



STATE ASSEMBLIES, LEGISLATIVE CRISES AND LEADERSHIP REMOVAL IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since Nigeria returned to democratic system in 1999, under the presidential and federal constitution, an average of about two state assembly speakers have been removed per year. This study examines the reasons for the removals using secondary data generated from documentary evidence and online archives. The data analysed using the qualitative method, namely, explanatory and descriptive methods. The study covers forty-nine cases in 32 states of the federation and established forty-four cases of removals. The study argues that allegation of corruption and authoritarian leadership rank first and second most important triggers of the removals. Other triggers include administrative incompetence, executive instigated removal and the subordination of the legislature to the executive.

Key words: Nigeria, state assemblies, state legislatures, speakers, legislative crisis, state governors, removal of speakers, impeachment, leadership crisis, legislature

Introduction

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 under a federal and presidential constitution. The provisions on the federal arrangement created a federal government, thirty-six constituent states and seven hundred and seventy-four local governments under the fourth republic. The constitution divided the most important political powers into two under the exclusive list and the concurrent list. The federal government is conferred with an exclusive power over items listed in the exclusive list. On the other hand, the concurrent list contains items over which the state shared power with the federal government. Although the states shared powers with the federal on the items listed under the concurrent list, the federal government enjoys overriding powers. Consequently, under the vertical power sharing arrangement of the federation, any law made by the national assembly on any matter or item listed in the concurrent list supersedes any legislation that either emerged before or after it from the states.

Horizontally, the presidential constitution created three distinct organs of government; namely, executive, legislature and judiciary, at the national level. Each of the organs has distinct personnel and separate functions. Furthermore, the procedures for electing or appointing people into each body as well as how to remove any personnel of each organ is well provided for by the 1999 constitution in operation in Nigeria (Fashagba, 2009). The constitution has been altered twice. Considering that Nigeria operates the federal arrangement, the three organs operating at the national level are replicated at the state level. Thus, each state has the executive, legislative and judicial organs, performing similar responsibilities and functions performed by the federal institutions.

For the first time, democracy in Nigeria has been operated continuously for 26 years. This is unprecedented, as the previous two republics collapsed between four and six years. Under the current fourth republic, politicians have put the constitution to test and on different occasions undermined it (Fashagba, 2010). To be sure, until recently, at the federal level, executive-legislature relations were frequently acrimonious, due to the overbearing attitude of the executive and the arm twisting approach and corrupt tendency of the legislature (Baba, 2019). This had led to some threat of impeachment against the president between 1999 and 2007 (Fashagba, 2009). Indeed, despite the stringent conditions provided in the constitution for the impeachment of a governor, six governors including those of Ekiti, Anambra, Bayelsa, Plateau, Oyo and Adamawa, and fifteen deputy governors were impeached between 1999 and 2025, using sometimes the most unconstitutional procedures and arbitrary method (Fagbadebo, 2020, Business Day, April 9, 2024).

It suffices to note that three of the impeached governors, namely, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State, Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State and Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo State, were re-instated, following the nullification of their impeachment by the Supreme Court. Most of the impeachments of the state governors took place under perceived federal government bullying despite the level of protection in-built into the 1999 constitution (as amended) to protect the executive against legislative rascality, harassment or persecution. The issue of impeachment of state governors or their deputies has not been directed entirely at the executive by the legislature. To be sure, the legislators have often weaponised the instrument of removal against their leaders, who enjoyed far less protection against such move than the state governors. By this, although the procedure for the impeachment of a governor is very complex, the legislators often disregard it. The removal of the speaker or any principal officers of a state house of assembly requires a mere legislative motion to trigger it. Thus, the instrument of removal is used very frequently by the state legislators as a political battle tool within their assemblies. The legislators have utilised the tool in such a reckless manner in certain instances that makes one to think that the

legislators operate under a constitution that is different from the amended 1999 constitution. Indeed, the legislature, as a central institution of representative democracy, both at the national and state levels, has been characterised by internal crisis since 1999 (Moheeb, 2019; Omotoso & Oladeji, 2019). Most of the internal legislative crises have resulted in the removal of the leaders, both at national and the state levels. Thus, the national assembly experienced high leadership turnover between 1999 and 2011 (Fashagba & Nwankwor, 2020). The removal of legislative leadership has exhibited a contagious character evidenced by the spread of the epidemic of leadership crisis in the state assemblies in Nigeria. At the state level, the removal of legislative leaders has occurred very frequently and across the various geopolitical zones since the fourth republic took off in 1999. Although in recent times, some level of stability has been seen in the legislative leadership of the two chambers of the national assembly, the state assemblies with their unicameral system have always been in the news.

A few writers have written or focused on the reasons behind the penchant for removal of state assembly speakers or other principal officers. Muheeb (2023) identified overbearing tendencies, financial misconduct, technical incompetence and abuse of office as the reasons behind the impeachment during the period between 1999 and 2015. In his article, Olasupo (2014) argues that impeachment of legislative leadership is often at the prompt of state governors and the party leaders. Shehu (2025), a social commentator, human rights advocate and a former Senator (2015-2019), reacting to the impeachment of the Speaker (later re-instated) of the Lagos State House of Assembly in January 2025, after holding the office for over nine years and being the longest serving Speaker of a state assembly in Nigeria, mentioned five reasons why Speakers are impeached or removed. These, according to him, include: when there is a strong suspicion that the speaker is plotting impeachment (against the governor); when the speaker is becoming too independent and resist taking orders from the governor; when the speaker is not 'taking good care' of members and leaving them hungry; when the speaker is deliberately delaying or obstructing the passage of Governor's interested Bills; and when the speaker is strongly accused of colluding with enemies of the governor. Similarly, Oderemi (2025) identified rivalry between the executive and the legislature, alleged infractions by the house leadership, supremacy contest among diverse tendencies in a ruling party controlling legislative majority and attempt to achieve a delicate balance between the ruling and opposition parties, and accusation of favouritism against the speaker.

