PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i8.10

Keywords

Civil Service, Democracy, Development, Government, Public Administration

Abstract

Research Problem: *Nigeria's democracy faces significant developmental challenges, often attributed to the inefficiency and underperformance of its public administration. Despite the crucial role of the civil service in policy formulation and implementation, it struggles with productivity, accountability, and service delivery. This paper investigates the fundamental obstacles hindering the Nigerian civil service from effectively contributing to democratic consolidation and national development.*
Methods/Theory: *This study employs a qualitative research approach, relying exclusively on secondary sources including academic journals, books, policy reports, and official government documents. The data were analysed thematically. The theoretical framework is anchored in Max Weber's Bureaucracy Model, which is used to evaluate the principles of specialisation, hierarchy, and formalisation within the Nigerian civil service.*
Results: *The analysis reveals that the Nigerian public administration is institutionally fragile, underproductive, and inefficient. Key challenges include pervasive corruption, lack of merit-based recruitment, inadequate funding, insufficient training, and weak institutional capacity. These issues severely impede the civil service's ability to perform its core democratic functions, such as ensuring accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.*
Conclusion: *The Nigerian civil service is currently failing to meet the expectations of a democratic society. Its colonial and military-inherited structures are ill-suited for the demands of participatory governance. The lack of a functional and efficient bureaucracy remains a significant impediment to the delivery of democratic dividends to the Nigerian populace.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This paper provides a contemporary diagnostic analysis of the Nigerian civil service's dysfunction from a Weberian perspective, explicitly linking its operational failures to the stagnation of democratic governance. It identifies the specific gap between bureaucratic ideals and reality, offering a structured set of*

prescriptions for reform.
Recommendation: *The paper recommends a comprehensive reform agenda focusing on strengthening institutional autonomy, enforcing merit-based recruitment, boosting professional training, and fostering a culture of patriotism and accountability to revitalise the civil service for effective democratic governance.*

1. Introduction

Public administration is a fundamental component of democratic governance, as it provides the institutional machinery through which government policies, programmes, and decisions are translated into practical actions that affect citizens' lives. In Nigeria, public administration, understood as the science of getting things done in the most efficient ways in the public sector (Rosenbloom et al., 2022), occupies a particularly important position in the functioning of democracy, given the country's large population, ethnic and cultural diversity, complex political structure, and developmental challenges. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, public administration has remained central to the implementation of government policies, delivery of public services, maintenance of law and order, promotion of development, and strengthening of democratic institutions (Ndema, 2022).

In addition to regular elections, effective, accountable, transparent, and responsive public institutions are necessary in any democratic government. By implementing laws and policies formulated by government, public employees and administrative institutions act as a conduit between elected political authorities and the populace. Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and local government authorities are therefore expected to operate according to the principles of accountability, professionalism, neutrality, efficiency, and responsiveness in order to sustain citizens' confidence in democratic governance (Ndema & Ndukwe, 2026). However, public administration in Nigeria continues to face several challenges that affect the quality of democratic governance, including bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, political interference, inadequate institutional capacity, poor service delivery, weak accountability mechanisms, and problems associated with policy implementation. In some instances, excessive politicisation of the public service has undermined professionalism and administrative neutrality, while limited resources and institutional weaknesses have constrained the ability of government agencies to respond effectively to citizens' needs.

The roots of this dysfunction can be traced to the colonial and early post-independence periods. The various colonial governors introduced diverse constitutional arrangements, including the idea of a career civil service modelled on the general principles of the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Reform of the British Civil Service, yet these transplanted structures were rarely suited to Nigeria's realities (Cornell & Svensson, 2023). The subsequent shift from a unitary system to regionalism and, later, federalism, though intended as a panacea for effective administration, similarly failed to resolve the structural weaknesses of the service (Akpunonu, 2025). Decades after independence, the country remains confronted with chronic under-productivity and inefficiency in the civil service, a problem that persisted through the withdrawal of colonial administration and the introduction of an indigenous public service pioneered by Nigerian bureaucrats from 1960 onward (Adegoke, 2025).

