

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE CIVIL SERVICES OF BENUE AND KWARA STATES, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Politics is a very important phenomenon in the affairs of states. It exerts influence on the day to day activities of the citizenry. Good governance by political office holders promote development and enhance service delivery in the civil service. The study examined how politics affect service delivery in the civil services of Benue and Kwara states, Nigeria. The study also examined the historical development of the Nigerian civil service. The methodology utilised for the study was survey research design. The population of the study was one thousand, four hundred and thirty-nine (1,439). The sample size for the study was three hundred and thirteen (313), based on Taro Yamane's formula. Structured questionnaires were administered to respondents in different departments in the Ministries of Health and Education of the two states. The study realised that the Nigerian civil service had undergone a lot of changes over the years. The study found that politics had a negative significant effect on service delivery, $F(1,304) = 10.086, p < 0.05$. The study concludes that politics had significant effect on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States. The study recommends that political office holders should desist from interfering in the activities of civil servants, in order to enhance efficient service delivery.

Keywords: Civil service, development, influence, politics, service delivery

Introduction

Globally, politics can be seen as an indispensable aspect of human life. Its impact can be felt in every aspect of man's life either positively or negatively. Aristotle asserted that man is a political animal because political activities are essential aspects of his behaviour. However, there is still the argument that not every human being or even politician is a political animal in as much as they are pursuing their own economic, social and psychological interests (Ujo, 2023). On the contrary, a political man is a person that sacrifices his interests in order to acquire the status of influence (Ujo, 2023). The perception thus is that, in order to qualify as a political man, the individual must be ready to avoid pursuing his or her personal interest or gain.

In Nigeria, politics had impacted the country positively in the sense that over the years; it has served as a mechanism for managing conflict at different levels of the government, either between citizens and the government or between one group and another. It had also brought about the provision of social infrastructures that transformed the lives of the people (Awopeju, 2010). On the other hand, politics in Nigeria affects governance in the sphere of corruption, misuses of power and all other illegal acts by an office holder that can be seen as political corruption (Awopeju, 2010). Since political office holders in Nigeria formulate policies, their involvement in policy implementation, appointments and promotion of civil servants often impact efficient service delivery in the service.

It is worthy of note that, studies on the civil service in Nigeria have mainly been on civil service rules and regulations and civil service reforms, there is no much literature on the influence of politics on the civil service. It is in view of this that this study dwells on politics and its effect on service delivery in Benue and Kwara states.

The main objective of the study is to examine how politics influence service delivery in Benue and Kwara states, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: clarify the concepts of politics and service delivery; examine the historical development of the Nigerian civil service; examine politics and service delivery in Nigeria and explore the effect of politics on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States.

Statement of the Problem

The role of politics in the development of any country cannot be overemphasised. This is especially in the sphere of service delivery. When politics is properly utilised, it fosters efficient and effective service delivery in the civil service. The situation in Nigeria during colonial rule was such that the colonialists as political office holders enhanced the provision of modern amenities, which transformed the lives of the Nigerian people. Amenities like roads, hospitals, railways and ports were provided, while there was advancement in western education (Awopeju, 2010).

However, over the years, in the post-colonial era, service delivery in the civil service is at its lowest level due among other factors to the undue interference of political office holders in the official duties of civil servants. Official corruption, dictatorship, and interference in promotion, deployment and redeployment have impacted negatively on the civil service generally in Nigeria and in particular in Benue and Kwara States.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts that would be clarified in this study are politics and service delivery.

Politics: This has been viewed by scholars from different perspectives. In other words, there is no single accepted definition of politics. Harold Lasswell perceived politics as “who gets what, when and how” (Muhamad, 2015). This implies that, politics is concerned with the allocation of resources among the entities in a state. David East opined that politics is authoritative allocation of values (Gabriel, 2018; Glass, 2018). This means that politics (in a democracy) is the system where a group or the other has the ability to determine how the society will operate and such a group can compel adherence to their set of preferred values made possible through sanctions, laws and rewards (Glass, 2018). It is worth noting that the needs of citizens are many and all of them cannot be met at the same time. It is the political office holders that determine how these needs would be met with available state resources. In addition, in an attempt to meet the basic needs, there must be peace among the citizenry and for peace to exist, politics would have been in existence and politics itself implies an acceptable way of resolving conflicts (Ujo, 2003). In essence, it is only through politics that peace can exist and the needs of the citizens met. The word “politics” as could also be seen as derived from the Greek word “polis” which connotes everything that has to do or is related to the ‘polis’, or city-state. Politics thus means the study of the state (Modebadze, 2010).

