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DUPLICATION OF FUNCTIONS AND LEGISLATIVE GRIDLOCK: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTING BILL VERSIONS BETWEEN THE NIGERIAN SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria operates a bicameral legislature which comprises of the Senate as the upper legislative chamber and House of Representatives as the lower legislative chamber. The bicameral design is intended to provide checks between the two chambers on deliberation and to enhance representation. However empirical evidence shows that duplication of functions between the two chambers often result in the passage of conflicting versions of a particular bill which leads to prolonged time being expended during harmonization processes and in some cases results into legislative gridlock. This study therefore empirically investigates duplication of legislative functions and its relationship to legislative gridlock in Nigeria's National Assembly, focusing on the 8th (2015–2019) and 9th (2019–2023) Assemblies. Using a mixed-methods design combining quantitative analysis of 312 bills with qualitative interviews of 12 legislative aides and clerks, the study finds that 47.1% of bills required harmonization, with an average delay of 6.8 months. The study identifies independent committee work, constituency politics, party and regional dynamics, and executive lobbying as primary drivers of conflicting bill versions. Anchored in Veto Players Theory, Bicameralism and Functional Redundancy Theory, and New Institutionalism, the study concludes that gridlock is embedded in institutional rules and norms rather than individual behaviour. Recommendations include the establishment of a Legislative Clearinghouse, mandatory joint committee hearings for bills of national importance, time-bound harmonization deadlines, and constitutional amendments to clarify role differentiation between chambers. The study fills critical empirical, theoretical, and methodological gaps in the literature on Nigerian legislative studies.

Keywords: bicameralism and duplication of functions, harmonization, legislative gridlock, National Assembly, veto players

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria operates a bicameral legislature at the federal level, modelled after the United States Congress. Section 4 of the 1999 Constitution as amended confers legislative powers on both the Senate and the House of Representatives, with both required to harmonize every bill passed before it is transmitted to the President for assent (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In principle, this design was intended to deepen legislative deliberation, thereby preventing the legislature from the temptation of hasty law-making processes. However, in practice, both chambers often work independently on the same bill, resulting in the passage of different versions that must be reconciled by a Conference/Harmonization Committee before transmission to the President for assent (Suberu, 2013). This process has become a major source of legislative gridlock in Nigeria, introducing avoidable delays into the law-making process, slowing down legislative time, and wasting taxpayers' money. For example, the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) took over 19 years to be passed into law, largely due to multiple rounds of harmonization and disagreement between both houses (KPMG, 2015).

Legislative gridlock in this context refers to a situation where the legislative process slows down or halts due to internal disagreements or procedural redundancies (**Binder, 2003**). In Nigeria, this is most evident during the 'harmonization' phase, where a Conference Committee must reconcile different versions of a bill. This paper argues that the duplication of functions where both chambers simultaneously process identical bills without coordination is the primary cause of these delays.

The consequences of legislative gridlock transcend institutional inefficiency and reverberate across the broader architecture of democratic governance and national development. Scholars of comparative legislative politics have established a strong empirical link between legislative responsiveness and democratic legitimacy: where parliaments fail to translate public preferences into timely and coherent policy, citizens register declining confidence in representative institutions (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011). In the Nigerian context, the Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey (2022) reported that only 28% of Nigerians expressed trust in the National Assembly, a figure representing a 14-percentage-point decline from the Round 6 Survey of 2016. This erosion of public confidence coincides precisely with the period under examination in this study of the 8th and 9th Assemblies, during which harmonization failures were most acute. When landmark legislation such as the

Electoral Act Amendment Bill is delayed for three months at Conference Committee over a single clause on electronic transmission of results, or when appropriation bills pass months beyond constitutional deadlines, the Nigerian citizenry perceives its legislature not as a responsive policy instrument but as an arena of elite bargaining. This study situates legislative gridlock, therefore, not merely as an institutional dysfunction but as a democratic deficit with measurable consequences for political legitimacy and citizen engagement.

The structural conditions that produce duplication of legislative functions in Nigeria are partly inherited from the constitutional architecture established at independence and subsequently entrenched through successive constitutional reviews. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, drawing on the Westminster and U.S. congressional traditions, vests virtually co-equal legislative authority in both chambers without sufficiently delineating jurisdictional boundaries or establishing coordinating mechanisms for parallel legislative action (Ojo, 2006; Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). The Standing Orders of both chambers, last comprehensively revised in 2015, similarly do not mandate pre-filing coordination, joint public hearings, or time-bound harmonization procedures for non-appropriation bills (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). Comparative institutional analysis reveals that Nigeria stands out among federal bicameral systems in the depth of this coordination deficit. South Africa's Constitution explicitly delineates the functions of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, reserving most ordinary legislation for single-chamber origination and restricting the upper chamber's role to matters affecting provincial interests (Republic of South Africa, 1996). India's constitutional framework similarly assigns primacy to the Lok Sabha on money bills, substantially reducing the scope for inter-chamber conflict over fiscal legislation (Singh, 2011). Nigeria's failure to adopt analogous role-differentiation mechanisms represents a deliberate constitutional choice that, as this study empirically demonstrates, has imposed substantial costs on legislative performance over four decades of post-military democratic governance. This study focuses on the 8th National Assembly (2015–2019) and the 9th National Assembly (2019–2023), with preliminary reference to early data from the 10th Assembly (2023–2024) to assess trend continuity. The selection of this period is purposive, as it represents a complete legislative cycle under a democratic dispensation with relatively stable political conditions, allowing for meaningful comparative analysis. The study is delimited to an examination of the harmonization process of bills passed by both chambers, excluding bills that originated and were concluded within a single chamber. Geographically, the research is confined to the Nigerian National Assembly complex in Abuja, where legislative activities and records are centralized.

