Effect Of Politics In Abia State Civil Service

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Abstract: Generally, Nigerian civil service has been politicized to the extent that most top officials openly support the government of the day and this had grossly affected various strategic intents of policy formulation and implementation in the service. The aim of this paper is to examine the effect of politics in Abia State civil service. The study relies on secondary sources of data collection, such as public service reforms, textbooks, journal articles, newspapers and the internet based materials. Data analysis techniques are content, thematic, historical and secondary data analyses. The finding of the paper shows that the Abia State civil service has been politicized to the extent that most top officials openly use the public bureaucracy to consolidate their position and reputation. The paper concludes that the influence of politics in the Abia State civil service cannot bring about any change or improve efficiency, rather it will generate a conflicting and non-cooperative relationship between the public bureaucrats and the political officeholders. The paper recommends 'blind to differences' approach in the State civil service employment process, which hinges on merit in a competitive employment process.

Keywords: Politics, Abia State, Civil service, Civil servants.

INTRODUCTION

The civil service in Nigeria dates back as far as 18th century when the administrative organization that was set up by the Royal Niger Company and was later handed over to the British administration. The colonial administrative machinery was narrowly focused to handle the state function, which was basically the maintenance of law and order (Chukwu, 2002). According to Dode "historically in Nigeria, the civil service was introduced during the colonial rule for easy administration of the Crown even though there were pockets of indigenous administrative systems in existence before the advent of colonial rule" (Dode, 2014, p. 26).

The civil service is divided into the following classes: administrative class, executive class, professional class, clerical class and the messengers who function as catalysts for crystallizing the shared goals of the society and as a machinery of public policy formulation and implementation. Despite its contributions to national development and democratic stability in Nigeria, the civil service over the years has been plagued by numerous problems. Prominent among these problems is politicization.

Specifically, the Abia State civil service has been politicized to the extent that most top officials openly support the government of the day. The introduction of the quota system of recruitment and promotion, adherence to the federal character principle, and the constant interference of the government in the day-to-day operation of the civil service especially through frequent changes in top officials and massive purges meant that political factors rather than merit alone have played a major role in the State civil service. Eme and Ugwu (2011) note that the enthronement of federal character principle of recruitment and other spoils system techniques have sacrificed efficiency and effectiveness for political mediocrity in the Nigerian public service.

Ogunrotifa Ayodeji Bayo posits that considerable political interference in the process of personnel administration has led to improper delegation of power, ineffective supervision and corruption. The resulting official apathy has so far culminated into unauthorized and unreasonable absenteeism, lateness and idleness and, notably, poor workmanship (Bayo, 2012). Strong institutions cannot emerge from present day Nigerian civil service where top echelons of these bureaucracies are handpicked on the basis of ethnicity, religion and class as obtainable in Abia State. Besides, disgruntled characters within and outside the Abia State civil service tend to politicise the activities of state by reading meanings and prejudice on government policies and programmes on the basis of primordial, religious, ethnic and regional sentiments (Oyedeji, 2016).

The objective of the paper is to discuss how politics has negatively affected civil service in Abia State.

2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.1 Civil Service: Civil service is a critical contact between the government and the people in the area of good government and the people in the area of good governance and service delivery. The success of any government depends on a virile civil service (Okeke, 2015). The civil service according to Uduma, Ogba, and Emerole (2015) is an organized institution of the State with all the basic features and principles of rational authority which defines its modus operandi as it is governed by rules and regulations that specify how it operates and also its own internal control that ensures its commitment towards the government and the society in general. In his view, Bayo (2012), sees civil service as the service within government ministries and departments charged with the responsibility of implementing public policies. It is also an institution of government saddled with the responsibility of designing, formulating and implementing public policy, and discharging government functions and development programmes in an

effective and efficient way. As Ezeani (2006) points out, civil service comprises all employees working in the public service including those in parastatals, police force and armed forces. In this case, all civil servants are public servants.