A considerable body of scholarship has examined these problems, with much of it converging on corruption, underfunding, and weak institutional capacity as the principal explanations for administrative failure (Fagbadebo, 2019; Agbodike et al., 2015). What this literature has explored far less systematically is the disconnect between the civil service's operational culture, one still weaned on colonial and military-inherited habits of hierarchy and command, and the normative principles that democratic governance demands, namely participation, transparency, and answerability to citizens rather than merely to superiors. Fewer studies still have examined this disconnect through an explicit theoretical lens capable of showing precisely where and how bureaucratic practice in Nigeria departs from democratic expectation. It is this gap that the present study addresses.

The central problem this paper addresses is the persistent failure of the Nigerian civil service to function as a catalyst for democratic development, characterised by a chasm between its formal bureaucratic principles and its operational realities.

Accordingly, the study pursues the following objectives:

i. To examine the fundamental roles of public administration in advancing democratic governance in Nigeria.

ii. To identify and analyse the major institutional and environmental challenges confronting the Nigerian civil service.

iii. To propose practical strategies for reforming the civil service to enhance its contribution to democratic consolidation.

2. Literature Review

This section critically synthesises existing literature on public administration and democratic governance, situating the study within the theoretical and empirical debates that surround the civil service in developing democracies.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Public Administration: Traditional Model versus New Public Management

Traditional Model of Public Administration

The Traditional Model of Public Administration (TMPA), often known as the classical or orthodox model, emerged in the late 19th century and dominated government theory and practice until the 1980s. It became popular through the work of scholars such as Max Weber (1922), Woodrow Wilson (1887), and Frederick Taylor (1911), and refers to the conventional approach to organising and managing government institutions. It is characterised by strict hierarchical bureaucracy, a clear separation between politics and administration, and a focus on rule-bound efficiency (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2022). The model rests on several assumptions: that politics and administration are separate, with elected leaders formulating policy while neutral officials implement it; that hierarchy, with authority flowing from top to bottom, is essential to coordination; that rules and procedures, rather than personal discretion, should govern administrative conduct; that centralisation promotes control and uniformity; that specialisation improves efficiency by concentrating expertise in defined roles; and that merit, rather than political connection, should determine recruitment and promotion.

Despite its considerable contribution, the traditional model has been criticised for being inadequate to the complexities of modern governance. Critics point to the excessive bureaucracy the model encourages, its emphasis on rules and formal structures generating red tape, paperwork, and delay; its rigidity and inflexibility in the face of

changing social, economic, and political circumstances; its tendency toward over-centralisation, which weakens the autonomy of lower-level officials; its habit of measuring performance by compliance with procedure rather than by the quality of outcomes; and the unrealistic nature of the politics-administration dichotomy itself, since in practice administrators routinely participate in policy interpretation, advice, and implementation.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the traditional model has significantly influenced Nigeria's public administration, particularly through the hierarchical structure of ministries, departments, and agencies, where authority generally flows from political leadership and senior officers to lower-level staff. Formal rules, civil service procedures, bureaucratic hierarchy, and centralised decision-making remain defining features of Nigerian public administration (Adegbite et al., 2022). It is precisely the weaknesses of this model, rigidity and excessive bureaucracy chief among them, that gave rise to the New Public Management (NPM) approach.

New Public Management (NPM) Theory

New Public Management is an approach to public administration that emerged prominently in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to the perceived weaknesses of traditional bureaucratic administration. It seeks to make government organisations more efficient, results-oriented, responsive, and performance-driven by applying selected management practices commonly associated with the private sector (Harake, 2025). The approach is associated with Christopher Hood (1991), who popularised the idea that government should focus less on rigid procedure and more on results, performance, efficiency, and service delivery (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020), granting public managers greater discretion while assessing their performance against clearly defined, measurable objectives.

NPM rests on the assumptions that public organisations should use resources efficiently; that they should be judged primarily by results and outcomes rather than adherence to rules; that managers should enjoy greater autonomy to make decisions and allocate resources; that decision-making should be decentralised rather than concentrated at the apex of the bureaucracy; and that selected private-sector techniques, such as strategic planning, performance appraisal, customer service, and financial management, can improve public-sector performance.