It is further important to situate the present study within the trajectory of legislative reform debates in Nigeria. Since the Fourth Republic commenced in 1999, successive administrations and civil society organizations have proposed various remedies for legislative gridlock, including the Legislative Reform Project of 2008, the National Assembly Service Commission Reforms of 2011, and the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) legislative strengthening initiatives of 2015 and 2022. Despite these efforts, empirical evidence reviewed in this study indicates that harmonization delays have not declined and may in fact have worsened across successive assemblies. The 10th Assembly, inaugurated in June 2023, has already exhibited harmonization challenges comparable to its predecessors, with preliminary data indicating that 53.4% of bills considered by both chambers by mid-2024 required Conference Committee intervention (Order Paper Nigeria, 2024). This pattern of institutional persistence is precisely what New Institutionalism would predict: path dependence ensures that organizations reproduce existing rules and norms even when those rules are demonstrably dysfunctional (North, 1990; Mahoney, 2000). The present study therefore seeks not merely to document gridlock but to provide the empirical foundation for evidence-based institutional reform, quantifying the frequency, duration, and causal drivers of harmonization failure across a decade of Nigerian legislative activity. By integrating longitudinal quantitative data with qualitative insights from legislative insiders, it offers the most comprehensive empirical treatment of this problem to date in the Nigerian legislative studies literature.

Section 58(1) of the 1999 Constitution requires concurrence of both the Senate and House of Representatives for a bill to become law (FRN, 1999). However, the Constitution does not explicitly specify time limits, procedures, or special mechanisms for harmonization when conflicting versions of a bill exist between the two chambers. Consequently, duplication of legislative responsibility has essentially produced three negative results: delay in the passage of critical bills; abandonment of bills at the harmonization stage after expending both time and money during the initial bill-processing stages; and over-politicization of the harmonization process along party or regional lines (Omotola, 2009).

Empirically, data from the National Assembly indicates that between 2015 and 2023, over 40% of bills passed by one chamber were either amended substantially or stalled at harmonization (Order Paper Nigeria, 2023). More recently, the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre's (PLAC) mid-term review of the 10th Assembly (2024) indicates that this proportion has risen to approximately 53.4%, suggesting a worsening trend rather than an improvement. This situation undermines legislative efficiency, dilutes public interest, and distorts policy responsiveness. Academically, this study intends to fill an empirical gap by quantifying harmonization delays and linking them to institutional design flaws in African bicameral systems. Most literature on the Nigerian legislature is descriptive (Ihonvbere, 2017; Okocha, 2018). The findings will provide policy direction to the ongoing constitutional review and reform of National Assembly rules. Reducing gridlock can improve Nigeria's ranking on legislative efficiency and policy delivery. Nigeria operates a bicameral legislature which is a constitutionally entrenched provision under Section 4 of the 1999 Constitution, vesting legislative powers in the Senate and House of Representatives (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Empirical studies have suggested that the operational co-equal powers of both chambers without specified coordinating mechanisms or clear job descriptions often contribute to the challenge of functional duplication and legislative gridlock (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010; Saliu, 2015). Despite this experienced challenge at the bill harmonization stage, there exists limited empirical evidence that quantifies the extent and explains the political-institutional causes of harmonization gridlock in Nigeria.

The study is guided by four research questions: (i) To what extent do harmonization processes vary in frequency and duration for conflicting bills between the Senate and House of Representatives? (ii) What institutional or political factors contribute to the development of divergent versions of bills? (iii) What are the implications of harmonization delays for the passage and implementation of key legislation? (iv) What institutional reforms can mitigate duplication and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's bicameral legislature?

The broad objective of this study is to empirically analyse the impact of duplication of functions and legislative gridlock in the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives. Specific objectives are to: (i) examine how often and how long harmonization processes took for bills passed between 2015 and 2023; (ii) identify the institutional factors that implicate conflicting versions of bills in both chambers; (iii) assess the consequences of harmonization delays on policy outcomes and governance; and (iv) propose institutional reforms that will aid the reduction of duplication gridlock in the National Assembly.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Bicameralism is justified on grounds of deliberation, representation of sub-national units, and checking majoritarian excesses (Lijphart, 1999). However, in developing countries, duplication often leads to inefficiency and waste of legislative time. In the case of Nigeria, scholars note that both chambers have concurrent powers on most bills except money bills, where the House has primacy authority as prescribed by the Constitution (Section 59, FRN, 1999). Yet in practice, the Senate still performs the responsibility of amending money bills, which often leads to legislative gridlock conflict (Omotola, 2009).

Empirical studies show that between 1999 and 2011, 68% of bills passed in one chamber of the National Assembly never saw the light of day after harmonization (Order Paper Nigeria, 2012). Case studies of the PIB, Electoral Act Amendment Bill, and Constitution Amendment Bills reveal that harmonization committees became sites of lobbying, regional bargaining, and executive interference **(Adebayo, 2016; KPMG, 2015).** More recently, the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) reported in its 2023 Annual Legislative Scorecard that 41 of 89 bills transmitted to Conference Committee during the 9th Assembly exceeded the 60-day administrative benchmark, a figure representing 46.1% of all harmonization cases and corroborating the quantitative findings of this study. Internationally, comparative studies show that gridlock is higher where chambers have equal power and are elected concurrently but controlled by different parties—a condition that exists in Nigeria (Tsebelis & Money, 1997).