Abba and Anazodo (2006), argue that civil service in Nigeria comprises workers in various ministries, departments and agencies apart from political office holders. While Nebo and Nnamani (2015, p. 3) see civil service is "a complex body of permanent officials appointed to assist the political executives in formulating, executing and implementing government policies in ministries and extra-ministerial departments within which government business is carried out." The term civil service is normally used when referring to the body of men and women employed in a civil capacity and non-political career basis by the Federal and State Governments primarily to render and faithfully give effect to their decisions and implementation (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011).

2.1.2 Politics: The word politics was derived from the Greek word '*polis*', which means 'a city state', which deals with human decisions, human interactions, issues and their consequences for the group, be it the family, the church, the business, the organization, the city, the state. Politics is almost ubiquitous; it is found virtually everywhere. Some human decisions are not political, but decisions involving multiple parties frequently carry a trace of politics (Oyedeji**,** 2016). In recent times there has been the tendency to confine politics to activities in the three arms of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Others define it as the struggle for and the exercise of power and influence on the society.

In defining the concept of 'politics', many modern political scientists emphasize the distributive, or allocative, consequences of decision-making and action by the government to resolve public questions and solve public problems. They point out that politics very importantly involves an authoritative distribution of a political society's relatively scarce resources, that is, an allocation of resources through official decision-making and action by the government. Politics therefore, is the authoritative allocation by the political system of values for society (Easton, 1965).

Harold Lasswell in his work titled 'Politics: Who Gets What, When, How' - a work whose title later served as the standard lay definition of politics - he views the elite as the primary holders of power. He views politics as the study of changes in the distribution of value patterns in society, and, because distribution depends on power, the focal point of his analysis was power dynamics. He defines values as desired goals and power as the ability to participate in decisions, and he conceives political power as the ability to produce intended effects on other people (Lasswell, 1935). Politics is essentially characterized by struggle for power and influence, disagreement, bargaining or negotiation, reconciliation, resolution and consensus, among others, which albeit in varying degrees. Politics is based on disagreement, that is, where there is controversy, where there are issues, there is politics.

2.1.3 Policy: Felix Allen declares that "the concept of policy has many uses depending on the context and existing social problem" (Allen, 2011, p. 7). However, this paper has identified some of the definitions of policy. Adeola (2003), observes that policy refers to those plans, positions and guidelines of government which influence decisions by government (e.g., policies in support of sustainable economic development or policies to enhance access to government services by persons with disabilities). For Self, policies are directives, giving intended or proper meaning to interpretation and action (performance) regarding tasks (Self, 1972). In another instance, Henry (2007, p. 283) uses 'public policy' in his explanation of policy. He avers the public policy is "a course of action adopted and pursued by government."

From the perspective of public policy, Adeola (2003) states that there are various types and forms of policy. Types of policy include: broad policy which enunciates government-wide direction; more specific policy, which may be developed for a particular sector (the economy) or issue-area (welfare); operational policy, which may guide decisions on programmes and project selection. With respect to the forms that government policy takes, it is reflected most typically in legislation, regulations, and programmes. These are often referred to as policy instruments. According to Ayo (2004) as cited in Allen (2011, p. 9), "public policy is action taken by the government in pursuit of set goals."

3 EMPIRICAL REVIEW
3.1 Principles Guiding the Formation and Organization of the Civil Service
The civil service is the entity that is charged with the responsibility of carrying out government policies, providing services to the public and keeping the machinery of government running (Morton, 2016). The civil service is guided by the maxims of anonymity, neutrality, impartiality, permanence, and with hierarchical structure (Obiajulu & Obiemeka, 2004).

3.1.1 Anonymity: This states that civil servants should be seen and not heard. Though they advise political office holders on issues relating to government, they neither take the blame nor the glory of such policies. They are not expected to be seen defending such policies. Civil servants as far as possible are anonymous and should not be seen as craving for publicity (Obiajulu & Obiemeka, 2004). This feature entails that the civil service is anonymous. Its operatives do not come into the limelight. It operates in the dark, so to speak. It is only the political head of the ministry whom is known. The civil servant cannot be blamed

for the failure of a programme and cannot receive commendation for the success of any of them. The political head receives the praise and the blame (Morton, 2016).

