

# Politics and Politicking: The Undoing of Effective Public Administration in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Public Administration, as an institution, is primarily the arm of government that is concerned with the implementation of government policies and programmes. Politics and politicking as the practice of determining resource allocation within a polity has been practiced with attendant negative consequences that have impacted on the practice of public administration in Nigeria and has made it less effective. From resource allocations to state/local government creations and social violence arising from conflicts of political interests and supporters, politics in Nigeria has become the undoing of the practice of public administration in Nigeria. It is however recommended that with improved welfare for the public servants, a re-orientation of politics in practice and a reinforced political neutrality of the public servants, there would be hope for improved service delivery and image cleansing of the Nigerian public service.

## INTRODUCTION

Public Administration is primarily concerned with the management of man, materials and money for effective distribution of goods and services for the people. Politics and politicking are concerned with the authoritative allocation of the resources which public administrators need to achieve their goals.

The persistent underdevelopment of Nigeria, particularly the rural areas and lack of efficiency in the general distribution of goods and services in the country has been attributed to the inefficiency of the public service. The 1989 World Bank Report on Sub-Saharan Africa stated that ‘underlying the litany of Africa’s development problems is the crisis of governance’. Governance connotes the exercise of legitimate political power to manage the nation’s affairs. The arbitrary use of power arising from non-legitimate possession of political power and the attendant politicking over resources meant for development and social services has resulted in the state of poor performance of the nation’s public service.

The position of this paper is not that the public service (Public Administration) is not effective per se but that it has been placed under situations that make its performance less effective.

This paper therefore focuses on how politics and politicking has become the bane of effective public administration in Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Politics is the general process of carrying out the business of the government. It is the theory and practice of government, especially the activities associated with governing, obtaining legislative and executive powers or forming and running organs connected with government (Encarta Dictionary, 2009). Marx Weber defines politics as the struggle for power. Harold Lasswell defines it as the game of who gets what, when and how of the public resources. David Easton on the other hand sees politics as the authoritative allocation of values for the general benefit of all.

Politicking is associated with Karl Marx’s notion of politics as essentially a class struggle between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. Politicking is the intricate web of deciding who gets what, when and how. It is politicking therefore that results in the tangibility of resource distribution and policy formulation and implementation in a given nation.

Public Administration is the management of the affairs of public organizations for the public good. It is the conduct of government business carried out by public officers in the ministries and government-owned public companies, Boards and Corporations.

## EFFECT OF POLITICS ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Politics in Nigeria since independence has witnessed the ascendance of the politically strong at the local, states and federal levels of governance. The political parties in power and by extension the politicians in power do not necessarily possess any concrete ideological attractions or identifiable manifestoes as springboards to power. Those that have occupied positions of power at the three tiers of government can therefore not lay claims to any superiority of ideas or good visions except that they had won elections as party members. The consequence is that there has been on the throne, a corps of rulers that lack utopia, vision or great dreams to pursue. This has had negative impact on the citizenry and in particular, the public service that would have no dreams on which to make policies or implement viable programmes. The public servants became advisers to vision-less leaders and

so the job of public administration became dull, routine and untasking.

Following closely to this is that many Nigerian political leaders at the regional/state and local councils where most Nigerians look up to, for concrete provision of goods and services have no particular ability except that of election rigging. In power therefore they cannot deliver the expectations of the people. They specialise in personal enrichment and distribution of political largesse. Appointments to public offices under these leaders have therefore taken the shape of patron-client relationships of putting square pegs in round hole. As Amuwo (1996) puts, it matters little whether or not the appointees perform. Indeed, the criteria for performance has nothing to do with how well or badly the job is done but how much material self-actualisation the appointees and their political god-fathers have attained. The Public Administrators cannot control these politicians and so there has been a steady decline in the performances of this programme-implementation arm of the government.

The political class has failed to keep the sovereign obligation that they owe the citizenry by abandoning what electoral promises they made during their campaigns. As aptly put by Shakespeare (1981 ed) in *Macbeth* :

*'That patter with us in a double sense  
That keep the word of promise in our ear,  
And break it to our hope'*

The politicians have made various promises during campaigns for elections but once in power these promises are disregarded. The political class (military or civilian) of whatever religion or ethnic background have rather formed a cabal to keep themselves in power and replace themselves with their blood relations rather than allow any other person that can perform to take their seats. The people are therefore perpetually held down and the public service that should provide goods and services or implement the programmes of the political class for the masses are made redundant and an appendage of the political class.

Through politicking the security of tenure of office of the public servants is now only in theory and not in practice. Political leaders have formed the habit of retiring public servants who do not belong to their political parties. This trend has eroded the principle of permanency of the civil service and made the profession anything but desirable. Only public servants who can play the game of politics remain at the top of their career for long or are given offices of responsibility that give them authorities to make meaningful decisions. The public service has therefore been rendered less effective and no more as attractive as before.

Party politics and politicking has made the rule of neutrality of civil servants to be of no effect. Many civil servants particularly at the top management level now engage in partisan politics or are at least politically biased. They now display prejudices and sabotage government policies instead of remaining politically neutral and genuine advisers of any government in power. This politicization of the civil service has given it a new coloration that hampers its performance at all levels.

To worsen the situation, there was the Nigerian Supreme Court judgment of November, 2002 which has allowed civil servants to openly belong to political parties. Since then, politics and politicking in promotions, recruitments and postings to positions within the service are determined largely by party membership rather than ability and seniority as used to be the case. This has introduced mediocrity to the top echelon of the public service, breeding inefficiency and low productivity.