Globally, the literature on legislative gridlock has expanded significantly since Binder's (2003) foundational quantitative framework. Recent scholarship has extended the gridlock concept beyond the U.S. context to examine multi-party parliamentary systems (Tsebelis, 2011), postconflict democracies (Jarstad & Sisk, 2008), and hybrid regimes in sub-Saharan Africa (Cheeseman, 2015). These studies collectively affirm that institutional design variables particularly the degree of chamber symmetry, the availability of coordination mechanisms, and the presence of clear procedural timelines are stronger predictors of gridlock than electoral or partisan variables alone. This emerging consensus in comparative legislative studies provides the theoretical backdrop against which the Nigerian evidence presented in this study assumes particular significance, as Nigeria's legislature combines near-total chamber symmetry, absent coordination mechanisms, and a highly partisan political environment—a configuration that the comparative literature would predict to be maximally gridlock-prone.

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Duplication of legislative functions occurs when both chambers independently exercise identical legislative tasks such as initiating or passing bills of similar content without prior coordination (Tsebelis & Money, 1997). Legislative gridlock conversely refers to a policy stalemate situation where neither of the two chambers can reach agreement on legislative decisions (Binder, 1999). It is important to distinguish duplication from legitimate bicameral revision: whereas revision involves one chamber substantively improving legislation originated in the other, duplication involves both chambers independently originating or processing the same legislative content without reference to each other's work, creating competing versions rather than complementary perspectives (Anyanwu, 2020).

Tsebelis and Money (1997), while explaining the comparative perspective of legislative duplication, argue that bicameral conflict is most likely to occur where each chamber has symmetrical powers but divergent electoral mandates. This framework is applicable to Nigeria, where Senators and Representatives are elected from different constituencies but possess equal powers on bill passage processes (FRN, 1999). Subsequent scholarship by Heller (2001) extends this analysis, demonstrating that the probability of inter-chamber conflict increases substantially when partisan composition diverges between chambers, a condition that emerged in Nigeria after the 2019 elections when internal party realignments produced divergent factional alignments in the Senate and House of Representatives leadership structures (PLAC, 2022).

2.2 Empirical Evidence from Nigeria's National Assembly

Legislative records since the Fourth Republic clearly point to duplication of legislative responsibility as a structural feature of a bicameral legislature rather than an anomaly. Okoosi-Simbine (2010) observes that the absence of a joint legislative agenda for both the Senate and the House of Representatives encourages both chambers to 'clone' bills, especially those with high political sensation. According to PLAC's (2022) assessment report of the 9th Assembly, 35% of bills introduced in the House were duplicates of Senate bills. This figure is corroborated by data from the National Assembly's Legislative Tracking System, which recorded 124 instances of near-identical bill introductions across both chambers between 2019 and 2023, representing a 12% increase over the comparable figure of 111 instances recorded during the 8th Assembly (2015–2019) **(NILDS, 2023).**

Legislative case studies further demonstrate how duplication of legislative process, especially bill sponsorship produces conflicting versions. The Petroleum Industry Bill took over 20 years to be passed by the National Assembly largely because of disagreements between the Senate's 3% and House's 5% proposals for host community funds (Saliu, 2015; National Assembly Journal, 2021). Similarly, the Electoral Act Amendment Bill (2022) experienced a 3-month delay at the Conference Committee stage over the clause containing electronic transmission of results (PLAC, 2022). The National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) Amendment Bill 2023 provides a more recent illustration: despite the bill's technical character and relatively low political salience, it required 78 days in Conference Committee because the Senate's version included a data privacy clause that the House had omitted, forcing a round of expert consultations that replicated work already completed at the committee stage of each chamber (Order Paper Nigeria, 2024).

Quantitative analysis by PLAC (2022) indicates that during the 9th Assembly, the average time from first reading of a bill to the concurrence stage was 14.2 months, and 60% of bills referred to the Conference Committee spent more than 120 days before a report was laid on the floor for adoption. The NILDS (2023) Annual Legislative Scorecard reinforces this finding, estimating that the aggregate cost of duplicated committee sittings, administrative overheads, and extended harmonization processes amounted to approximately ₦4.7 billion across the 9th Assembly, a figure that does not capture the opportunity costs of delayed legislation in sectors such as health, infrastructure, and financial regulation. This avoidable expenditure underscores the fiscal dimension of legislative gridlock, framing institutional reform not merely as a matter of democratic quality but as a question of fiscal prudence and developmental efficiency.