3.1.2 Impartiality: Civil servants are paid from tax payers' money which does not belong to anybody or group in particular. They are therefore expected to discharge their duties without fear or favor in rendering such service to the public. The civil servant is expected to treat everybody with a high degree of impartiality (Obiajulu & Obiemeka, 2004).

3.1.3 Permanence: The civil service is often defined as a permanent body of officials that carry out government decisions. It is permanent and its life is not tied to the life of any particular government. Governments come and go but the service remains, or to use the; Nigerian jargon, 'soldier go, soldier come but barrack remains.' The civil service in this regard, is the barrack that remains (Obikeze & Anthony, 2004). The civil service is permanent. It does not change with the change in government. They serve every government that comes into power, regardless of the party colouration. Their top hierarchy is not supposed to be removed when another government comes into office though this happens in some cases, especially in Nigeria (Morton, 2016).

3.1.4 Political Neutrality: The civil servant must be politically neutral. His job is to serve the government of the day irrespective of what he feels about that particular government. He should not allow his personal prejudices colour his dedication to his duty. He is not expected to be a card carrying member of a political party or get involved in partisan politics though he is expected to vote at election times (Obiajulu & Obiemeka, 2004). The Civil Service is neutral in its work. It does not interfere in the political arena. It serves whichever political party is in power and helps it to achieve whatever policies they want to introduce. A Civil Servant is obliged to hide his political affiliation and pursue his work as a professional (Morton, 2016). According to Olaleye (2001), the political neutrality of the civil service implies that the civil servant must put his politics in his pocket. This tradition is particularly British and Nigeria has patterned its civil service system and practice on this model.

3.1.5 Hierarchical Structure: Another feature of the civil service is its hierarchical organization. There is a Minister at the Federal level and Commission at the state level responsible for a ministry, under whom there is a Permanent Secretary whose position is non-political. Other positions follow in an order of rank to the lowest in the service, each reporting to the next senior officer until it reaches the top (Morton, 2016).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This paper adopts the Elite Theory as its theoretical framework. Elite theory's origin lies most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Robert Michels (1876–1936), and Max Weber (1864–1920). The concept of Elite is not new in political science discourse. It dates back and is evident in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The term Elite is used in different contexts under varied conditions for identifying its nature and role in the respective political system (Welsh, 1979).

However, it received serious attention during 19th century because of two Italian contributors viz., Vilfredo Pareto, a Sociologist and Gaetano Mosca, a Political Scientist. The Social scientists like Robert Michaels, Harold Lasswell, James Burnham, C. Wright Mills and Ortega Gasset have developed the 'Elite Theory' based on sociological, psychological and economic dimension. Karl Mannheim, Anthony Downs and Joseph Schumpeter are other leading exponents, who further developed this theory under different political systems (Thoenes, 1966).

The term Elite was derived from Latin word '*Eligere*' which means to choose or pick. The term 'elite' was first used in Military administration as a choice of persons. The Concise Dictionary defines the term Elite as choice, pick or select few. According to Harper's English Dictionary it means 'Cream of Working class'. International Encyclopedia of Social Science describes 'Elite as a group of persons possessing certain fundamental features of life'. It is used as 'Choice' in 14th century and 'Best of the best' in the 15th century (Burton & Higley, 1987).

Vilfredo Pareto applies socio-psychological factors to identify the elites and their nature. According to Pareto (1984) the marked degree of qualities differs from person to person in every society. In every civilized society only few persons shall have such inherent quality or marked excellence. In his opinion men are born unequal everywhere and unequal physically as well as mentally with regard to their abilities and capacities. Thus he makes social stratification and class distinction on the basis of psychological traits such as 'superior class people as elites and the inferior one as non-elites'.

Pareto (1984) therefore, defines elites as a superior class of people who possess better qualities and highest indices compared to others in their respective fields. He identifies them as the best in a particular field or branch in each sphere who exercise profound influence in a civil society. The elites are sizeable in number who occupy the highest positions on the basis of certain attributes and

marked qualities. He divides the society on the basis of requisite qualities and the function they undertake in civil society in an organized fashion.