Noticeably, some of the identified reasons by scholars overlap but quite a number are different. Using the above extant works as a point of departure, this study focuses on the empirical examination and explanation of the frequent leadership crises and removal in the Nigeria state legislatures. This is necessary because, most frequently, the legislatures apply their constitutional powers to frivolous issues to activate the impeachment clause (Agbaje & Adisa, 1985). However, while Agbaje and Adisa focused on the abuse of power in the relationship between the legislature and the executive in the second republic, under the fourth republic, the power has been activated very frequently to remove assembly leadership. Indeed, this prompted the conference of Speakers of state legislatures to jointly demand for the amendment of the constitutional clause on the removal of Speaker of state legislature during the constitutional amendment hearing of 2021 (Ogunyemi, 2021). This was intended to shield the office from the incessant harassment by members and state governors to restore some stability into the office (Premium Time, June, 2021).

Although the phenomenon has reached a crisis level, it has received a negligible priority among scholars (Richman, 2010). Yet, no systematic and empirical study of the phenomenon has been done. Although Nigeria operates the presidential system with the democratic institutions at the

national level replicated at the state level, the states' unique characters are likely to make them difficult to use the development at the national level as a benchmark to explain occurrence at the state level (Squire & Hamm, 2005). To be sure, the federal legislature is a bicameral system, while the states operate the unicameral assembly. Furthermore, no state has a separate constitution as both the federal and the state derived their powers from the same constitution with the federal having superior power in some key areas. The national legislature draws members from highly diversified and complex communities. Because of the high level of diversity among groups in the national assembly, different groups could exercise some degree of veto to protect or remove legislative leadership (LeVan, 2021). Conversely, in most state assemblies, members are very few, belong to the same ethnic group and are not too diverse. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the rationale for the frequent removal of legislative leadership in the Nigerian states assemblies from 1999 to 2025. By so doing, a coherent and systematic explanation of the drivers of the emerging feature characterised by intra-chamber conflict, using data generated from 32 out of the 36 states of Nigeria is developed. This will enable the researchers to offer some insights into understanding the key triggers of leadership crisis and internal acrimony and the likely outcome. In the 32 states, and the legislative crises for which records are available, the speakers have been removed in most cases (forty three cases of removal). Secondly, out of this, seven deputy speakers were removed alongside the speakers. Thirdly, there were unsuccessful threats of removal against the speakers of Osun and Sokoto states. In Sokoto State, the deputy majority leader that initiated the removal of the Speaker was impeached in 2017. The removal of a State Assembly Speaker is a constitutional matter in Nigeria under the amended 1999 constitution, Chapter 5, Part 2, Section 92. It provides that:

There shall be a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker of a House of Assembly who shall be elected by the members of the House from among themselves

The Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly shall vacate his office-

- a. If he ceases to be a member of the House of Assembly otherwise than by reason of the dissolution of the House,
- b. When the House first sits after any dissolution of House: or
- c. If he is removed from office by a resolution of House of Assembly by the votes of not less than two-thirds majority of the members of the House'.

Thus, to interrogate legislative crisis in the state assemblies in Nigeria, data is generated from secondary sources; namely online archives and libraries. The data is analysed using qualitative and content analysis. This article is divided into four sections: the next section focuses on literature review.

Literature review: Legislative crisis

Scholars of legislative studies are increasingly becoming familiar with the phenomenon of impeachment or removal or resignation of the leadership of an executive arm of government across both the parliamentary and presidential systems in the developed and recently in new democracies. However, the impeachment of a speaker of a parliamentary presidential system appears very rare and poorly documented resulting in the paucity of studies on legislative leadership removal or impeachment. Indeed, the constitution of the United States, perhaps, not envisaging such an occurrence, does not have any specific provisions on the impeachment of the speaker of the congress (Constitution Annotated, Analysis and Interpretation of the US

Constitution, Article/Section 2 Clause 5.3). Although there are no specific provisions on the impeachment speakers of legislature, impeachment proceeding had been activated against a member of the American Senate who was impeached in the past. This suggests that in practice, while it is an exception rather than the rule, since the congress and Senate have the power to initiate impeachment proceeding, a speaker could be impeached if and when conditions for such actions make it inevitable. Yet, while intra-chamber tension between the majority and opposition parties is very common in both the national and state congresses in the United States, sometimes operating under a divided government, the resort to the discretionary activation of power of impeachment is rarely invoked to get rid of legislative leaders. In a rare show of intra-party bitter ideological and factional struggle, eight democrats joined their highly conservative Republicans to remove a speaker (a member of Republican) of congress in 2023 (Enten, 2023). At the state level in the United States, the speakers appear to wield more power than at the national level. As Richman (2010) avers, no speaker of congress has exercised such an enormous power wielded by Joseph Gurney Cannon, fondly referred to as 'Czar Cannon' in modern congress. Cannon was speaker between 1903 and 1911, a position he combined with the chair of the rules committee of the house. Combining these key legislative offices gave Cannon enormous power and control over legislative agenda and legislative proceeding (Britannica n.d.). No speaker of congress in modern time has wielded such an enormous power. Indeed, house speakers at the state level appear to wield more power than their counterpart at the national level in modern time. Yet, resorting to impeachment is very rare despite the intra-chamber tension that often characterise majority-minority relations in the predominantly bicameral legislatures of the states in United States. For instance, although the governor of Texas had an issue with the Speaker of the state House of Representatives over the 2023 impeachment of the state Attorney General, the governor did not instigate members to impeach the speaker. Rather, the speaker lost the backing of the state governor and was pressured not to re-contest the speakership position in January 2025 after the inauguration of a new assembly. Very importantly, the speaker was able to finish his term in December 2024 (Lathan, 2024).