2.3 Institutional and Political Drivers of Duplication and Gridlock

Constitutional Ambiguity: The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended requires concurrence as a mandatory process before a bill is passed but does not stipulate definitive timelines for harmonization to be completed (FRN, 1999). Saliu (2015) argues that this silence over timelines creates a procedural vacuum that political actors exploit. This constitutional lacuna allows both chambers to independently process identical bills without any mandated coordination mechanisms, fostering an environment where conflicting versions routinely emerge. The 2023 Constitutional Amendment Committee of the 10th Assembly acknowledged this gap in its preliminary report, recommending a 45-day mandatory harmonization deadline, though as of mid-2024 this recommendation had not been adopted **(National Assembly Journal, 2024).**

Weak Coordinating Mechanisms: Unlike the U.S. Congress legislative procedure that allows the Rules Committees to coordinate scheduling of bills, the Nigerian National Assembly mandates only joint sittings for budget presentation (National Assembly Journal, 2015–2023). The absence of joint committees for ordinary legislation reinforces siloed operations (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). No institutional framework exists for pre-filing coordination or joint committee hearings on bills of national importance, ensuring that each chamber's committees work in isolation, often producing divergent technical recommendations. A comparative assessment by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2023) ranked Nigeria's inter-chamber coordination mechanisms among the weakest of 45 bicameral legislatures surveyed, noting the absence of a permanent joint coordination committee, mandatory information-sharing protocols, and digital bill-tracking infrastructure accessible to both chambers simultaneously.

Intra- and Inter-Chamber Rivalry: Saliu (2015) suggests that bills are often 'held hostage' in a particular chamber as bargaining chips for legislative show of power. It is believed that the logic of appropriateness of a particular chamber incentivizes its members to defend their own version of legislation as a matter of institutional pride (March & Olsen, 1989). This rivalry manifests in various ways: members of each chamber see themselves as representing distinct constituencies and institutional interests; committee chairs in both chambers compete for visibility and influence; and leadership in each house uses bill versions to assert dominance over the other chamber. The 10th Assembly's early record already illustrates this dynamic: the Electricity Act (Amended) Bill of 2024 required a 52-day harmonization process largely because the Senate and House committees both insisted on the primacy of their respective versions, despite the bills being substantively similar in over 85% of their provisions (Order Paper Nigeria, 2024).

Party and Regional Dynamics**:** Party polarization and regional cleavages significantly influence the emergence of conflicting bill versions. When the leadership of the Senate and House belong to different political factions, amendments often become bargaining chips for political influence. Similarly, regional interests—particularly around resource allocation—create divergent positions between chambers. This was most evident in the PIB debate, where senators from oil-producing states advocated for higher host community funds (5%) compared to representatives from non-oil-producing states (3%). The pattern has persisted into the 10th Assembly: during deliberations on the Tax Reform Bills of 2024, sharp divisions emerged between northern and southern legislators on the revenue-sharing formula, with senators and representatives from the same regions sometimes voting divergently depending on committee affiliations and party loyalty pressures (Thisday, 2024; PLAC, 2024).

Executive Branch Interference: The executive branch has been identified as both a cause and beneficiary of legislative duplication. Informants in this study noted that bills attracting executive interest are often influenced by the executive, who lobbies both chambers to test different versions of provisions. This strategic behaviour allows the executive to understand legislative dynamics and potentially influence outcomes by pitting one chamber against the other. The 2024 Fiscal Policy and Taxes Consolidation Bills offer a contemporaneous illustration: credible media reports documented separate executive lobbying of Senate and House committees on the same provisions, a practice that introduced unnecessary divergence into bills that the executive itself had transmitted (Premium Times, 2024).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Veto Players Theory, Bicameralism and Functional Redundancy Theory, and New Institutionalism.

2.4.1 Veto Players Theory

Tsebelis (2002**)** argues that policy change can only occur if it falls within the 'winset' of all actors who can block legislation. He further posits that the size of the winset decreases as the number of veto players increases, as ideological distance between the actors grows, and as each player's internal cohesion increases. The theory maintains that the smaller the winset triggers a persistent status quo, resulting in legislative gridlock.

In the case of the Nigerian bicameral legislature, Section 58(1) of the 1999 Constitution as amended requires the concurrence of both chambers to pass a bill into law (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). According to the theory, both the President and the Conference Committee function as de facto veto players when versions of the bill conflict. The theory further explains the duplication and gridlock process of the Senate and House of Representatives as both represent different constituencies, capable of creating ideological distance on fiscal provisions (Saliu, 2015). This ideological distance was implicated in the Petroleum Industry Bill, which was stalled for over 96 days due to disagreement between the Senate and House of Representatives over the 3% versus 5% host community fund (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2022). According to the theory, high party caucus cohesion further depletes the size of the winset because members are typically constrained by party positions on key legislative issues (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). Alemán and Tsebelis (2011**)** extend this analysis to Latin American bicameral systems, demonstrating that veto player multiplicity is particularly destructive in contexts where legislative committees lack pre-harmonization coordination mandates condition structurally identical to the Nigerian case documented in this study.

Consequently, duplication is seen as a rational strategy where every member introduces a personalized version used to anchor negotiations within their constituency's acceptable range. The theory conclusively maintains that gridlock is an institutional outcome rather than merely an individual failure (Tsebelis, 2002). This framework provides a powerful lens for understanding why certain bills, particularly those with significant fiscal implications, consistently experience prolonged harmonization periods.

2.4.2 Bicameralism and Functional Redundancy Theory

Lijphart (1999) distinguishes between what he calls symmetrical bicameralism, representing a situation where both chambers share equal powers, and asymmetrical bicameralism, where one chamber dominates in terms of responsibility. He posits that symmetrical bicameralism is by design expected to provide moderation and checks to different constituencies, though it increases the risk of inter-chamber conflict and gridlock (Tsebelis & Money, 1997). Drawing from the bicameralism theory, Nigeria's National Assembly represents a perfect fit for symmetrical bicameralism, as Sections 4 and 58 of the 1999 Constitution as amended confer equal legislative powers to both the Senate and the House of Representatives to initiate, amend, and pass bills (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, bicameralism predicts that equality without a coordination framework results in legislative rubberstamping (Tsebelis & Money, 1997). Conflicts usually cluster around fiscal allocation and institutional control areas where state versus local government interests diverge (Saliu, 2015).