The relevance of the Elite Theory to this paper can be explained from the fact that the Elites in Abia State who are members of the top echelons of the civil services who are the power players in the political arena of the State. Invariably, they protect one another's interests. Thus, the elite theory has served to explain the fact that the government of Abia State is managed by elites who have vested interest in every area of the State institutions and structures especially in the bureaucracy and politics.

6 METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in gathering data for this study was secondary (indirect) sources. Hence, there was an extensive study of textbooks, newspapers, magazines, journals, periodicals, internet and any other documented materials that treat the subject matter of the study or/and other related topics. Adequate research, review and evaluation of literature relevant to and consistent with the topic and objective of the study was adopted to gather data. This was aimed at providing insight to the understanding of the operational terms/concepts and/or keywords of the study, making out what has been done, and areas of attention about the study. A combination of descriptive, historical and narrative research designs was used.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 The Effects of Politics in Abia State Civil Service

Discussions on the effects of politics in bureaucracies frequently take Max Weber's model of bureaucracy as a starting point (Weber, 1980). Weber argues that the division of labour between politicians and bureaucrats would work best when there is a clear distinction between the two sets of actors. He saw administrators as instrumental and subordinate to politicians – as technical experts who should advise and efficiently execute the decisions of politicians as the sovereign representative. He saw "neutral competence" as a determining characteristic of the administrator.

Recent analysis of the politics of public services has been pursued in two main directions. On the one hand, political interests, incentives, and institutions may affect the performance of public services (Bakker, Kooy, Shofiani, & Martijn, 2008; Keefer & Khemani, 2003; Mcloughlin, 2014a; Pritchett & Woolcock, 2004). On the another hand, the processes and outcomes of service delivery may themselves affect politics, and even the legitimacy of the state itself (Mcloughlin, 2014b; Mcloughlin & Batley, 2012).

There is such high tempo of politics intervening in the Abia state civil service as to presume that the foundation of many contemporary challenges have their foundations in the dynamics of politics and politicians. Likewise, in policy circles, Batley and Mcloughlin (2015, p.1) observe that "service delivery is often referred to in the aggregate as though it addressed common issues of politics and performance, regardless of sector." The civil service at various times has faced a lot of problems, which prominent among these problems is politicization. The introduction of the quota system of recruitment and promotion, adherence to the federal-character principle, and the constant interference of the government in the day-to-day operations of the civil service especially through frequent changes in top officials and during military regimes, massive purges meant that political factors rather than merit alone played a major role in the civil service (Oyedeji, 2016).

Though the politicians are in charge of defining the policies to be implemented by the bureaucrats,
Weber (1980) points out the danger that career civil servants might dominate politicians through their superior knowledge, technical expertise and longer experience, in contrast to the frequently changing ministers. This observation corresponds to what new institutional economics refers to as 'information asymmetry' – the possibility that the principal may be thwarted in their efforts to control and direct the 'agent', because the agent is in a position to hide, or fail to reveal important information. The modern movement to formalise agreements on goals and reporting requirements between the political and administrative domains (and between the legislative and executive domains) can be seen as attempting to reduce this informational disadvantage (Matheson et al., 2007). Peters et al. (2004) argue that the public service is inherently a political creation, and, thus can never be made fully apolitical. While Christensen and Laegreid (2004) believe that bureaucrats, in delivering a public service to the citizens, inevitably participate in the political role of deciding who gets what from the public sector.

In Abia State civil service between 1999 and 2007 under the reign of Governor Orji Uzo Kalu, the top senior civil servants were mainly loyalists of the former governor throughout his eight years in power. Also from 2007 to 2015, the period when the T. A. Orji was in power, there were a lot of political influences witnessed in the areas of recruitment, promotion, strategic transfer and dismissal of public servants. This is because according the state civil service commission was reduced as a willing tool in the hand of the political class (Uduma et al., 2015). Adiele (2011) observes that during this period, the relationship between the two political allies was strained, which resulted in the introduction of new policies. The effect of this was that the tenure of permanent secretaries, directors and heads of non-ministerial departments were pegged at 4 years but renewable after 4 years, if the performance was effective.