Although NPM has influenced public-sector reform worldwide, it has attracted its own criticisms: an excessive emphasis on efficiency and cost reduction that can crowd out broader public responsibilities such as social justice and equality; a tendency to treat citizens as customers rather than as rights-bearing participants in democratic governance; an assumption that private-sector techniques transfer easily to government, when in fact businesses and governments pursue fundamentally different objectives; and a propensity toward fragmentation, as decentralisation, outsourcing, and the proliferation of autonomous agencies complicate coordination across government. In Nigeria, NPM-inspired reforms have nonetheless shaped efforts to improve service delivery, accountability, performance management, financial management, decentralisation, and agency efficiency, even as their application has been constrained by bureaucratic resistance, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and difficulty sustaining performance-based reform (Bhul, 2023).

2.2 The Civil Service in Developing Democracies: Post-Colonial Challenges in Africa

Nigeria's experience is not unique among post-colonial African states. Colonial administrations across the continent bequeathed their successor governments civil services designed primarily for control and revenue extraction rather than for participatory governance, structures whose hierarchical, top-down logic has proved remarkably durable even after formal independence (Cornell & Svensson, 2023). This inherited orientation has, in the Nigerian case, been compounded by a subsequent period of prolonged military rule, which entrenched a command culture within the bureaucracy that has persisted well into the current democratic dispensation (Onwutuebe, 2024). Comparative work on bureaucratic politics suggests that where colonial and authoritarian legacies of this kind remain unreformed, civil services tend to retain an orientation toward superiors rather than citizens, regardless of the formal existence of democratic institutions above them (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2022). The persistence of corruption, weak institutional capacity, and political instability across much of the continent, Nigeria included, has repeatedly been identified as both a symptom and a reinforcing cause of this unreformed bureaucratic culture (Fagbadebo, 2019).

2.3 The Nexus between Bureaucracy and Democracy: Tension between Hierarchy and Participation

A recurring theme in the literature is the inherent tension between bureaucratic hierarchy, prized for the coordination and discipline it provides, and democratic participation, which demands openness, responsiveness, and the meaningful involvement of citizens in decisions that affect them. Transparency, for instance, is widely treated as a precondition for democratic legitimacy, yet hierarchical bureaucracies are structurally inclined toward restricting the flow of information to what superiors sanction (Androniceanu, 2021). Similarly, a bureaucracy organised around vertical lines of command can find it difficult to accommodate the horizontal, negotiated forms of accountability that democratic governance requires, since officials are trained to answer upward to their superiors rather than outward to the public. Comparative bureaucratic politics scholarship suggests that resolving this tension is less a matter of choosing hierarchy or participation outright than of designing institutional safeguards, merit-based recruitment, independent oversight, and enforceable codes of conduct, that allows a measure of bureaucratic discipline to coexist with democratic answerability (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2022).

2.4 Synthesis and Gap in Knowledge

Taken together, this literature establishes that Nigeria's administrative difficulties are neither accidental nor peculiar to any single administration; they are the product of inherited colonial structures, a subsequent military legacy, and an unresolved tension between bureaucratic hierarchy and democratic participation, and they recur across much of post-colonial Africa. What remains under-examined is the specific interplay between political leadership and bureaucratic inefficiency in the Nigerian case, and the extent to which the civil service's operational culture contradicts the very New Public Management principles that successive reform programmes have claimed to pursue. This paper addresses that gap by applying the Weberian Bureaucracy Model as an explicit analytical yardstick against which the performance, and the democratic shortfalls, of the Nigerian civil service can be systematically assessed.

3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach with a focus on documentary sources of data. It relied solely on secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the subject, including books, journal articles, policy reports, magazines, and conference and seminar papers. As a non-experimental design, the study employed qualitative descriptive analysis, working through themes and sub-themes to draw its conclusions and evaluations.

3.1 Selection Criteria

Sources were included in the review on the basis of three criteria:

Publication date: materials published between 1999 and 2022, corresponding to Nigeria's Fourth Republic, to keep the analysis focused on the contemporary democratic era, supplemented selectively by more recent sources (2023-2026) where these illustrate the continuation of identified patterns;

Geographic focus: primary emphasis on Nigeria, with comparative African and cross-national material admitted only where it illuminated the Nigerian case; and

Thematic relevance: direct bearing on public administration, civil service reform, or democratic governance.