This is in contrast with the experience of a new democracy like Nigeria, a country with a history of epileptic democracy. Since 1999 when the fourth republic took off, state legislative leadership change has occurred very frequently and has become an emerging feature of the republic. To be sure, while the presidential system was adopted under the amended 1999 constitution, threat, forced-resignation and removal of legislative leadership have become the norm rather than an exception, especially in the states (Fashagba & Nwankwo, 2020). In Nigeria, the legislature and the executive are usually controlled by the same party, yet this has occurred very frequently in majority of the 36 states. Before 2007, leadership instability was a major feature of the national assembly. At the state level, legislative crisis resulting in leadership removal has remained unabated, fitting into the postulation of Krehbiel (1998) who contends that 'Gridlock is in fact the order of the day, occurring even when the same party controls the legislative and executive branches' due largely to the fact that most of the states in which impeachment have taken place have both executive and legislature controlled by the same party. Although Krehbiel focused on executive-legislature relations, it is also relevant to the state assembly where intra-party tension occurs very frequently, despite the fact that most members belong to the same party. In other words, just as inter-party tension is a feature of a representative democracy, intra-party altercation as well as conflict among members of the majority and opposition parties, respectively, is a common feature of modern democracies as evidences from the United States and Nigeria have shown. This, in part, undermines public trust in democratic institutions, not only in Nigeria and United States, but also in most democracies (Wike, 2025). While inter-party or intra-party conflict may sometimes constitute

a distraction and appear to suggest that a democracy is dysfunctional, it is sometimes good if the end result produces a desirable public good.

The impeachment of an executive in democracies, especially in a new democracy like Nigeria, is a constitutional instrument carefully designed to deepen both institutional checks and democratic accountability, strengthening the rule of law. In a country which appears characterised by a low or declining democratic culture or receding democratic values, impeachment could become a tool that is easily weaponised to blackmail, force compromise from a leader, persecute opposition leaders or get rid of political opponent and real or perceived political enemies (Fagbadebo, 2020). It appears that in Nigeria, state legislators see the threat of or actual impeachment of a governor or the removal of a legislative leadership as a normal business that in one way or the other would translate to some form of tangible benefits for the executors. With its low democratic culture, the provisions for impeachment of an executive who abuses his office or removal of legislative leadership under the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended) were meant for institutional checks and balances and to foster accountability that was non-existent under the military that ruled until 1999. Surprisingly, this legislative instrument is often being abused and grossly undermined by the legislators either within their chambers against their principal officers or against the executive (Moheeb, 2023). Nigerian politicians appear to find it difficult to get rid of the military legacies of aggression, political intolerance and anti-competition despite the transition to a democratic system since 1999. The inability to get rid of the military mentality explains the absence of or low level of political and institutional tolerance. From 1999 to 2025, six state governors and fifteen deputy governors have been impeached from office (Ikechukwu, 2014, Fagbadebo, 2020, Ogunyemi, 2024). The legislative rascality of the state assemblies, sometimes acting on the prompt of the president or the state governor, depending on who the target is, would have become uncontrollable but for the intervention of the Judiciary (Olasupo, 2012). Indeed, the Supreme Court had to intervene between 2003 and 2007 to nullify the impeachment of and ordered the re-instatement of the governors of Plateau, Ekiti and Oyo states. The three governors were impeached and removed from office by their respective state legislatures in utter disregard for the constitutional requirements on the removal of governors (Lawal, 2010). The situation repeated itself in 2016 when the Supreme Court had to nullify the impeachment of the governor of Adamawa State and ordered his re-instatement due to non-compliance with the constitutional provisions. Indeed, the provisions of the 1999 constitution on the removal or impeachment of either a state governor or the leadership of an assembly has been regularly abused to pursue the narrow agenda or ambition of an individual or a group (Ogun, 2020). This often puts the state assemblies in the news for the wrong reasons, painting a picture of an institution in perpetual state of crisis.

Theoretically, historical institutionalism explains this occurrence as a legacy of authoritarianism. It is believed that, in post-authoritarian states, weak or manipulated legislature may persist, lacking autonomy or credibility (Thelen, 1999). This is relevant to the Nigerian situation where the post-military civilian executives have subdued the legislature. The state assemblies often operate under the shadow of the executive as a dependent and weak institution. In addition, conflict and cleavage theorists explain conflict in an institution as a reflection of societal division. To those who subscribe to these theories, they argued that when legislatures mirror deep societal divisions, they can become sites of unresolved conflict. In their explanation of the cleavage theory, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) posit that the modern party systems in western democracies are shaped by historical social cleavages, namely, cultural, religious, rural-urban, and economic and class. Thus, all of these are characterised by intra-group conflict. Yet, these cleavages, on the other hand, influence political party formation,