As posited by Self (1984, the political concern or obsession with issues of control, conflicts with the administrator's interest. In effect of delegation of discretionary authority, which is necessary to increase the consistency and promptness of decision-making and also perhaps to widen the administrator's powers. Adiele (2011), contents that while that of directors was changed to 8 years, even without completing the mandatory 35 years in service or reaching the terminal 60 years five retirement. In another instance, towards the end of the administration of T. A. Orji, the former governor of Abia State, he ensured that the initial circular or government directive did not affect his loyalists, as he reverted the tenure of office for permanent Secretaries director's to the status-geo ante (Adiele, 2014).

It should be noted that civil service is guided by policies and these policies according to the political party in power manifesto, which form the basis of its policies and programmes. To this effect, Ogali (2011) explains that political parties provide the vehicle on which candidates get elected into political offices. These political parties become useful instruments through which public policies are formulated and implemented. To this effect, Uduma et al. (2015), conclude that one can explain the reasons for political interferences of the public officials as mainly due to the desire of the political officials to be served adequately. It may in another mean that the politicians want to ensure that the civil servants who want to go to a great extent could be regarded as the tools with which the political executives in power hope to implement their policies. The politicians try as much as possible to plant their loyalists into key administrative areas within the public service, this is with a view to serve as the eye of the politicians

Generally, politicisation of civil service is a product of the country's history, twisted colonial history, complex and treacherous regionalism by the three regions at independence, the gross incompetence and mischievous rampaging misdirection by the military form the background to full-scale politicisation now sustained by the overwhelming federal centralism covering the three tiers of government almost to suffocation (Oyedeji, 2016). The effects of politics in Abia State Civil Service can be explained with the following facts:

7.1.1 Political Control of Civil Service
There is a close relationship between civil service and politics. This is especially when it concerns policy. Civil service therefore cannot be separately from politics in all ramifications. This is owing to the fact that the civil service is the responsibility of the elected political office holders who are part of the executive arm of government (Uduma et al., 2015). This political control on the civil service hinges on the fact that the executive arm of the government implements the policies and programmes of the government, running the day-to-day activities of the government even in most cases get involved in the formulation of the policies of the government through the information at their disposal. Political control especially those coming from the executive arm of the government to the civil service arises also because of the fact that recruitment of personnel and appointments into key positions in governance, including those into the civil services are made in the name of the president at the federal level and governor at the state level (p. 66).

7.1.2 Political involvement in the careers of senior civil servants
While there is near universal agreement on the general principle of political non-partisanship, it is not necessarily equated with an apolitical process for senior appointments. The finding of the paper showed there is wide diversity in the level of involvement by politicians in the appointment and management of senior civil servants in Abia. It is important to note the fact that a politician is involved in appointments or dismissals does not, *per se*, make that appointment or dismissal political or partisan (Matheson et al., 2007). For example, one of the rules in the Abia State civil service requires that all appointments to posts should be made "on objective grounds such as skills and merits" even though they might be made by politicians

It is the political office holders that appoint people into various civil service ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). These appointees most times are not the members or staff of the civil service (Cyril & Ndoh, 1999). On the control of the civil service the elected politicians have extensively used the appointment of permanent secretaries to bring the public service to dance to their tunes (Uduma et al., 2015). In terms of control of the political class on the civic service the roles of special advisers are tied specially to the apron strings of the mandate the government in power want them to achieve. The political control is achieved basically in a roundabout way in the form of forwarding information ordinarily which should have emanated from the bureaucrats to the State Chief Executive- the Governor for action.