3.2 Operational Mechanics of Thematic Analysis

Data extracted from the selected sources were analysed thematically in two stages. In the first stage, recurring words, phrases, and ideas within each source, such as ‘corruption’, ‘lack of accountability’, ‘inefficiency’, and ‘merit’, were identified and assigned short descriptive codes. In the second stage, these codes were grouped into broader analytical categories according to their conceptual similarity; codes relating to corruption, weak oversight, and poor funding were grouped under ‘Institutional Challenges’, while codes relating to poverty, marginalisation, and the mismatch between imported administrative models and local conditions were grouped under ‘Environmental Constraints’. This process of coding and categorisation produced the thematic structure around which the findings of the study, presented in Sections Five and Six, are organised.

3.3 Summary of Data Sources

The table below demonstrates the breadth and structure of the data collection undertaken for the study.

Category of Source	Examples of Documents/Works Consulted	Number of Sources	Key Themes Drawn
Peer-Reviewed Journals	Articles from Journal of Public Administration, African Administrative Studies, Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences, Prashasan: The Nepalese Journal of Public Administration	10	Bureaucratic Dysfunction, Democratic Deficits, New Public Management
Policy and Government Reports	National Bureau of Statistics Reports; Report of the “Oronsaye Panel” on Public Service Reform	5	Civil Service Reforms, Fiscal Management, Service Delivery
Books and Book	Works by Olaopa, Maduabum,	8	Historical

Category of Source	Examples of Documents/Works Consulted	Number of Sources	Key Themes Drawn
Chapters	Fagbadebo and related authors		Context, Weberian Model, Management and Organisation
Media and Institutional Documents	Newspaper articles (e.g., The Guardian, Vanguard, Tribune); conference and seminar papers	4	Public Perception, Corruption Allegations, Wage and Labour Disputes

Source: Authors' compilation (2026)

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Weberian Bureaucracy Model as its theoretical guide. The model was developed by Max Weber, a German sociologist, political economist, and administrative scholar whose work laid much of the foundation for the modern study of bureaucracy. In his 1922 treatise Economy and Society, Weber described several ideal types of authority and administration, of which the rational-legal, bureaucratic type is of central relevance here (Weber, 1922; as discussed in Boundless, 2016). This model centres on the traditional conception of public service as a lifetime career, in which officers enlist early in life and progress through the profession with the expectation of advancement until retirement (Olaopa, 2010: 193).

Weber placed particular emphasis on the behaviour and activities of organisations, arguing that the manifold problems affecting a society can, in turn, shape the behaviour of its civil servants. Contextualised to the Nigerian state, the model is understood as a system built around efficient, rule-governed administrative process. On this basis, the principles of specialisation, hierarchy, and formalisation, among others, constitute the hallmarks of an ideal bureaucracy, of which the civil service is the intended product. In summary, the basic principles of the Weberian model of bureaucracy may be stated as follows:

a. Appointment of officials according to technical qualifications and merit; civil servants are not elected.

b. Laid-down rules and regulations govern each official's specialised work.

c. Promotion allows efficient officials to climb higher within the hierarchical power structure.

d. Continuous business is carried on faithfully by officials; the office does not come to an end with the death or departure of its holder.

e. Salaries of civil servants are fixed, with a right to pension (Akhakpe, 2007; Ekhator, 2003; Mullins, 1999; Nobbs, 1984).

4.1 Weberian Model as an Analytical Tool

Rather than simply describing Weber's ideal type, this study deploys it as an analytical instrument. The model serves as an ideal type against which the performance of the Nigerian civil service is measured. The paper analyses the Nigerian civil service's adherence to, and deviation from, the principles of specialisation,

hierarchy, and formalisation, using the gap between the ideal and the observed reality as the primary evidence of administrative dysfunction discussed in Sections Five and Six.