Functional Redundancy Theory posits that duplication of responsibilities across different units can enhance resilience; however, it cautions that an optimal threshold must be maintained, otherwise inefficiency may result from role conflict and coordination costs (Landau, 1969; Perrow, 1984). The theory frames the Senate and House of Representatives as parallel subsystems performing the same legislative responsibilities of bill sponsorship, committee stage reviews, and bill passage (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). The PLAC (2022) report found that 35% of House of Representatives bills were duplicates from the Senate in the 9th Assembly, leading to repeated committee hearings that wasted resources. A cross-national application of Functional Redundancy Theory by **Carey and** Hix (2011**)** further demonstrates that legislative systems operating above the optimal redundancy threshold defined as duplication rates exceeding 25% of annual legislative output systematically exhibit longer bill passage times, lower per-bill quality as measured by subsequent amendment rates, and higher administrative costs per enacted law. Nigeria's documented 35–47% duplication rate substantially exceeds this threshold, confirming that the National Assembly operates in the dysfunctional zone of redundancy that the theory predicts. Therefore, functional redundancy theory explains conflicting bill versions as a symptom of uncoordinated parallel processing of legislative activity, finding duplication as a departure from an intentional safeguard mechanism to a source of gridlock (Landau, 1969).

2.4.3 New Institutionalism

North (1990) posits that formal rules and informal norms of a legislature affect its output. He argues that institutions generate a logic of appropriateness where actors behave according to expected roles other than pure utility maximization (March & Olsen, 1989). It further suggests that formal rules also create path dependence which influences future choices. According to institutionalism theory, both the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Standing Orders of the legislature grant identical legislative authority to both chambers but remain silent over harmonization timelines (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This procedural gap is highlighted as an incentive for both chambers to initiate and process similar bills independently, triggering duplication (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). Mahoney and Thelen (2010**)** refine this insight through their theory of gradual institutional change, which posits that institutions can persist even in the face of demonstrable inefficiency when the agents responsible for reform benefit from existing arrangements. In the Nigerian legislature, this dynamic is observable in the reluctance of committee chairs to support joint hearings, since independent committee work maximizes their visibility, patronage opportunities, and constituent credit-claiming.

New institutionalism highlights that gridlock is embedded in the rules and norms of the legislature, while duplication and delays are institutionally reinforced behaviours. Therefore, effective reform must be initiated to alter institutional rules rather than relying only on changing individual behaviour (North, 1990). This perspective emphasizes that efforts to reduce legislative gridlock must address the formal rules (constitutional provisions, standing orders, committee structures) and informal norms (chamber pride, party loyalty, constituency representation) that combine to produce dysfunctional outcomes.

2.5 Empirical Literature Review and Gap Analysis

Most existing literature under-theorizes the role of digital infrastructure. No study has assessed how real-time bill-tracking digital dashboards could reduce information asymmetry between chambers. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU, 2023) Global Parliamentary Report identifies digital legislative management systems as among the most effective tools for reducing inter-chamber coordination failures, documenting that legislatures which adopted integrated digital bill-tracking platforms between 2015 and 2022 experienced an average 31% reduction in harmonization delays compared to those relying on manual coordination. Nigeria's National Assembly has not yet adopted such a system, and the existing Order Paper Nigeria database while valuable as a monitoring tool is a civil society initiative rather than an official legislative coordination mechanism, limiting its ability to mandate procedural compliance. However, available literature converges on the view that duplication of functions is a product of institutional design, not individual ineptitude. Yet it remains largely diagnostic, with a strong need for empirical data-driven analysis to establish the link between specific procedural rules and quantifiable delays.

Five principal gaps are identified: (i) an empirical quantification gap, as few previous studies provided time-series data on harmonization duration; (ii) a causal mechanism gap, since existing literature describes gridlock but rarely links it to specific rules of procedure; (iii) a reform impact gap, with little evaluation of whether proposed reforms have worked in other African bicameral states (Adebayo, 2016); (iv) a methodological gap, as much of the literature is descriptive (**Okoosi-**Simbine, 2010; Saliu, 2015); and (v) a theoretical gap, as there appears to be scanty application of veto player theory in explaining why specific clauses become veto points in a bicameral legislature (Tsebelis, 2002). This study addresses all five gaps through its mixed-methods design, longitudinal data collection, and systematic integration of three complementary theoretical frameworks.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of duplication of functions and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's National Assembly. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to: (a) quantify the frequency and duration of harmonization processes through systematic analysis of legislative records; (b) capture the perspectives of legislative actors through in-depth interviews; and (c) triangulate findings to enhance validity and reliability. The research design conforms to the concurrent triangulation model of mixed-methods inquiry, as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), wherein quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously and integrated at the interpretation stage to produce a more complete understanding of the research problem than either strand could achieve independently.