voter alignments and institutional dynamics. These continue over a period of time, affecting stability or instability. The instability may manifest in form of legislative gridlock, fragmentation and crisis. This theory helps in understanding the frequent occurrence of internal division and crises that have been so common and destabilising in the state assemblies in Nigeria. Lastly, the institutional theories focus on rules and structures designed by legislatures to explain crisis in the legislature. The theory holds that institutional design flaws such as bicameralism, disproportionate electoral systems, weak party discipline, or poorly designed separation of powers can produce deadlock. For instance, Shepsle and Weingast (1995) and Cox and McCubbins (2012) aver that a crisis might emerge if rules designed to facilitate decision-making are exploited for partisan gain. This may trigger legislative stalemate. Similarly, they pointed out that a breakdown in party discipline usually associated with changes in electoral incentives can also lead to collective action problem that manifests as a crisis in governance. In Nigeria, a change in electoral incentive is rarely the reason for legislative rebellion or anti-party behaviour at the state level, although it was once a major factor, especially in the national assembly (Fashagba, 2014). In the opinion of Scott (1995), a crisis might involve a breakdown of regulative rules, a violation of normative expectations, or a fundamental challenge to cultural-cognitive understanding of what a legislature should be. These aptly capture the frequent manifestation of anti-party behaviour among national and state legislators and the frequent allegation of corruption against legislative members and their leaders in Nigeria. Their unquenchable craving for patronage and self-enrichment suggest a conflict between societal expectation and the legislative attitude as well as the misunderstanding of the reason for their election. These have often triggered series of crises that resulted in the removal of several legislative leaderships in Nigeria.

Finally, Linz (1990) avers that presidential systems are more prone to crisis due to fixed terms and dual legitimacy. By dual legitimacy, he meant the legislature and the president (governor in the case of the state), being separately elected, have separate mandates and distinct constituencies which translate to a possible frequent clash of interests.

So far, it has been discussed how the legislative power of impeachment has been exercised and various explanations of scholars for legislative crisis. The next section discusses an overview and the trends of impeachment in Nigeria, with a particular attention on the state assemblies which this study focuses on.

Legislative leadership crises and removal in the states in Nigeria

From 1999 to June 2025, several legislative crises leading to the removal of legislative leaders were recorded across the states of the federation. Although significant efforts were made to capture all the legislative crises and leadership removal, there is an awareness of the possibility that a few might have been left out. Thus, at least forty nine cases which have records, apart from one voluntary resignation over the need to cede the deputy speakership and majority leadership positions to other senatorial districts, following the emergence of a new governor from the zone of the deputy speaker and majority leader (Dada, 2025), the legislative crises in forty eight states were significant enough to trigger the removal or forced resignation of a principal officer, especially the speaker, and occasionally the deputy speaker or majority leader. By principal officer(s), it is meant the speaker and deputy speaker in particular. However, the majority and deputy majority leaders and party whip are also principal officers and were sometimes removed. For instance, the deputy majority leader of the Sokoto State House of Assembly was removed in 2017 (Mohammad, 2017). It should be pointed out that in most

states of the federation, the state ruling party often controls the legislature but that has not translated into harmonious executive-legislature relations or peaceful intra-chamber operation. By this, most states in Nigeria have a unified government or one-party system de facto. The Nigerian states operate the unicameral model. Membership of the state legislatures is based on the single member constituency or the first past the post. State constituency delimitation takes cognizance of population. Consequently, delimitation focuses on making constituencies to be relatively equal for representational purposes. Thus, states like Lagos (16.5 million) and Kano (16.1 million) with the highest population in the country have forty state legislators each. Conversely, states like Bayelsa (3.7 million) have 24 legislators and Ekiti (3.5 million) has 26 due to their relatively smaller population size.

Between 1999 and 2025, legislative crises led to the removal or resignation of at least a principal officer, namely, a speaker, a deputy speaker or others in thirty one states. Thus, forty-three state speakers were removed. The forty-three removals are breakdown down into two components. Specifically, thirty-eight speakers were removed while five legislative speakers in Edo (2016), Kogi (2017), Yobe (2018), Benue (2022) and Lagos (2025) were either forced to resign or did so under pressure (Adebulu, 2018, Sule, 2017, Momoh, 2016). Apart from the speakers, two deputy speakers were removed from Lagos (2009) and Adamawa (2018). One deputy speaker resigned in Adamawa in 2011 instead of waiting to be removed along with the speaker (Daily Post, 2011). A deputy majority leader was removed in Sokoto State (Mohammad, 2017). In most cases, the removal of the deputy speaker and or other principal officers was due to their alleged insubordination to the speaker. In all, forty-three speakers lost their speakership positions. However, among the forty-three, there were seven instances in which the deputies were removed alongside the speaker. In a number of cases, the majority leaders were removed with the speakers. These scenarios played out in Adamawa (2011, 2018), Taraba (2013), Ekiti State in 2018, Benue State (2018), Ondo State (2018), Kebbi State (2021) (Oluwole, 2018, Ogundipe, 2018, Vanguard, Nov 14, 2018, Maishanu, 2021, The Punch, Dec 30, 2018).

In Yobe State, the speaker had presided over the house for seven-years before he was forced to resign in 2018 (Adebulu, 2018). He was the second longest serving speaker, after Hon Obasa of Lagos State assembly who was speaker for over nine years before he was removed in 2025. Although Hon Obasa was removed in January 2025, pressure from outside the Lagos State assembly ensured his reinstatement in February 2025 to the embarrassment and discontentment of majority of the members who were displeased with his leadership style (Iniobong, 2025).