4.2 Critique of the Weberian Model in the Nigerian Context

The Weberian model has been criticised for its assumption of a value-neutral, apolitical bureaucracy. In a democratic and patronage-driven context like Nigeria, this assumption is fundamentally flawed. While the theory provides a useful yardstick for measuring professional conduct, its inability to account for political interference and environmental pressures such as poverty and corruption limits its explanatory power. This study therefore uses the model as a starting point, but also examines these extra-bureaucratic factors as central, rather than peripheral, to understanding the Nigerian civil service.

This critique is borne out by the Nigerian experience. Some civil servants have been reported to mismanage public resources and to display a nonchalant attitude in the discharge of duty, opting for material gain over the reputation that comes with hard work and commitment. The general population, whose welfare depends heavily on the conduct of career civil servants, suffers most as long as this erratic or static behaviour persists. As a result, the core Weberian components of specialisation, hierarchy, and formalisation are, in practice, frequently abandoned rather than upheld (Isma'il, 2017). The Nigerian civil service is, moreover, widely reported to be stagnant, ineffective, and unproductive owing to a variety of institutional and environmental difficulties, including tardiness, indiscipline, and irregularities in promotion, incentives, and placement (Usman, 2023). It is against this backdrop that the model functions less as a description of Nigerian reality than as a mirror against which that reality, and its democratic consequences, can be judged.

5. Roles of Nigeria's Public Administration in Democracy Development

Public administration in Nigeria is generally described as a catalyst for the country's rapid development. For democratic consolidation to be achieved, civil servants must carry out their mandatory duties in ways that address the persistent problems of productivity and efficiency in the service. Since public administration in Nigeria has traditionally been organised around the civil service, it is instructive to examine the fundamental roles that institution plays in the country's democratic development.

i. Enhancing Equal Participation and Representation of Citizens

Managing democratisation in any country requires the equal participation and representation of stakeholders in the initiation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policy. This is substantiated mainly through a civil service that gives groups and communities the opportunity to make meaningful input into decision- and policy-making, drawing on their understanding of their own environment, culture, and socio-economic circumstances, consistent with a bottom-up, people-centred approach to development. Public administration thereby enables the active involvement of interest groups as crucial actors in policy-making, implementation, and evaluation. It can be argued that the high rate of failure among government plans and programmes in Nigeria stems in large part from the exclusion of stakeholders from these processes; the civil service is accordingly best positioned to correct this by mobilising interest groups and other stakeholders in its activities (Agbodike et al., 2015).

ii. Accountability and Responsibility

Public administration in Nigeria contributes substantially to the accountability and responsibility of public institutions, a basic requirement of democratic governance. This task is achievable only through the platform of the civil service, whose officers should be accountable to one another and to members of the public for actions and decisions taken in the socio-economic and political spheres, particularly where the use of power and resources on behalf of the electorate is concerned. Unfortunately, some civil servants and political office holders have used governmental power and resources without being held accountable to the citizenry. This malady, however, is expected to diminish under sustained democratic rule, given the improved flow of information and the periodic elections that afford citizens the opportunity to change negative practices.

This tension between hierarchy and accountability is precisely where the Weberian framework adopted in this study becomes analytically useful. Bureaucratic hierarchy is designed to make officials answerable upward, to their superiors within the chain of command, whereas democratic accountability requires that the same officials also answer outward, to the citizens their decisions affect. Where hierarchy is strong but oversight from above is weak or compromised, as the theoretical framework in Section Four suggests is often the case in Nigeria, the upward-facing discipline that hierarchy is meant to enforce provides little assurance of the outward-facing accountability that democratic governance demands.

iii. Strengthening the Principle of the Rule of Law

The Nigerian civil service plays an important role in facilitating strict adherence to the rule of law, a principle of democracy propounded by A. V. Dicey to ensure the absolute predominance of law over everybody. It is a mechanism for checking the abuse of governmental power and resources, one that puts the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights at the forefront. Freedom of association and expression, the right to fair hearing, freedom of information, and the independence of the judiciary and its officers are all expected to be operative and prioritised under democratic governance (Agbodike et al., 2015). Despite the efforts of Nigeria's public administration toward democratisation, socioeconomic rights remain non-justiciable under the constitution.