Since independence, the cries of marginalization and domination by minority ethnic groups has resulted in the politics of quota system or federal character representation in appointments and promotions in the government offices. Good as this policy apparently is, there are cries of deliberate introduction of supersession and untimely retirement of top senior public servants to allow for the enthronement of more junior ones to fulfill all righteousness of quota system. This is a confirmation of low standard and an approval of office politics and mutual hatred that beclouds genuine co-operation for efficient work output. Resource allocation, particularly revenue allocation, between the three tiers of government has been a thorny political issue since independence. Various principles have been utilized including population, equality, derivation etc. But none has been satisfactory enough. The local government council areas where most Nigerians live and need to be provided for, continue to receive the lowest amount from the revenue formula. This politics has made it impossible for effective provision of goods and services to the rural areas. Public administration is therefore seen as not impacting on a good number of Nigerians.

Politics and politicking has greatly been affecting recruitment into the public service. As Adebayo (2001) and Otobo (1992) stated, employees entering the public service through the spoils system lack the required technical and professional skills for their positions. Their performances have therefore fallen below standards.

Now and again the political elites embark on reforms in the various sectors of the economy. Reforms in the public service have hardly gone beyond retiring public servants in the name of right-sizing and restructuring by re-naming ministries and/or regrouping functional arms of the public service. These actions are informed by politics and politicking as a way of demonstrating action by those in power rather than by any serious rational decision-making process. And as Obanya (2010) puts it, the way forward is to carry restructuring

along with re-tooling and re-skilling which would imply mindset and work practice transformation, so that the reforms can also mean value-added staff performance and service delivery mechanisms. Because such a feature is lacking in the politically engineered reforms they rather translate into staff demotivation and poor service delivery.

Social violence arising from clashes of supporters of political aspirants are rife. All over the country. Politics as striving for elected offices has translated into destructions of lives and property. Public servants go to work unsure if they would return to their families : the fear of suicide bombers, assassinations and sudden violent clashes has beclouded their security consciousness and threatened their human need disposition. The public service has been torn by continuous ethnic and selfish clashes over little or no reasonable causes and so the pursuit of positive results becomes an illusion and no effective administration can take place under such a situation.

Corruption has become endemic and eaten into the fabrics of the nation. It is primarily an outcome of the desire by elected politicians to recover monies spent during their electioneering campaigns. All contract-awards are therefore shrouded in fake papers, ten percent 'kick-back' syndrome, payments for jobs not done etc.. The public servants are used to achieve this aim and are consequently drawn into the game. They therefore loose focus of their primary functions by going into contracts and contracting, culminating in unproductive, inefficient and an uncaring public service.

The location of development projects such as infrastructural facilities, social amenities etc are determined by politics. The politicians who are able to influence the party in power end up bringing development projects to their constituencies. Where there are no strong and influential politicians therefore the constituencies are neglected and starved of development projects. Development projects are therefore not necessarily located on the basis of need and that accounts for why some areas are crowded with government projects at the expense of other areas. The neglected areas would conclude that, effective public administration determined by justice and fair play in project allocation is lacking.

### **WHICH WAY FORWARD ?**

Much as this situation has done damage to the image of the Nigerian public service, one can make some suggestions on improving the situation:

1. Further public service reforms in Nigeria should be tailored towards refocusing the system. Re-tooling and re-skilling which is the evidence of institutional facilities and capacity building should be the priority rather than right-sizing and /or down-sizing which only ends up in untimely retirements, retrenchments and removals of public servants.
2. The system of motivation in the public service should be reviewed for the better. Only then will there be a negative reaction by public servants being used as agents for corruption or they themselves engaging in the practice. There should be a de-emphasising of monetary incentives in favour of non-monetary but ego-enhancing incentives to public servants.
3. There is need to re-emphasise the political neutrality of public servants. Career public servants should differ from political office holders in their allegiance and flirtation with political parties. In fact, governments in power should ensure that career public servants should be distanced from politics except as it affects policy formulations along political manifestoes of ruling parties.
4. Training and retraining of public servants should be directed at imbuing in them the desire for self-less service. They should see the satisfaction of their self-actualisation need as not the size of their bank accounts and personal investments but more of what they have contributed to the effective and unbiased advise to political office holders and effective implementation of government policies and programmes through their various ministries and departments.
5. The life after service (retirement) of most public servants leave much to be desired. The essence of motivation should revolve around improving not only the conditions of work of those in the service but more importantly, properly caring for those in retirement. There is therefore need for adequate provisions for robust and prompt payment of pensions because the race for corruption and non-challant attitude to work is rooted in the recognition that one is wasting his/her youthful time doing an honest work for a country that would desert one at old-age.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

It is obvious that if Nigerian public service continues to operate in the current level of apathy, low individual and corporate performance, and declining productivity there would be no hope for efficient and effective public administration in the foreseeable future. It has been argued here that the prevailing low level of efficiency of the Nigerian public service is a causal effect of poor politics and politicking. We have tried to look at the causal relationship between waning interest, declining productivity and apathy of public servants resulting in inefficient public administration in Nigeria and the type of politics and politicking practised within the country. We have

equally said that there is hope for a rejuvenated public administration in the country if concerted and deliberate efforts are made to create functional separation between public servants and political office holders and to regain the image of the public service as a worthy and noble career.

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Dr.Sunday Ichima holds a B.Sc. degree in Political Science, a Post-Graduate Diploma in public Administration, a Master degree in Public Administration, and a Doctorate degree in Local Government studies; all from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. He has varied administrative and academic work experience in the public and private sectors. He is an author of three books on administration and series of academic articles in various journals.He currently lectures at the Federal Polytechnic Bida ,Niger state and is a visiting lecturer with the I B B University, Lapai Niger state, Nigeria.