Furthermore, looking at the gender dimension of the discourse, nine female speakers have presided over their state assemblies from 1999 to date (Ayobami, 2025). Three were removed and three others were forced to resign. Mrs Margaret Icheen in Benue State in 2002 (Lor, 2002), Elizabeth Atavie in Edo State in 2016 (The Cable, July 25, 2016) and Mrs Mojisola Meranda of Lagos State in 2025 resigned under pressure. Elizabeth was made to exchange the speakership office with the deputy speakership over what members claimed to be the need for a balanced power sharing among the various senatorial zones (Momoh, 2016). On the other hand, Meranda was the deputy speaker under Obasa and reverted to that position, following an alleged presidency forced reinstatement of Obasa as the speaker few weeks after his removal (Abidoye, 2025). Thus, both Elizabeth and Meranda were in office for less than two months. A female deputy speaker was also removed in Lagos State in 2009 (Akoni & Akanmu, 2009). Anambra State has produced three female speakers since 1999. In Ondo State, a female speaker was removed and reinstated twice. On a general note, it suffices to note that the marginalisation

and emasculation of women has persisted at both state and national levels in Nigeria after 26 years of democracy. The trend in female participation and the way they are treated by their male counterparts suggests that the political environment remains hostile to women. The emasculation is not limited to the state assemblies. To be sure, in 2007, the male dominated House of Representatives impeached their speaker, Hon Patricia Etteh, a female, just few months after she was elected speaker, over alleged inflation of the contract cost for the renovation of her official residence among other allegations (Fashagba, 2009). In 2012, the arrowhead of the campaign to remove Patricia Etteh, Hon Farouk Lawal, one of the representatives from Kano State, was alleged to have demanded a gratification of over 400,000 dollars from one of those invited by his ad-hoc committee investigating the subsidy abuse. This suggests that the removed speaker must have taken decisions that displeased the male dominated members leading to the 2007 gang up that led to the removal of the female speaker. To be sure, Farouk Lawal was removed from his former committee and made to head a different committee in 2007. He must have considered the new committee not to be as juicy as the former one, leading to the gang up against the female speaker. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), the organisation responsible for the arrest and prosecution of economic fraud offenders in Nigeria, successfully prosecuted and secured jail term for Farouk Lawal over the subsidy probe (Majeed, October 22, 2022). Similarly, the recent allegation of sexual harassment raised by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, a female senator representing Kogi Central, against the Senate President of the Nigerian Senate and a former governor of Akwa Ibom State, Senator Godswill Akpabio, in early 2025 and the way male dominated senators handle the matter, leading to the imposition of a six-month suspension on her and the withdrawal of all her official privileges, suggest that the marginalisation and emasculation of women in national politics remains deeply entrenched and is not likely to end soon (The Economist, March 20, 2025, Business Day, March 22, 2025). The senators did not only suffocate and attempted to silence Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan for daring to speak out about being sexually harassed, but in another display their disdain for women. During the sitting of the ethics committee assigned to investigate the allegation of sexual harassment, Oby Ezekwesili, a female and former Minister of Education as well as Solid Minerals, an advocate for social justice, who attended the hearing was upbraided by a senator (Opera News, March 25, 2025, 7:24pm).

In some state assemblies, the threat of removal did not result in the removal of the speaker. Examples of this are seen in Osun State in 2023 (Adedeji, 2023) and Sokoto State in 2017 (Aminu, 2017). In 2013, the governor of Rivers State had to intervene to stop the removal of the speaker (Premium Times, July 9, 2013). In 2016, in Cross River State assembly, members threatened the speaker with impeachment over not paying them for welfare and lack of electricity to work (Affe, 2016).

The extent to which legislative crisis was an issue varies from state to state and from one geopolitical zone to the other; for instance, the north-west with twelve removed speakers and or deputy speaker and the southwest with twelve removals recorded the highest rate of removal in the country during the period. In north-west, out of the seven states in the region, four states, namely, Jigawa, Kebbi, Katsina and Kaduna, executed two removals each during the period while Kano recorded two removals and one resignation (Vanguard, September 24, 2013, Premium Times, July 30, 2018, Isenyo, 2020, Ibrahim, 2018, Olugbemi, 2021, Channelstv, April 28, 2015, Oluwagbemi, 2017). Only one removal occurred in Zamfara State (Umar, 2024). In the six north-east states, five states removed the speakers but two states, namely, Taraba and Adamawa experienced two removals each. In Adamawa, the deputy speaker, majority and minority leaders were impeached in 2018 (The Punch, 2018). In the north-central,

seven removals occurred but Kogi State alone accounted for three, removing two while one was forced to resign. In Benue State, two speakers were removed. It is important to point out that the speaker of the Kogi State assembly was forced to resign in 2017 by the state governor. He would have been removed due to a disagreement with the governor (Sule, 2017).