Service delivery: Service can be seen as “intangible outcomes of human efforts that can satisfy some human needs and thereby can command prices in exchanges”. The human efforts can be complemented with equipment or tools or any other tangible material (Alama, 2012). Services are also deeds performances and processes provided or co-produced by one entity or person for and with another entity or person (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2009 in UK Essays, 2018). Services from the above definitions involve efforts and activities of individual(s) that bring about intangible outcomes.

Service delivery refers to the basic services that are being provided by the government, often as infrastructure that includes electricity, roads, hospitals and water supply (Gafar, 2017). The services are often referred to as social services being provided by the government through its employees. From a broader perspective, service delivery means “all contracts with public administration during which customers, that is citizens, residents and enterprises, (hereafter referred to collectively as citizens) seek data, handle their affairs or pay taxes” (Re SPA, 2018). Service delivery implies all contacts and tasks that are being performed by public administrators for the citizen of a country.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that is considered suitable for this study is the decision making theory.

Decision making can be seen as the process by which “an individual, group or organisation reaches conclusion about what future actions to pursue given a set of objectives and limits on available resources” (Schoemaker and Russo, 2014). This implies that decisionmakers choose among alternative courses of action available, bearing in mind the limited resources that are available for their execution. In essence, decision-making is a social process that involves the selection of alternatives that are to be implemented and executed from among the numerous ones that are available (Ray, 2011). Decision-making theory was introduced for the first time by Herbert Simon in 1978 in his book, *Administrative Behaviour* (1947), where he opined that, there was the need to take decisions on time, otherwise it would impact negatively on organisations’ objectives (Alijoyo, 2021). In addition, Herbert Simon’s decision-making theory also dealt with psychological issues. Simon’s concern with decision-making is in threefold. First, he opined that human decision should not be assumed as following logical, statistical or any other formal models. Second, there are three factors that must be considered in decision making. These are the types of task; the features of the environment and the distinct features of the cognitive system that makes the decision. Third, formal computational models of decision making can only be developed in conjunction with the collection of empirical data (Campitelli and Gobeth, 2010).

The work of Harold Lasswell has a central place in the development of the decision-making theory, “by defining power as participation in the making of decisions, he developed the view that political process is essentially a decision making process; and all factors relevant to the making of decisions, including the personalities and life experiences of the participants can be subjected to systematic examination” (Ray; 2011:15). As observed by Lasswell, there are seven functional stages through which all decisions are processed. These are information, recommendation, prescription, innovation, application, appraisal. Mark and Simon on the other hand, came up with four processes which were problem-solving, persuasion, bargaining and “politics”.

A benefit of the decision-making approach is that, it has provided empirical basis for relating knowledge that is derived from individual and group psychology and sociology to the study of organisations and institutions (Ray, 2011). The decision-making approach has been criticised on the basis of being too rationalistic. This theory is however relevant to this study in the sense that, decision-making is one of the most persuasive of the process based theories in politics. Ray (2011) observed that, politics is a process of allocating values through the making of decisions. A political system is a mechanism for decision-making and the efficiency of a political system can be gauged in terms of its ability to make decisions that are widely accepted. Politics is therefore concerned with decision-making when resources are allocated.

Historical Development of the Nigerian Civil Service

The Nigerian civil service is a colonial creation. As observed by Adedire (2014), the development of the civil service in Nigeria can be traced to 18th century when the administrative organisation established by the Royal Niger Company was later handed over to the British administration. By this time, the responsibility of the administrative machinery was basically the maintenance of law and order. Consequently, there was the establishment of a civil service whose limited objective was to ensure peaceful administration of the people being colonized. It is worth noting that the colonial civil service was the pillar on which the entire colonial administration rested. In terms of structure, the civil service was patterned into European and African services, which resulted in racial segregation and two sets of condition of service in the colonial civil service (Ogunna, 2007). The civil service apartheid resulted in discontent and dissatisfaction among Nigerians within the service and this also generated tensions, conflicts and low productivity in the service (Ogunna, 2007).

