



The seal of office of the
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

THE PRESIDENT OF NIGERIA

The office of the president of Nigeria is a highly important one. Understanding the office and its role is one step toward ensuring that only capable and productive presidential candidates aspire and fill the office. Filling the position responsibly requires much deliberation, scrutiny and a sense of patriotism and pride from Nigerian citizens. The reason is that the office, among other things, represents and drives the vision of the country and its 150 million people. Consequently, the election of a Nigerian president **must not** be driven by sectarian interest or a desire to reflect federal character. It must be fuelled and powered by a hunger, on the part of the Nigerian people to join the world community of progressive and prosperous nations.

A blind and weak president equals a weak, myopic and poverty stricken nation. The president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria must command legitimacy through voting and selection by the people on the basis of “dazzling charisma, qualities, skills, exposure, talents, knowledge and strength” (Onikoy Jr). His political, leadership and organisational skills coupled with his emotional intelligence must be outstanding. A great president shapes a great nation.

The constitution (Section 130.1) of Nigeria establishes an executive branch of the government headed by a president. This means that the executive powers of the Federal Republic Nigeria is vested in the president. The President, Senate and the House of Representatives govern the country. Ideally, this system works to give the President just enough power to govern the nation without so much he forgets his position as a servant of the people. Of course, a number of limits are placed on the presidency. For example:

- The National Assembly may override presidential vetoes.
- The Senate must approve presidential appointments apart from appointments relating to the chairman or member of the Council of State or the National Defence Council or the National Security Council (section 154.2).

- The president serves only a four-year term and is limited to two terms in office.
- A president also may be impeached — that is, brought up on formal charges — by the House of Representatives and removed from office if convicted in the Senate.

The oath of office is administered by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and reads:

“I do solemnly swear/affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria; that as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, I will discharge my duties to the best of my ability, faithfully and in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the law, and always in the interest of the sovereignty, integrity, solidarity, well-being and prosperity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; that I will strive to preserve the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; that I will not allow my personal interest to influence my official conduct or my official decisions; that I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; that I will abide by the Code of Conduct contained in the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; that in all circumstances, I will do right to all manner of people, according to law, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will; that I will not directly or indirectly communicate or reveal to any person any matter which shall be brought under my consideration or shall become known to me as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, except as may be required for the due discharge of my duties as President; and that I will devote myself to the service and well-being of the people of Nigeria. So help me God”.

Adhering to the terms and declarations of this oath is the difference between the success and failure of a president. It is equally the difference between a progressive and a failed state. The stage Nigeria is today in developmental and security terms is a vivid evidence of the level of compliance to the declarations in the oath of office by past and present holders of the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The office is addressed as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT

The powers of the president, as in the USA, are not limited to those granted in the Constitution. Presidential authority has expanded through the concept of inherent powers as well as through legislative action.

Treaty power

The president is authorised to negotiate treaties on behalf of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with other nations. Such formal international agreements do not go into effect, however, until ratified by a vote in the Senate.

Appointment power

The president is responsible for the selection of officials to serve the government in a wide range of offices: most important among them are ambassadors, members of the Supreme Court and the federal courts, and cabinet secretaries. Most of these positions require confirmation (approval) by the Senate under the "advice and consent" provision of the Constitution.

Unlike the Aso Rock presidential staff positions or ambassadorships, cabinet appointments are not usually based on a personal relationship with the president or given as a reward. The president should base the selections on **reputation**, **expertise**, and **ability** to manage a large bureaucracy. Appointments are also an opportunity for a president to show that the administration represents a broad cross section of the country by including ethnic minorities and women in the cabinet.

Legislative powers

The president is authorized to propose legislation. Despite his powers, a president cannot write bills. The president has the power of veto power. It is an important check on the National Assembly. If the president rejects a bill, it will take a two-thirds vote of both houses, which can be difficult to achieve, to accomplish a veto override.

Inherent powers

Inherent powers are those that can be inferred from the Constitution. For example, in conducting foreign policy, a president may sign executive agreements with other countries that do not require Senate action. In USA for example and under such instances, The Supreme Court ruled that such agreements are within the inherent powers of the president. Inherent powers allow a president to respond swiftly to a crisis.