In the south-south, there were six removals but Edo State alone recorded three: with one removal and one resignation each in 2016 (Momoh, 2016) and another removal in 2020. In the south-west with a total of twelve removals, Ogun State recorded one removal (Sowole, 2024), Oyo and Ondo states recorded two removals each while each of Ekiti (Oluwole, 2018, 2022) and Lagos states recorded three and four respectively, the highest by any state in the country. Out of the four who were removed in Lagos, two were female. In 2009, a female deputy speaker was removed in the assembly. In March 2025 a female speaker was made to resign under external pressure by the party leadership. Going by this, Lagos appears to be hostile to female leadership, despite its sophistication outlook. In the South-east, while four removals occurred, none of the five states recorded two removals during the period. Indeed, in Anambra State, three females presided over the assembly. This suggests that while internal crisis is inevitable, assemblies in the South-east and north central succeeded in restraining themselves from allowing their personal emotion, selfish ambition and internal crisis to degenerate to the level that would trigger leadership crisis and change. Conversely, for the north-west and south-west geopolitical zones, the removal clause has been triggered more frequently than other zones, meaning that legislative crises in the regions is the highest in the country. This shows that in the South-west and north-west the tolerance level among members is low, with the legislators unable to rein in their personal ambition and desperation for power, undermining internal instability in the process and instigating leadership crisis and change that erode legislative productivity and stability. Furthermore, in sixteen states, namely, Plateau (2021), Imo (2021), Anambra (2018), Cross River (2024), Ogun (2024), Zamfara (2024), Rivers, Niger (2015), Gombe (2020), Ebonyi (2014), Borno (2012), Bayelsa (2019), Abia (2023), Bauchi (2011), Katsina (2017) and Delta (2017) one removal each took place (Sani, 2011, Goerge, 2014, Asadu, 2017, Okafor, 2018, Ukpog, 2019). In the next section, focus is placed on the reason for the removals.

Accounting for leadership removal in the state assemblies from 1999 to 2025

Why do peers and members of state assemblies experience frequent internal crises, disruption and legislative leadership removal in Nigeria? Going by the small number of members of each state assembly in Nigeria and more importantly the predominant grip of one-party control of most of the assemblies, it is a paradox that crisis is a major feature of the state assemblies in Nigeria. Indeed, one of the arguments against too large a body or too many members is that it becomes unwieldy. The small number of legislators in the state assemblies would have been expected to facilitate a close-knit and peaceful system. But the reverse has been the case in Nigeria since 1999 as the analysis will show. The small number of elected members in the state assemblies has not translated into cohesion among members, induced operational harmony nor inspired esprit de corps among the state legislators. This has made the state assemblies fragile, vulnerable and crisis ridden. What then accounts for this? From the earlier studies on the reasons for the many cases of removal or leadership crisis in the Nigerian state assemblies, several reasons have been identified. In this study, there is continuation on the earlier findings by not only identifying the triggers of the actions in the state assemblies but also bringing a level of cohesion that provides a theoretical framework into the discourse.

To start with, this study explains three various triggers. Number one is the endogenous triggers of leadership crisis in the state assemblies. In this study, endogenous factors are categorised

into political (authoritarian leadership), economic (neglect of members by the leaders spurring division), administrative (incompetence) and sociological (corruption) drivers. The endogenous triggers are legislative-centric. By this, leadership crisis is seen as a product of the internal politicking in the legislature and not instigated by the executive, at least not directly. This suggests that a legislative crisis is not externally induced. The term endogenous trigger is used within the latter context. Specifically, under this, several factors constitute the propellers of the legislative crisis that snowballed into the removal of the leaders. These factors, as appeared in the bracket under the categorisations, include corruption, authoritarian leadership, incompetence and neglect of members by the leaders or internal division. However, in most cases, the reasons that members from different assemblies cite when removing their leaders often overlap and sometimes they are fabricated when the executive instigate the crisis using their loyalists in the assembly. For instance, some leaders were accused of corruption and authoritarianism at the same time. Thus, all the reasons cited disaggregated to see how often a particular reason occurs to know the weight that each reason carries ultimately.

Under the endogenous triggers of the leadership crisis, corruption was cited eighteen times as the reason for the crises. By this, the crisis was triggered by the allegation of corruption against the affected speakers. Under this, the speakers were either alleged to have mismanaged assembly funds or lack accountability and transparency in the handling of assembly funds and spending. However, only in two instances was corruption solely accounted for the removal. In most other instances, corruption was cited alongside other triggers. In states like Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Cross River, Edo, Ekiti, Delta, Ebonyi, Kano, Kebbi and Kaduna corruption was mentioned by the aggrieved members that removed the speakers (Okafor, T. 2018, Sule, 2017, Adedeji, 2023, Iniobong, 2025, Bankole, 2024, Ebegbulem and Enomholase, 2016, Oluwole, 2018, Okutu, 2014, Omojomololu, 2024, The Nation, 2013, Akpan, 2023, Ibrahim, 2018, Muhammed, 2015, Chinonso Alonzie, 2021, Fanwo, 2015, Momodu, 2005).

Similarly, in eleven instances, the authoritarian behaviour was cited as the trigger of the legislative crisis, leading to the removal of the speakers. Moreover, the trigger was cited in six instances as solely responsible for the removal of the speakers. Under this, the affected speakers were alleged by their members to be highhanded and disregarded their colleagues who made them speakers in the first place and retained the power to remove them (Alonzie, 2021, Adedeji, 2023, Iniobong, 2025, Ebegbulem, 2016, Oyero, 2020, Ogundipe, 2018, Oderemi, (n.d.), Hamagam, 2019, Akpan, 2023, Abayomi, 2017).

The third endogenous trigger commonly mentioned by the aggrieved members is incompetent leadership. This appeared nine times among the reasons identified as the triggers of the crisis. Under this, some leaders lost their positions because they did not understand the house rules and the protocols that guide legislative activities. Although there is no data to find out why the affected individuals were incompetent, there are speculations that this could be due to low education, imposition, zoning and possibly lack of experience. In two instances, incompetence alone was cited as the trigger. The problem was alleged to be undermining the effectiveness and smooth running of the assembly, hence the need for a change of leadership. Further study is needed to unravel the causes of the incompetence.