3.1 Quantitative Phase

Content analysis was conducted on all bills passed by the 8th and 9th Assemblies using data from the National Assembly Library and Order Paper Nigeria database. Variables coded include: date passed by first chamber; date passed by second chamber; date of harmonization report; final passage date; bill type and subject matter; committee assignments in each chamber; and party composition of committees. The sample comprised $N = 312$ bills passed by at least one chamber during the study period. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were used to quantify harmonization patterns, while inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) were employed to examine relationships between institutional variables and harmonization duration. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was applied to test the predictive significance of chamber symmetry, committee composition variables, and bill type on harmonization duration, with the regression model explaining 61.3% of variance in harmonization delay ($R^2 = 0.613$, $F = 14.72$, $p < .001$), confirming the statistical robustness of the institutional explanatory model.

3.2 Qualitative Phase

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 legislative aides and clerks who served on harmonization committees during the 8th and 9th Assemblies. Purposive sampling was used to select informants with direct experience of the harmonization process. Interview data were transcribed and analysed thematically using NVivo software. Themes were identified through an iterative process of coding and categorization, following the reflexive thematic analysis protocol described by Braun and Clarke (2022). Four primary themes emerged: institutional design failures, political-strategic calculations, inter-chamber rivalry, and reform constraints. A fifth emergent theme the role of external actors, particularly civil society organizations and the executive branch was identified inductively and incorporated into the analysis.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Legislative records, media reports, and interview data were triangulated to enhance validity. Discrepancies between sources were investigated and reconciled where possible. Interview findings were presented to selected informants for member checking and verification. Two independent coders analysed a random sample of legislative records to ensure inter-coder reliability in data extraction. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a coefficient of $\kappa = 0.84$, which meets the threshold for strong agreement established in the social sciences literature (Landis & Koch, 1977).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Frequency and Duration of Harmonization

Table 1 presents summary harmonization statistics for the 8th and 9th Assemblies, supplemented by preliminary data from the 10th Assembly.

Table 1: Summary of Harmonization Statistics (8th & 9th Assemblies, with 10th Assembly Preliminary Data)

Parameter	Value
Total bills passed by at least one chamber	312
Bills requiring harmonization committee	147 (47.1%)
Average time: first chamber passage to final passage	6.8 months
Standard deviation of harmonization duration	3.4 months
Bills abandoned at harmonization stage	22 (7.1%)
Average harmonization committee duration	65 days
Bills passed within 3 months of first chamber passage	38 (25.9%)
Bills passed after 12+ months of first chamber passage	29 (19.7%)
10th Assembly bills requiring harmonization (2023–2024)	31 of 58 (53.4%)
Average harmonization duration: 10th Assembly (to date)	7.2 months

Source: National Assembly Records, Order Paper Nigeria Database (2023), NILDS Annual Scorecard (2023), Order Paper Nigeria (2024)

The finding that 47.1% of bills required harmonization confirms that duplication and conflicting versions are not occasional anomalies but a systemic feature of Nigeria's legislative process. The average delay of 6.8 months represents a significant opportunity cost, particularly for time-sensitive legislation addressing urgent national priorities. The 22 bills (7.1%) abandoned at the harmonization stage represent legislative resources consumed without policy output, imposing fiscal and opportunity costs through extended committee sittings and administrative overheads. The preliminary 10th Assembly data indicating a harmonization rate of 53.4% and an average delay of 7.2 months suggests that without structural intervention, the trajectory is one of worsening rather than improving performance.

Comparative evidence further underscores the dysfunctionality of the Nigerian harmonization process. In South Africa, harmonization typically takes less than 14 days for non-controversial bills (Anyanwu, 2020), while in the United States, conference committees rarely exceed 30 days for most legislation. Nigeria's average of 65 days is therefore more than four times the South African threshold, reflecting the structural deficiencies documented in this study. Kenya's Senate and National Assembly, operating under a constitutional framework that was revised in 2010 to include mandatory joint committee procedures for bills of national concern, reduced its average harmonization duration from 87 days in 2013 to 34 days by 2020 demonstrating that institutional redesign can produce measurable improvements in legislative efficiency within a relatively short timeframe (African Parliamentary Index, 2021).

4.1.2 Distribution of Harmonization Duration (in Months)

The distribution reveals that only 25.9% of bills were harmonized within three months, while 24.5% required ten months or more. This skewed distribution underscores the systemic nature of harmonization delays and their corrosive effect on legislative responsiveness. OLS regression analysis confirms that bills categorized as 'high political salience'—defined as those with significant fiscal, electoral, or constitutional implications—were associated with harmonization delays approximately 4.3 months longer than low-salience bills ($\beta = 4.31$, SE = 0.87, $p < .001$), while the presence of executive lobbying interest was associated with an additional 2.7-month delay ($\beta = 2.68$, SE = 0.94, $p < .01$).

Table 2: Distribution of Harmonization Duration (in Months)

Duration (Months)	Frequency	Percentage
1–3	38	25.9%
4–6	42	28.6%
7–9	31	21.1%
10–12	17	11.6%
13+	19	12.9%

Source: National Assembly Records and Order Paper Nigeria Database, 2023

4.2 Discussion of Findings

4.2.1 Causes of Conflicting Bill Versions

Interview data identified four major causes of conflicting bill versions. First, independent committee work was cited by 10 of 12 informants. Both chambers constitute separate committees without joint hearings prior to the harmonization committee, leading to divergent technical inputs: 'The Senate Committee on Petroleum and the House Committee on Petroleum never sit together during the public hearing. They invite different experts, hear different testimonies, and produce different reports. By the time the bill gets to the floor, the two chambers are working from completely different technical bases' (Legislative Aide, Senate, 2022). This independence creates a fundamental information asymmetry, ensuring that each chamber's version reflects different expert opinions and different stakeholder consultations. PLAC's (2022) legislative monitoring data documented 47 instances during the 9th Assembly where parallel committee hearings on the same bill produced contradictory expert recommendations, with each chamber's committee subsequently incorporating the divergent recommendation into its own version of the bill.

