United States' House of Representatives for special constituencies are also known as non-voting members designated as *Delegates* or *Resident Commissioners*. Currently, there are six special legislative seats occupied by non-voting MPs representing US Virgin Islands, district of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Island designated as special constituencies. Constituencies are delineated and mapped to lend characteristic indicators to its topography and population which are significant to election practitioners and lawmakers. Basically, constituencies in its forms across countries underscored the pertinence of democratic value and process in legislative governance. In other words, its essence illuminates in liberal democracy.

3. The Essence of Constituency in Representative Democracy

Emphatically, election and legislative practice are the bedrocks of representative democracy in political process and governance. A representative democracy is a kind of democracy that encourages existence of a government that represent public interests and political process that enable people to participate in governance. The relevance of constituency in representative democracy reflects under the following: (a) Constituency in representative democracy builds orientation and attitude of partisanship for national development. In a liberal party politics, the constituents are mobilized to participate in the political process as individuals and collectives. (b) Constituency in representative democracy provide avenue for civic awareness among the constituents. Mobilized constituents are enlightened to demand for legislative accountability. (c) Constituency in representative democracy reinforces social contract of purpose and obligation between people and government. It bridges the gap between government and people through legislator-constituents' relations. (d) Constituency in representative democracy reveals national plights and expectations expedient in governance. Constituencies in national and special interests emanate from articulated needs and aspirations of people in their peculiarities and challenges across the length and breadth of a nation or nation-state. (e) Constituency in representative democracy

builds values, skills and competencies of persons who aspire for public service in politics and governance. It therefore represents the foundation of exposure and training for persons and collectives passionate for public interest and service.

Nigeria is a democratizing polity. Democratic attitude is nonexistent as institutions grapple in crisis of identity and purpose while the process remains chaotic in recessive economy and social disarticulation. However, there are constituencies in Single-Member Districts in Nigeria represented at levels of local, state and national parliaments. Beside the National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives) and 36 State Assemblies, there are 774 local legislative councils made of elected councilors (municipal lawmakers) representing electoral wards designated as grassroots constituencies. Below is the Table of statistics of electoral wards and local government areas across 36 states and FCT in Nigeria.

TABLE 3.1: GEO-POLITICAL ZONES, STATES & FCT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS AND ELECTORAL WARDS IN NIGERIA

Geo-Political Zone	State	Statistics of Local Government Areas and Electoral Wards	
		Local Government Area	Electoral of Wards
North-Central	Benue	23	276
	FCT	6	62
	Kogi	21	239
	Kwara	16	193
	Nassarawa	13	147
	Niger	25	274
	Plateau	17	207
	Total	121	1,398
North-East	Adamawa	21	226
	Bauchi	20	212
	Borno	27	312
	Gombe	11	114
	Taraba	16	168
	Yobe	17	178
	Total	112	1,210
North-West	Jigawa	27	287
	Kaduna	23	255
	Kano	44	484
	Katsina	34	361
	Kebbi	21	225
	Sokoto	23	244
	Zamfara	14	147
Total	186	2,003	
South-South	Akwa Ibom	31	329
	Bayelsa	8	105
	Cross River	18	193
	Delta	25	270
	Edo	18	192
	Rivers	23	319
Total	123	1,408	
South East	Abia	17	184
	Anambra	21	326
	Ebonyi	13	171
	Enugu	17	260
	Imo	27	305
Total	95	1,246	
South West	Ekiti	16	177
	Lagos	20	245
	Ogun	20	236

	Ondo	18	203
	Osun	30	332
	Oyo	33	351
	Total	137	1,544
Grand Total	36 States and FCT	774	8,809

Source: Adapted from Report of Federal Republic of Nigeria (2024: 183) and organized in Table.

From the index of Table 3.1. North-West has the highest number of local government areas in 186 and 2,003 electoral wards followed by South-West with 137 municipal councils and 1,544 grassroots constituencies in local legislative governance. The least is South-East in 95 local government areas and 1,246 electoral wards followed by North-East in 112 local government areas and 1,210 grassroots constituencies. Further indication showed that there are 419 local government areas and 4,611 electoral wards in the North while there are 355 local administrative councils and 4,198 grassroots constituencies in the South of Nigerian Federation.

In the North-Central, Niger state has the highest number of local government areas in 25 but marginally in electoral wards of 274 as Benue has 23 local government areas and remarkably high in electoral wards of 276 while the FCT has the least number in 6 area councils and 62 electoral wards. In the North-East, Borno state has the highest number of local government areas in 27 and electoral wards of 312 followed by Adamawa state with 21 local government areas and 226 electoral wards as Gombe has the least number of local government areas in 11 and 114 electoral wards. In the North-West, Kano has the highest in 44 local government areas and 484 electoral wards followed by Katsina in 34 local government areas and 361 electoral wards while Zamfara state has the least in 14 local government areas and 147 electoral wards. In the South-South, Awka Ibom has the highest number of local government areas in 31 and 329 electoral wards followed by Delta in 25 local government areas and 270 electoral wards while Bayelsa is least in 8 local government areas and 105 electoral wards. In the South-East, Imo state has the highest number of local government areas in 27 and marginally 305 electoral wards as Anambra state have 21 local government areas and highest electoral wards in 326 while Ebonyi state is the least with 13 local government areas and 171 electoral wards. In the South-West, Oyo state has 33 local government areas as highest and 351 electoral wards followed by Osun with 30 local government areas and 332 electoral wards while Ekiti is the least in 16 local government areas and 177 electoral wards. Aggregately, there are 774 local government areas and 8,809 electoral wards across states and FCT in Nigerian federation.

4. Conclusion

Constituency is symbolic to representative democracy and government. Democratic states design and aggregate its population in units of identification and representation (constituencies) to effectively mainstream expectations in governance and public policy. Hence, elections and parliaments facilitate and bolster value of constituencies in democracies. The discourse begins with introductory background that established rationale to reexamine constituency in symbols and substance to democratic process. Subsequently, the discourse conceptualized and explicate in illustrative sense how constituencies are represented across countries and established its nexus with representative democracy. The discourse concluded that constituency beyond geographical location represent a sense of *identity and voice* seeking for audience in government. In other words, constituency representation is critical to assess the latitude of legislative governance in popular and minority expectations.

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