The last trigger under the endogenous factors is the internal division and neglect of members. This is closely related to the tendency of the legislative leadership to sideline or neglect other members in the distribution of patronage or largesse coming from the governors or other money in the assembly which the speaker chose to sit on for personal use instead of sharing it with other members. In Nigeria, legislators seem to hold the view that their office is for self-enrichment. Anything that threatens that tendency is therefore resisted. Similarly, internal

competition among factions and the personal ambition of members sometimes spurs internal division and lead members to cook up reasons to justify their rebellious act against the leadership. Allegation of neglect of members that precipitated internal division occurred six times all by itself as the sole reason cited for the removal of six speakers. In general, neglect of members and internal division arising from the personal ambition of some members occurred six times along with other triggers. Members often resist any speaker who 'feeds fat' while other legislators are 'growing lean' or have little or no access to the resources in the assembly (Sanni, 2025). In extreme cases, the frustration among members against the 'greed' of the speaker results in the invocation of the removal clause and the ultimate removal of the speaker. Thus, unequal access to patronage is a major trigger of conflict, even in most cases when corruption is alleged against the speaker.

However, in some instances, an endogenous trigger always finds accomplices. Thus, overlapping endogenous triggers are very common. By this, combination of triggers account for the removal of a lot of the affected speakers. To be sure, in seven cases, both corruption and authoritarian behaviour were cited along others for removing the speakers. In these three instances, corruption, authoritarianism and incompetence were cited as the reasons for the removal of three speakers. In other three instances, incompetence and neglect of members were cited as the triggers of the removal. In two instances, corruption overlapped with incompetence to trigger the removal of the leaders.

Furthermore, it suffices to note that some removals were triggered by exogenous factors. Thus, the second type of trigger is the exogenous factors. The exogenous triggers, mostly political-economy related, are externally driven and directly relates to the domineering influence of the executive or state governors and their capacity to make their state legislators do their biddings. There is yet a variant of the exogenous factor. It occurs frequently in reaction to external prompt and influence. The latter lies halfway between the exogenous and endogenous triggers, because the legislators react in the assembly to real or perceived external influence. This trigger is driven by political economy factor as well

Looking at the main exogenous trigger that is externally driven, one speaker faces threat of removal if they cross their path with the executive or there arises a serious and perhaps irreconcilable disagreement between the speaker and the executive. For instance, where a speaker tread the path of 'insubordination' to the executive by querying his actions or bills or engages in actions considered unfriendly, the executive could or have sometimes instigated his loyal members in the assembly to remove the speaker (The Nation, October 13, 2013, Maishanu, 2021, Jonathan, 2017, Oluwole, 2022). Eight leadership crises appeared to have been directly instigated by the executive leading to the removal of the speakers by their colleagues. Often legislative members who are ambitious take advantage of the executive prompt to remove their speakers and take over the seat with others who executed the executive agenda rewarded with the chairmanship of 'lucrative or juicy' committees and other form of patronage or reward from the executive. The economic and political interest of members plays a very important role in this respect. In other instances, five speakers lost their positions over alleged subordination of the assembly to the state governors while two others narrowly escaped despite facing the same allegation. Members alleged that they subordinated the assemblies to the executive where the latter falls in-between the endogenous and exogenous triggers. Often, a lack of cohesion among members manifests in the willingness of members to betray their colleague to please the executive governor and be rewarded. Sometimes, speaker who is 'selfish' by not sharing largess with his colleagues get punished with removal. The office of the speaker holds enormous prestige and controls legislative resources and distributes

patronage. The speaker has tremendous influence over allocation of members into committees and appointment of committee leadership. He has more access to members of the executive who dispense resources. Thus, the concentration of economic and social resources as well as political influence in the office makes the office very attractive. Thus, considering the low level of democratic and legislative culture in Nigeria, members often scheme to remove their leader, especially in the state assemblies, to capture the office so as to take charge of the distribution of patronage.

In addition, the governors in the Nigerian states are very strong. They preside over very huge financial resources and control a wide array of patronage and wield enormous control over the legislative careers of the state legislators and to some extent national assembly members. This, in part, is the reason that members sometimes do the bidding of the state governors against their colleagues and speaker, considering that most of their seats are very vulnerable. For instance, in Kogi State, the removal of the speakers in 2012, 2015 and 2017 was triggered by the executive, although a series of allegations ranging from highhandedness among others were cited by members to mask the real motivation for their action (Sule, 2017). This is very common among states legislators while acting under state governor's prompt. In Ekiti State, the off-season elections have been a factor in the legislative leadership crisis in the state. To be sure, when the PDP won the 2014 governorship election, prior to the inauguration of the governor-elect, he had made a deal with members of the majority Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) to defect to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and be rewarded with the speakership and other key legislative leadership positions. Holding the speakership position often translate to power, enhanced social status and greater access to financial resources. Any ambitious politicians could be easily swayed by the executive using the bait of speakership or deputy speakership. And this has been very evident in executive-legislature relations at the state level. Thus, the main drivers were political and economic benefits for the members. In pursuit of the personal interest in Ekiti State, the offer created internal tension and acrimonies that culminated in the defection of many members of the majority (ACN) to the minority PDP thereby giving PDP majority in the assembly. Consequently, the former speaker under the ACN was removed and a PDP member, from among the defectors, became the speaker. The same scenario played out again in 2018 when the ACN which had merged with other parties to form the All Progress Congress (APC) defeated the PDP in the state governorship election and used the 2014 card of the PDP to gain majority and removed the speaker (Oluwole, 2018).