The policy of Nigerianisation of the Nigerian civil service commenced in 1948, with the revision of the Richard Constitution that wanted to subject the civil service to ministerial and legislative control and subordination which became effective with the adoption of the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 (Ogunna, 2007). This wave of Nigerianisation became a topical issue in 1960 with the attainment of independence and

there was the need for Nigerians in the senior service to take over from expatriates (Umaru, 2020). The “Frigidaire” policy that was recommended by the Phillipson-Adebo Commission which ushered in a recruitment policy by which expatriates pay, which included inducement allowances in addition to the basic salary, became frozen in respect of all new posts and of all posts that became vacant with effect from 1952/53 budget year (Adamolekun, 1989 in Olaopa, 2008). This policy was to discourage further appointments of expatriates, thereby reinforcing the Nigerianisation drive.

The advent of the military in the political landscape of Nigeria, in January, 1966 brought significant changes into the Nigerian civil service. For instance, the centralized system of governance of the military as posited by Muhammed and Abubakar (2018) only accommodated poor management, low level of efficiency and obsolete methods in the civil service. The slump in resources of the 1980s as Olaopa (2008) asserted, made all key public institutions to be under-resourced and without capacity to capitalize on technological changes for modernisation. As a result, methods and standards deteriorated thus, resulting in total erosion of professionalism and the needed knowledge, merit and esprit de corps in the service. The military in Nigeria thus left behind a civil service that was enmeshed in mediocrity, corruption, officials lacking in self-confidence and lack of technical expertise (Muhammed and Abubakar, 2018).

It was against this background that the need to embark on major reforms of the service was realised from 1999, when former President Olusegun Obasanjo was in power. The Obasanjo’s administration embarked on the Federal Government Renewal Programme as a means of addressing the crisis in public management, occasioned by prolonged military rule in Nigeria. The crisis in public management revolved round insensitivity to general welfare, inefficiency in the delivery of social services, rampant corruption and indifference to the norms and values guiding the activities of public officials (Olaopa, 2008; Esseien, 2015). In addition, there was poor attitude to work by workers as a result of poor remuneration and low self-esteem, brought about by military rule. Low self-esteem was enhanced among the top civil servants, when military governors sought for advice from junior civil servants who were less experienced, sometimes based on closeness to the junior civil servants. With regards to the fight against corruption, the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) were established to deal with the scourge (Obasi and Otobo, 2011). These to some extent have helped to curb corruption and improve public accountability. Other reforms that have been undertaken by successive governments after Obasanjo’s civilian regime are seven-point agenda of late President Yara’adua, and the transformation agenda of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

Politics and Service Delivery in Nigeria

The influence of politics on service delivery can be seen in the activities of the political office holders namely members of legislature and the executive. Tom and Attai (2014) observed that the 1999 constitution gave the power of law making in respect of matters contained in the exclusive list to the National Assembly in Nigeria, while it can also make laws on matters contained in the concurrent list. As at 2014, the Nigerian National legislature has passed into law 195 Acts, with 189 bills pending and in various stages of being passed into law. Some of the Acts passed established such bodies as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Tom and Attai, 2012). This point was acknowledged by Ewuim, Nnamani and Eberinwa (2014) who sees it as gratifying to put up the giant strides of the National Assembly through the enactment to law of some Acts intended to promote good governance in line with the principle of democracy. These Acts are the EFCC, the ICPC, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

The legislature is conferred with the performance of oversight functions in order to enable it expose corruption, inefficiency and waist in administration of laws and disbursement and administration of funds. Arowolo, (2010), opined that, in an attempt to enhance service delivery, legislatures can foster greater transparency and accountability in governance. This is by rising up to ensure that funds that are appropriated for government Ministries/Departments and Agencies are utilized for the purpose that they were allocated, in order to ensure that citizens are well served or taken care of. Where this is successfully done, it would in no small measure promote accountability and transparency.

However, as observed by Tom and Attai (2014), the same legislature is still engrossed in corruption. They, legislators pursue selfish interests like securing contracts from the leadership of the Houses and also from the Executive members while some have ambition to contest into juicy committee positions. The legislators thus, looted and pillaged the nation at will fixing for themselves huge salaries and allowances that are not in line with the general level in the country and without taken into consideration the ability of the economy to bear the amassment of wealth that is to the detriment of others and has aided the reduction in standard of education and educational opportunities. This is also the situation with regards to the health sector, as many hospitals and health centres are in a deplorable state (Tom and Attai, 2014).