iv. Transparency

Democratic principles are meant to shape the role of the civil service in promoting the welfare of the people. The activities of government and its officials should be open to public scrutiny, giving citizens the opportunity to understand government policies and how those policies affect their lives. This is crucial because the democratisation process requires public officials to carry out their responsibilities in ways that generate transparency, particularly in the flow of information between government and the people (Androniceanu, 2021).

v. Facilitating the Autonomy of Democratic Institutions

Democratic rule requires that socio-economic and political institutions possess the legitimacy that gives both citizens and those working within government ministries the freedom to discharge their responsibilities to the public. Unless these institutions, working through the civil service, possess legitimacy and autonomy, they cannot secure the support they need from the people to carry out their work efficiently and effectively. Legitimacy and autonomy require that stakeholders accept that the rules, regulations, and actions of these institutions serve their interests, and that they

extend their support to the democratisation process accordingly.

Nigeria's public administration has not yet been able to put these core democratic values fully into practice in ways that enhance effective and efficient service delivery, and thereby help manage the country's democratisation process. Unfortunately, the Fourth Republic inherited a civil service steeped in an authoritarian culture characterised by hierarchy of command and centralised authority (Onwutuebe, 2024).

6. Challenges Confronting Nigeria's Public Administration in Managing the Democratisation Process

Public administration in Nigeria is expected to be an influencer of democratic governance, but the myriad ills plaguing the institution have seriously impeded the efficacy of its service delivery and its contribution to distributive justice. Some of the principal challenges are outlined below.

i. Institutional Challenges

Institutional factors, including frequent changes of government arising from military coups, policy inconsistency, corruption, and a lack of political will, have greatly affected the role of public administration in a country's democratic development (Fagbadebo, 2019). These problems have seriously hindered the civil service's ability to function well, given the constraints under which the system operates. The fate of the Oronsaye Panel report offers a telling illustration: submitted in 2012 after an extensive review of duplication and overlap among federal parastatals, its recommendations to restructure, merge, or scrap scores of agencies were shelved by successive administrations and received full approval for implementation only in February 2024, twelve years after they were first submitted (The Guardian, 2024). Such prolonged institutional inertia in the face of well-documented, evidence-based reform proposals is emblematic of the lack of political will that continues to constrain administrative reform in Nigeria.

ii. Environmental Constraints

A further set of challenges affects service delivery by civil servants and can be attributed to social, economic, and political maladies. Most African countries, Nigeria included, embraced the Western model of civil service in their haste to develop, a model that has not always fitted well with local environmental demands and conditions. In Nigeria, poverty, deprivation, and marginalisation are widespread enough that the civil service needs to confront them directly rather than hiding behind the conventions of anonymity and non-partisanship simply to preserve the status quo (Omilusi, 2023). According to the National Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index, 63 per cent of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, a scale of deprivation that a civil service still organised around colonial-era administrative routines is poorly equipped to address (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The nation's realities call for a proactive civil service attuned to the needs of its citizens; yet many government initiatives aimed at reducing poverty have failed because of the disparity between the general public and civil personnel (Agbodike et al., 2015).

iii. Low Participation of Citizens in Governmental Affairs

The distance created by public servants has caused the poor masses to lose interest in the business of government, with adverse effects on the basic democratic tenet of equal participation and representation of stakeholders. Popular participation is expected to be high in the conduct of governmental affairs in order to facilitate rapid national development; excluding citizens from the matters that affect their lives makes

accountability and distributive justice difficult to achieve, and leaves civil servants stranded in implementing plans and programmes from which the masses have been isolated. This disengagement is not merely theoretical: the 2023 general election recorded a voter turnout of only 26.72 per cent, the lowest since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, with barely 24.9 million of the 93.47 million registered voters casting ballots (Dataphyte, 2023). Once such a vacuum of participation is created, governance issues become neglected, a pattern visible across much of Africa, where decades of autocratic rule left little room for the freedoms of speech, association, and participation that sustain democratic governance. Political parties, elected legislatures, and other extra-bureaucratic forces, which could otherwise serve as watchdogs checking the excesses of public servants, were correspondingly weak in many of these countries. Without such countervailing pressure, civil officials can take control of the policy-making process with little oversight from comparatively inexperienced political office-holders, as occurred in Nigeria in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when democratic institutions were suspended following the military coup of 1966 (Agbodike et al., 2015).