In Edo (2016) and Cross River (2024) states, the battle for supremacy between the immediate past governors and their successors triggered executive-legislature acrimonies that precipitated internal crisis in the respective assemblies. The majority of the legislators felt beholden to the immediate past state governors and thus felt duty-bound to do their bidding, while the new governors with their own agenda to implement wanted a legislature that would help them to implement their agenda. Perhaps, the past governors gave them the ticket and supported them financially during campaigns. This resulted in the conflict of interest that triggered leadership crises in the two states in 2016 and 2024. In Cross River state, between 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, the crisis dragged on until the Supreme Court resolved it in February 2025 in favour of majority members who are loyalists of the former governor, thereby putting the state governor in a tight corner and incapacitated. Taking advantage of the ruling of the Supreme Court, the returned speaker and his colleagues who constituted the majority were alleged to be plotting to impeach the governor leading to threat and counter threat that prompted the president to declare six-month state of emergency.

In about four instances, the intervention of the governor or power broker, such as the case of Lagos in 2025, led to the reinstatement of the impeached speakers. However, in two instances, the reinstated speakers were still removed. This was seen in Benue and Ondo states.

However, in some cases of defiance, state legislators have removed their speakers due to the alleged subordination of their assemblies to the executive. Under this, as noted earlier, speakers that appear to be loyal to their state governors and perhaps neglect carrying their members along, particularly in the sharing of patronage, often faced the wrath of their colleagues. Similarly, when a speaker becomes too close to the executive governor that he becomes too arrogant and disregard or disrespect his colleagues, this may trigger crisis that could lead to his removal. This is a political trigger. To be sure, seven speakers were removed on the ground that they allowed the executive to control their assemblies. In states like Niger (2015), Borno (2012) and Ondo (2018) among others, the speakers were removed over their loyalty to their respective state governors at the expense of the members. In Sotoko and Osun states in 2017 and 2023 respectively, the speakers survived the threat of removal over their alleged closeness to and subordination of their assemblies to the executive. Indeed, the removal of speakers not instigated by the executive but resulted from their perceived loyalty to, and subordination of the assembly to the governor falls between exogenous and endogenous trigger, a variant of the exogenous trigger.

Discussion and conclusion

From the analysis so far, it is clear that the allegation of corruption is the most significant trigger. Following closely is the exogenous triggers evident in the removal connected with governor-legislative leadership relationship. This is followed by the allegations of authoritarian leadership and administrative incompetence, respectively. The last is the allegation of neglect and division among members. Corruption-instigated trigger played a very significant role in most of the removals, accounting for 1 out of every 3 removals. The authoritarian style leadership of some speakers has been a major cause of internal crisis leading to the fall of 1 in every 4 speakers captured in this study. Nine removals have resulted from low or poor administrative capacity of some speakers. The reason for the poor capacity may be due to executive imposition, zoning policy among groups, political pressure from external political gladiator or financial inducement by the candidate. Whatever accounted for the choice of a speaker that is poorly equipped for the job, it has been a source of crisis and internal instability in the state assemblies. At least 1 in every 5 speakers lost the position due to the factor. The executives have accounted for 1 in every 6 removals. On the other hand, the alleged subordination of an assembly to the governor has resulted in 1 in every six removals. In other instances, as it has been shown above, combination of factors constituted the triggers. This is the most common type of triggers, with many crises being the culmination of a number of interacting factors. Earlier on, the overlaps have been demonstrated between a number of factors in spurring leadership crisis and ultimately the removal of a speaker and or his or her deputy.

Unlike in most presidential democracies, the leadership crisis in the Nigerian state assemblies is unique because it has become one of its defining features. While many federal states operate power-sharing arrangement between the national and constituent states, with each having two levels of government, no other federal states has experienced the level of leadership crisis and removal of speakers in their state assemblies the way it has happened in Nigeria.

The rate at which leadership crises occur in the north-west and south-west suggest that legislative culture is not developing as expected. The three removals each in Kogi, Kano and

Ekiti and four in Lagos states suggest an abuse of process in the provisions on removal of a speaker and immaturity of the legislators. However, legislative leadership tendency to neglect their members, jettison accountability on assumption of office and highhanded against their colleagues who ultimately hold the power to retain or remove them from the speakership seat calls for attitudinal change on the part of the leaders. Members' tendency to remove the speaker on the allegation of subordination of the assembly to the executive appears to be driven more by the neglect of the members in terms of the distribution of patronage. A speaker can easily address this by becoming more open and carrying members along, while shedding the habit of greed. The state governors remove speakers who fail to do their bidding. In a presidential democracy, the legislature is an independent institution and it is not expected to take order from the state governor. The state governors have accounted for the eight removals, even though the removed speakers belonged to the same party as the executive. This suggests the absence of democratic tolerance and lack of capacity to manage political differences and negotiate and compromise, the key essential ingredients that lubricate democracy.

Allowing the speaker to finish his term and possibly work against his return as a speaker after the next election would have been a democratic way to handle governor-speaker disagreement. In developed democracies like the United States of America and in Texas in particular, this was the case in January 2025 when the Texas State governor worked against the return of the former speaker to the speakership office because under the Speaker, the state Attorney General was impeached to the embarrassment of the governor.

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