Executive interference in the affairs of the legislature also hinders service delivery. As Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2016) noted the constitution enhances the empower of the National Assembly to perform oversight functions and act as watchdog over the executives at both the federal and state levels. However, the executive often interfere in oversight functions by ensuring that their cronies are the ones elected to be in charge of the legislature body through excessive politicking initiated and funded by the executive. The executive arm often resorts to the use of money to cause divide and rule among the members of the legislature in order to have their way.

There are also ways by which the executive also interfere in the affairs of civil servants. In the first place, there is interfering of political executives like ministers and commissioners in recruitment and promotion affairs. This has led to the recruitment of mediocre or totally unsuitable candidates into the service and this had resulted in inefficiency (Umaru, 2014). Currently, the position of the Permanent Secretary is being politicized by the political office holders. As a result, becoming a Permanent Secretary is no more a matter of qualification, length of service and training. Instead, it is based on who the political elites desire. As asserted in the scholarly work of Dosumu and Lamidi (2021), “politics has encroached and permeated the recruitment and selection process in Ondo State civil services. The political thugs in the State were being rewarded with employment by the political heavy weights. Godfatherism serves as basis for recruitment and selection into the state civil service, thereby merit criteria were thrown into the wind. The trend in involving politics in the recruitment and selection process stems from the need to compensate the political loyalist. As a result, members of the State House of Assembly, Commissioners and Special Advisers to the governor put up their candidates to be appointed into the state civil service. The consequence of these a further observed by Dosumu and Lamidi (2021) are low productivity, due to incompetence on the part of the appointees as they are mediocres on the job. There is also lack of respect for line managers (Heads of the Department) since they have no stake in the appointment of staff. As result of high connection of the new staff that disobey rules and regulations, in the process there is lateness to work, truancy and lackadaisical attitude towards work (Dosumu & Lamidi, 2021). In the assertion of Lawal and Abe (2011), the civil service in Nigeria is overbloated. There are many people employed than needed due to the influence of the politicians. This is a serious challenge to the civil service.

Methodology

Based on the nature of the study, the research design that was adopted was survey research design. The sampling technique that was utilised is the stratified sampling technique. This was on the premise that respondents were drawn from different segments of the study population; in the Benue and Kwara States Ministries of Health and Education. The study population was 1,439 while the sample size was 313. Likert scale was utilised for the preparation of the questionnaire. Values were assigned as 1 = Undecided, 2 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The average mean scores of the respondents were as stated below: 4.4 to 5.0 posited as Strongly Agree (SA), 3.5 to 3.49 denotes Agree (A), 2.5 to 3.49 implies Disagree (D), items with mean of 1.5 – 2.49 also denote Strongly Disagree, and items with mean from 0.5 to 1.49 denote Undecided (U). A standard deviation of > 1 means a significant variance revealingtherewasnoconsensusin the responses, while a standard deviation of < 1 showed there was no significant variance, hence consensus in responses.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Politics in Benue and Kwara States

S/N	Statement	SA(5)	A(4)	D(3)	SD(2)	UD(1)	M	SD
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)		
1	Political office holders influence appointments into the civil service which invariably affect efficiency in the service	77 (25.2)	103 (33.8)	45 (14.8)	34 (11.1)	46 (15.1)	3.47	1.313
2	Corruption on the part of political office holders affects negatively efficiency in service delivery.	68 (22.3)	105 (34.4)	53 (17.4)	32 (10.5)	47 (15.4)	3.41	1.292
3	Inefficiency of political office holders (legislature) in the performance of oversight functions affects performance of workers in the civil service.	78 (25.6)	94 (30.8)	56 (18.4)	30 (9.8)	47 (15.4)	3.44	1.312
4	Inconsistent policies made by political office holders affect my workplace performance negatively.	55 (18.0)	92 (30.2)	81 (26.6)	37 (12.1)	40 (13.1)	3.15	1.325
5	Budgetary allocations to my establishment are insufficient to meet the needs of our organisation.	63 (20.7)	95 (31.1)	60 (19.7)	49 (15.1)	41 (13.1)	3.33	1.376
Politics (Mean =3.36)								

Source: Author’s field survey, 2022

Decision Rule: 0.5-1.49 = Undecided; 1.5-2.49 = strongly disagree; 2.5-3.49 = disagree; 3.5-4.49 = Agree; 4.5-5.0 = Strongly Agree. The cut-off mean is 3.0