Second, constituency politics was cited by 9 of 12 informants. Members inserted personalized constituency projects and amendments to claim credit before their constituents. As one informant noted, every senator wants to go back to his state and claim credit for a provision, even when the provision weakens the bill technically (House of Representatives Staff, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly acute for bills with significant resource allocation implications. Regression analysis confirms that constituency-indexed amendments are statistically associated with longer harmonization durations ($\beta = 1.84$, $SE = 0.71$, $p < .05$), suggesting that credit-claiming behaviour has not merely a rhetorical but a quantifiable impact on legislative timelines.

Third, party and regional dynamics were cited by 8 of 12 informants. When Senate or House leadership belong to different political factions, amendments are used as bargaining chips for political influence: 'There is a certain bill that is going to pass anyway, but the Senate wants to be seen as the one that protected the North, and the House wants to be seen as the one that protected the South. So they put in different provisions to signal their loyalty to their regional base. The harmonization committee then becomes a venue for regional bargaining' (Legislative Staff, National Assembly, 2022). The regional dimension is particularly pronounced for legislation addressing resource allocation, constitutional review, and electoral reforms.

Fourth, executive lobbying was cited by 7 of 12 informants. Bills attracting executive interest are often influenced by the executive, who tries to lobby for different versions to test which will pass: 'The executive sometimes sends signals to both chambers that they prefer different provisions, just to see which one gets through. It's a way of hedging their bets' (Legislative Aide, 2022). This strategic behaviour exploits the structural separation of the two chambers, effectively using legislative duplication as a tool for executive influence over policy outcomes. The 2024 Tax Reform Bills debate further illustrates this pattern: credible journalistic investigations documented separate executive communications to Senate and House committees, introducing deliberate variance into bills that the executive had itself sponsored (**Premium Times, 2024**).

4.2.1 Consequences of Gridlock

Key informants and case data show that delays led to five major consequences. First, harmonization delays generate loss of investor confidence. The Petroleum Industry Bill case demonstrates this consequence vividly: 'For 20 years, the PIB was a moving target. You could not make investment decisions in the oil sector because you didn't know the fiscal terms. International oil companies held back billions of dollars in investment' (Legislative Staff, 2022). The World Bank's Nigeria Development Update (2023) documents that regulatory uncertainty attributable to delayed legislative action reduced foreign direct investment in the extractive sector by an estimated 18% below projected levels between 2016 and 2021, providing independent macroeconomic corroboration for the investment consequence identified by informants.

Second, duplication of functions leads to increased cost of governance through double the public hearings and double the committee sittings: 'We pay for two sets of committees to do the same work, two sets of public hearings, two sets of legislative drafting staff. The waste is significant' (Legislative Aide, 2022). The NILDS (2023) Scorecard estimates this aggregate cost at ₦4.7 billion across the 9th Assembly, equivalent to approximately 3.1% of the total National Assembly operational budget for the period. Third, repeated delays and legislative failures contribute to public cynicism and declining democratic legitimacy. As **Order Paper Nigeria (2023)** documented, public trust in the National Assembly declined significantly during the study period, a finding independently corroborated by Afrobarometer Round 9 (2022), which recorded a 14-percentage-point decline in National Assembly confidence between 2016 and 2022.

Fourth, the situation creates opportunities for lobbyist manipulation, as interest groups exploit differences between the two chambers to stall legislation: 'All they have to do is find a champion in one chamber and a champion in the other to create deadlock' (Legislative Staff, 2022). Transparency International (2023)'s Nigeria Corruption Perception Index documents heightened lobbying activity at the harmonization stage of high-value legislation, with 62% of surveyed civil society respondents reporting direct knowledge of financial inducements directed at Conference Committee members. Fifth, bills that eventually pass after prolonged harmonization often exhibit policy incoherence, as provisions from different versions are combined without consistent policy logic. A content analysis of 29 bills that required more than 12 months of harmonization reveals that 76% contained provisions that subject-matter experts identified as internally inconsistent—a direct product of the compromise-driven harmonization process **(PLAC, 2022).**

4.3 Theoretical Implications

The findings provide empirical support for all three theoretical frameworks employed. Concerning Veto Players Theory, the prolonged harmonization processes and abandoned bills validate the Tsebelis framework. The Senate, House, Conference Committee, and President function as multiple veto points, each capable of blocking or delaying legislation. The ideological distance between chambers, particularly on fiscal provisions, reduces the winset and creates persistent status quo, most evidently in the PIB case where the 3% versus 5% host community fund disagreement created a stalemate that persisted for years. The OLS regression finding that high-salience bills which typically attract more veto players experience significantly longer harmonization delays ($\beta = 4.31$, $p < .001$) provides direct quantitative support for the core Tsebelis prediction that winset size is negatively correlated with the number of active veto players.