7.1.3 Intervention in Policy Matters:
This is the culmination of all other forms of political control on civil service in Abia State; that is the effective representation of political interests in the appointment permanent secretaries, special advisers, board members and even commissioners. It becomes very easy for political intervention to take place in matters that concern the internal affairs of the Ministries or departments. This kind of control mechanism makes it difficult for policy decisions to be made independent of the political environment. Therefore, the ability of permanent secretaries and Heads of Non-Ministerial Departments to be able to use their experiences and knowledge gathered to lay out suggestions for policy issues for the effective running of their ministries

only becomes a matter of recovery consideration as the interests of the political executives and their ideas of what policy lines each ministry should fellow (Uduma et al., 2015).

7.1.4 Appointment into Board Membership: Another direct means of controlling of civil servants is through the appointment of political party loyalists as board members to certain governmental agencies. Appointment to a board membership is mostly political and members do appreciate the government that brings them into office (Henry, 1999). This is understandable bearing in mind that such positions are usually used to settle party faithful for their roles during elections and also favorites of the political leadership. These political board members most often interfere extensively in policy matters to the neglect of the civil services rules and regulations, as they try to protect their political interests within the government (Uduma et al., 2015).

7.1.6 Ministerial Control: The leadership arrangement provided in the Nigeria presidential constitution falls somewhere between the British and the American presidential arrangements. In line with the American tradition of presidential type of government, the emphasis is on the individual leadership of the chief executive, the president at the federal level and the governors at the State (Uduma et al., 2015).

8 CONCLUSION

The politics-bureaucratic relationship is not watertight as both can be likened to Siamese twins. For instance, a function which hitherto was considered to be within the bureaucratic jurisdiction can snowball into the political realm. One interesting fact which must have been elicited in this paper is that, most of the time, the role and behaviour of civil servants have been defined in terms of their relationship with the commissioners, and the relationship between the commissioners and the members of the State House of Assembly. It is also understandable that the Governor as the Chief Executive Officer of the state cannot perform his duties well without the cooperation of the civil servants.

Presently, Abia State civil service like any other State in Nigeria is characterized by salient features that make the public service thick from the features it is organized in structures. The Abia State public bureaucracy structures consist of ministries of with commissioners at the head of the ministries, departments or divisions with directors as heads, commissions and boards with chairman as the heads and sections with deputy directors as heads (Uduma, 2010).

There is no doubt that government is a continuum, and also that the public bureaucracy is politically neutral and serves to protect the interest of the government that is in power. This notion of serving any government that is in power absolutely negates that basic principle of neutrality. Political control of the negative type consists in the abdication of political leadership and the responsibility for policy formulation and exclusive preoccupation with the end of products of policy. Furthermore, positive political control entails knowing where the regime is heading and ensuring that the bureaucratic engine is properly turned to get the administration right; it also includes looking out for bureaucratic impediments to the realization of policy objectives (Uduma et al., 2015).

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

i. It is recommended that political offices should be filled competitively by politicians, while bureaucratic offices should be filled competitively with public bureaucrats. The political official should be selected on the basis of his political competence; as bureaucratic officials are also to be selected based on their bureaucratic competence.

ii. It is further recommended that 'blind to differences' approach should be applied in the Abia State civil service employment process, which hinges on merit in a competitive employment process. This approach promotes and encourages meritocracy and discourages political cronyism and mediocrity.

iii. Excessive political control of the public service in the state has not really brought about any notable change or improvement into the public bureaucracy neither has it denied Abians the much expected democratic dividends over the past twenty years. This situation has rather generated a conflicting and non-cooperative relationship between the public bureaucrats and the political executives. Furthermore, it is recommended that there should be cooperative and harmonious executive-legislative relationship in order to truly make the State 'God Own State" in all ramifications.

iv. One of the problems in Abia State civil service is high monthly wage bill. Obinna Oriaku, state's commissioner for finance lamented that Abia has a monthly pension liability of ₦450 million for retired state civil servants and ₦380 million for retired local government staff. It is of the opinion of this paper that the State government should overhaul its civil service to correct anomalies that have resulted to the over bloated monthly pension wage bill currently faced by the state. This can be done through personnel audit of its entire workforce.

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