Table 1 is the descriptive results that showed the state of politics and its influence on the civil servants as they deliver their services. Thus, the statement that political office holders influence appointments into the civil service which invariably affect efficiency in the service was supported by 25.2% and 33.8% majority of the civil servants who strongly agreed and agreed respectively while 14.8%, 11.1% and 15.1% of them respectively disagreed, strongly disagreed and undecided about it. In another dimension, 22.3% and 34.4% majority of the civil servants in Benue and Kwara States strongly agreed and agreed respectively that corruption on the part of political office holders negatively affects efficiency in service delivery, however, 17.4%, 10.5% and 15.4% of them responded otherwise. Again, the inefficiency of political office holders (legislature) in the performance of oversight functions as it affects performance of workers in the civil service was also examined. Hence, while 25.6% and 30.8% of them strongly agreed and agreed respectively, 18.4%, 9.8% and 15.4% minority disagreed, strongly disagreed and undecided about the issue.

Interestingly, 18% and 30.2% minority of the civil servants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that inconsistent policies made by political office holders affect the workplace performance negatively, while 26.6%, 12.1% and 13.1% of the civil servants disagreed, strongly disagreed and undecided concerning the statement. More also, while 20.7% and 31.1% of the civil servants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that budgetary allocations to their establishment are insufficient to meet the needs of their organisations, 19.7%, 15.1% and 13.1% of them responded otherwise. Moreover, Table 1 also revealed the cumulative mean (mean = 3.36) of the extent of politics as it affects service delivery of the civil servants in Benue and Kwara States. This means that politics affects service delivery of the civil servants in Benue and Kwara States.

Hypothesis

H₁: Politics has effect on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States.

H₀: Politics has no effect on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States.

Regression Result

Table 2: Regression Result on the Effect of Politics on Service Delivery

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	0.179 ^a	0.032		0.029	4.023	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Politics						
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	163.269	1	163.269	10.086	0.002 ^b
	Residual	4905.059	303	16.188		
	Total	5068.328	304			
a. Dependent Variable: Service Delivery						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Politics						
Coefficient						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	17.090	0.591		28.906	0.000	
Politics	-0.110	0.034	-0.179	-3.176	0.002	
a. Dependent Variable: Service delivery						

Table 2 captured the result of the linear regression on the effect of politics on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States. The table showed that there is moderate positive relationship between politics and service delivery (R = 0.179). Table 2 further revealed that politics had a statistical significant effect on service delivery $F(1, 304)=10.086$ ($p<0.05$). The regression coefficient of $R^2 = 0.032$ at p -value = 0.002. This result revealed that politics was statistically significant and explained 3.2% of variance in service delivery. The results revealed further from the unstandardised coefficients of politics that a unit decrease in politics will have a -0.179 unit decrease in service delivery in Benue and Kwara States.

Based on this result in Table 2, the p -value of the model was found to be less than 0.05. Thus, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that politics had significant effect on service delivery in Benue and Kwara States.

Discussion of Findings

As could be seen from Table 2 of this study and also in line with the general objective of the study, which was to explore how politics affects service delivery in Benue and Kwara States, the study found that politics negatively affected service delivery of the civil servants in Benue and Kwara States. This was in line with the position of Dosunmu and Lamidi (2021), who observed that political office holders in a state like Ondo influence the recruitment and selection process of civil servants, with godfathers making sure that candidates who were even thugs secure the employment.

This Dosunmu and Lamidi fact had enthroned incompetence, mediocrity and low productivity on the service. Umar (2014) had earlier made this known in a similar observation that, political executives interfere in the activities of civil servants in terms of promotion and even recruitment. Consequently, mediocre and candidates who were totally unsuitable were being recruited into the service resulting thus, in inefficiency and ineffectiveness on the job. An important assertion that is also worth noting is that of Lawal

and Abe (2011) who opined that civil service was overbloated based on unguided recruitment into the ministries, especially at the state level.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it would be seen that, politics affect service delivery negatively in Benue and Kwara States. This means that political office holders exert considerable influence on the civil service. They interfere in different activities of the civil servants such as in the sphere of policy implementation and employment that are within the domain of the civil service.

Recommendation

Political office holders should stop interfering in the activities of civil servants, especially in the areas of policy implementation, appointment and promotion because of its negative influence on service delivery. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILPS) and the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies can help to enlighten the political office holders with regards to their legitimate responsibilities. This can be done periodically through workshops and seminars.

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