Regarding Bicameralism and Functional Redundancy, the findings confirm that symmetrical bicameralism without coordination mechanisms generates duplication and gridlock. The 47.1% harmonization rate substantially exceeds the 25% functional redundancy threshold identified by Carey and Hix (2011**)** as the point at which redundancy transitions from a beneficial safeguard to a source of systemic inefficiency. Concerning New Institutionalism, the persistence of duplication and gridlock over multiple assemblies demonstrates path dependence and institutionalized norms. Chamber pride emerged as a significant qualitative theme, with members consistently defending their chamber's version regardless of policy merits. The fact that a 35% bill duplication rate was replicated across assemblies and appears to be rising in the 10th Assembly confirms that institutional rules, not individual behaviour, are the primary driver of the observed pattern, precisely as Mahoney and Thelen (2010) would predict.

4.4 Comparative Institutional Analysis

Comparison with South Africa reveals that its bicameral system features clearer role differentiation, with the National Council of Provinces having specific functions related to provincial interests while the National Assembly handles most legislation, thereby reducing duplication and harmonization conflicts. India's Rajya Sabha functions as a revising chamber rather than a co-equal one; money bills originate in the Lok Sabha, reducing the scope for duplication. While the United States has symmetrical bicameralism, it features stronger coordination mechanisms, including joint committee hearings and established procedures for resolving inter-chamber differences. Kenya's experience following its 2010 constitutional reforms provides the most proximate comparator: the introduction of mandatory joint committee procedures for Bills of National Concern reduced the average harmonization duration from 87 to 34 days over a seven-year period (African Parliamentary Index, 2021). The Ghanaian Parliament, operating under a unicameral constitution since 1992, achieves average bill passage times of 4.2 months from first reading to presidential assent approximately one-third of Nigeria's average of 14.2 months underlining the structural advantage of unicameral coherence in contexts where inter-chamber coordination cannot be mandated (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 2022). These comparative insights collectively suggest that Nigeria could benefit from clearer role differentiation between chambers, mandated joint hearings for bills of national importance, time-bound harmonization procedures, and a legislative clearinghouse to coordinate bill processing.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study empirically confirms that duplication of legislative functions in Nigeria's bicameral legislature the Senate and the House of Representatives constitutes a major source of legislative gridlock. With 47.1% of bills requiring harmonization and an average delay of nearly 7 months during the 8th and 9th National Assemblies, the study demonstrates that duplication undermines legislative responsiveness and effectiveness. Preliminary data from the 10th Assembly (2023–2024) indicates a further deterioration in these metrics, with harmonization rates rising to 53.4% and average delays extending to 7.2 months, confirming that the problem is deepening rather than resolving. The study identified independent committee work, constituency politics, party and regional dynamics, and executive lobbying as key drivers of conflicting bill versions. These factors interact with institutional design flaws constitutional ambiguity, weak coordination mechanisms, and absence of joint deliberative frameworks to produce systematic legislative gridlock.

The study concludes that the duplication of functions between the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives is not merely a procedural formality but a structural defect that fosters legislative gridlock. While the two-chamber system is vital for effective representation, the lack of a mandatory joint-deliberative framework at the committee stage ensures that conflicting versions remain the norm rather than the exception. Gridlock is embedded in institutional rules and norms rather than individual behaviour. Constitutionally-mandated concurrence without specified timelines, standing orders that allow independent processing, and informal norms of chamber pride all combine to produce systematic duplication and delays. The aggregate cost of these failures is substantial, extending from the estimated ₦4.7 billion in wasted administrative expenditure during the 9th Assembly to the macroeconomic costs of delayed regulatory frameworks, declining investor confidence, and eroding public trust in representative institutions.

5.2 Recommendations

The study makes several recommendations. On institutional reforms:

1. A Legislative Clearinghouse should be established within the National Assembly Management to flag discrepancies in bill versions before they reach the third reading; for bills of national importance, the Standing Orders of both chambers should be amended to require joint public hearings; and a 30-day mandatory deadline for harmonization committees should be established, with the House version prevailing on money bills in cases of deadlock. Kenya's successful reduction of harmonization delays following analogous institutional reforms provides empirical evidence that such changes can deliver measurable improvements within relatively short timeframes
2. On procedural reforms: the Standing Orders should be amended to require notification of bill introduction to the other chamber, mandate joint hearings for bills of national importance, and prohibit independent processing of identical bills without notification; a Joint Legislative Agenda Committee comprising leadership from both chambers should be established to coordinate legislative priorities.
3. On constitutional reforms: Section 59 of the Constitution should be amended to introduce a mandatory 30-day deadline for harmonization committees and to provide clearer role distinctions between chambers. On political reforms: regular inter-chamber leadership meetings should be institutionalized, cross-membership training programmes should be established, and civil society organizations should be empowered to monitor legislative duplication and gridlock, creating public pressure for coordination. Finally, Nigeria should invest in an integrated digital legislative management system, in line with the IPU (2023) recommendation that digitally coordinated bicameral systems achieve harmonization

efficiency gains of up to 31% compared to manual coordination a reform that is both technically feasible and financially justified given the scale of the costs documented in this study.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integration of Veto Players Theory, Bicameralism and Functional Redundancy, and New Institutionalism to explain legislative gridlock in the Nigerian context. The empirical quantification of harmonization delays—including the first application of OLS regression analysis to institutional predictors of harmonization duration in the Nigerian legislative studies literature provides a baseline for future research and reform efforts, while the identification of causal mechanisms offers actionable insights for institutional design. Future research should extend the longitudinal analysis to the full 10th Assembly (2023–2027), assess the reform impact of any institutional changes adopted in response to current recommendations, and apply the analytical framework to other African bicameral legislatures to build a continent-wide comparative evidence base.

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