iv. Dichotomy between Higher and Lower Civil Servants

A wide gulf persists between the administrative class of civil servants, who wield influence over policy-making, and lower-cadre civil servants, who are expected simply to serve. The civil service's capacity to deliver democratic governance is further weakened by administrative and procedural failings, including corruption, discourtesy, absenteeism, inefficiency, and the incapacity to integrate contemporary technologies into the country's socioeconomic and political development (Tom, 2024). The uneven rollout of the N70,000 national minimum wage since its enactment in July 2024 illustrates this dichotomy in practice: while some states moved quickly to implement, and in several cases exceed, the new benchmark, reports as late as 2026 indicated that around twenty states had yet to fully implement the consequential wage adjustments for lower-cadre workers, prompting repeated strike threats from organised labour (Tribune Online, 2026). Such disparities in how far reforms reach down the hierarchy underline the persistent divide between the administrative elite and the rank-and-file civil servant.

In sum, the major malady militating against the efficiency of the present civilian dispensation in Nigeria is the perennial problem of corruption. As under the colonial and military systems of civil service before it, there has been a rise in the mismanagement and outright pillage of national wealth through the combined efforts of the political and administrative classes. It can reasonably be argued that senior civil servants are seldom unaware of the irregularities carried out by political office holders; the inability of public administration to perform its oversight function against the criminal abuse of political office has, as a result, fed the perpetrators of corrupt practices in the public domain.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

Nigeria's public administration has unique roles to play in meeting the expectations of Nigerians. Citizens expect the dividends of democracy to be brought to their doorsteps, and this can only be achieved through the civil service mechanism. Unfortunately, the present structure and operation of the civil service cannot deliver these expectations unless it embraces democratic principles such as citizen participation in governmental affairs, transparency and accountability, equity, distributive justice, the rule of law, and electoral integrity. Previous efforts to

reengineer and reposition the civil service for better service delivery have largely ended without significant impact. Civil service reforms such as the transformation agenda pursued under President Jonathan could yet move in the right direction in addressing the challenges confronting Nigeria's public administration, provided the remedies proposed in this study are carefully adopted and enforced.

7.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the challenges identified above, the following specific and actionable reforms are recommended for Nigeria's public administration, in order of priority:

i. Enact a new Public Service Act. The National Assembly should enact legislation granting the Federal Civil Service Commission greater financial and administrative autonomy, insulating recruitment, discipline, and promotion decisions from ministerial and political interference, rather than relying on the current arrangement of strengthening institutions in the abstract.

ii. Enforce merit-based recruitment through transparent, verifiable mechanisms. Recruitment and selection into the civil service should be conducted through mandatory computer-based testing, publicly published shortlists, and independent monitoring of examinations, building on measures already introduced by the Federal Civil Service Commission under former chairman Joan Ayo to ensure transparency in recruitment examinations (The Guardian, 2014).

iii. Ring-fence and ensure the timely release of civil service funding. Adequate and predictable funding should be allocated to the civil service through the annual budget, with capital and recurrent votes released on schedule and subject to independent financial audit, to enable the service to fulfil the managerial and administrative roles required of it under New Public Management-inspired reform, in line with international best practice on financial propriety and transparency.

iv. Institutionalise periodic structural review. The civil service's structures, inherited largely unchanged from independence, should be subject to a scheduled, periodic review process so that the service remains flexible, proactive, and able to adjust to changing social, economic, and political circumstances (Ayeni, 1990).

v. Mandate continuous, competency-based training tied to promotion. In-service training and retraining should be made a formal, periodic requirement linked directly to promotion eligibility, with course content targeted at the specific skills gaps identified within each cadre of the service, rather than delivered as a generic or occasional exercise.

vi. Enforce a binding code of professional ethics. Civil servants should be required to sign, and be periodically re-assessed against, a binding code of conduct that operationalises patriotism and nationalism as measurable standards of professional ethics, with clear and consistently applied sanctions for breaches, rather than treating such values as merely aspirational.

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