The president enjoys executive privilege also such as deciding when information developed within the executive branch would not be released to the National Assembly or the courts. "A claim of executive privilege is based on the separation of powers, the need to protect diplomatic and military secrets, and the notion that people around the president must feel free to give candid advice".

Delegation of powers

The president may also be granted the power to deal with domestic policy. For example in the USA, President Franklin Roosevelt asked for and received extraordinary authority to do what he thought was necessary to bring the country out of the Depression. President Bush and Obama also received broad powers to

address problems such as education, recession, welfare, the environment, and, most recently, homeland security. The trend throughout the 20th century has been to increase presidential powers at the expense of Congress or National Assembly.

The Function of the President

The president is expected to perform several duties as part of the office. While the Constitution mentions several of these duties, others have evolved over time. How a president carries out these functions depends on his personality, as well as on his view of the presidency and the role of government and the nature of the problems facing the country at the time.

Modern presidents usually take a leadership approach to their job. They consider themselves representatives of all the people, put in place to pursue a political agenda by using their inherent powers.

Commander in chief

The president is the highest-ranking officer in the armed services. As noted previously, presidents have shown no hesitation in filling this role by sending Nigerian armed forces on peace keeping missions to trouble spots in Africa and beyond as an instrument of foreign policy.

Chief of state

Acting as chief of state is a president's most visible role, whether meeting the heads of other countries, welcoming Nigerian sportsmen and women to the state house (Asu Rock), or opening major national events. Although largely ceremonial, the role of chief of state makes an important statement to the world and the nation about the president as a leader.

Diplomat

The president not only decides the direction of Nigerian foreign policy but also plays an important role in carrying it out. During various crisis in Africa e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leon, Kenya, Zimbabwe, the Nigerian president has contributed in peace mediation directly or indirectly by giving weight to African Union efforts.

Chief executive

The president is the chief administrator, or chief bureaucrat, of the nation and is ultimately responsible for all the programs in the executive branch. His is responsible for seeing that "all laws are faithfully executed," and sets the broad policy for the executive departments and agencies rather than managing their day-to-day operations.

Legislator

A president does not simply propose legislation but is actively involved in seeing that it becomes law. His job is to approve the laws that have been created. When the Senate and the House approve a bill, they send it to the President. If he agrees with the law, he signs it and the law goes into effect.

The Asu Rock staffs maintain close contacts with the House and the Senate, while the president meets with Senators to press for passage of bills and calls individual members of the Senate to ask for their vote. In instances of a divided government, in which the Asu Rock and the Senate are controlled by different political parties, the president can appeal directly to the people for support.

Moral leader

The president is expected to set the moral tone for the nation, including exemplary honesty, religious faith, virtue, fidelity, loyalty and integrity. The question of a president's moral leadership will assume new importance in the near future when the media and public start giving the private lives of the elected officials' closer scrutiny, as they should. The "character issue" is frequently included in public opinion polls on a president's performance in the developed countries of Europe, USA and Asia.

Character is extremely important in persons occupying public office for the following reasons:

- i. There will be more consistency in government policy. A man of good character cannot be compromised in his decision-making process.
- ii. He is less likely to be impaired by errant behaviour. He can be relied upon for integrity in all his relationships, either inward or outward looking.
- iii. Honesty and integrity mean that we will know where a man in office stands at all times, i.e. reliability. The people can rely upon the decisions made and the actions taken as straightforward and in their best interests.
- iv. People of good character are less likely to yield to pressure from special interest groups and make decisions which will act to the detriment of the majority of our citizens.
- v. A character defect is all-pervasive in the sense that it impacts the personal life and political life as well; you cannot arbitrarily say that a man can be dishonest and immoral in his personal life and honest and moral in the exercise of his official duties as a government official. On the contrary, his character colours all aspects of his thinking and of his life. We cannot permit persons with multiple standards to occupy offices of public trust.

Party leader

In addition to performing clearly governmental functions, the president serves as the "titular head" of a political party. A president is expected to support the party's platform, help raise money for the party and campaign for the party's candidates.

