THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN MODERN STATES: THE EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

The importance of public administration to the efficient and effective functioning of modern democracies around the world cannot be overstated. Public administration has become an essential part of democracy and a dominant factor in the modern era, which has seen the emergence of a welfare state. The role it is called to play has broadened in scope and naturalness, and its importance is growing all the time. It has taken on the axiomatic role of providing the basic necessities of human life, such as health, education, recreation, pipe-borne water, social security, and so on. Public administration is extremely important and necessary for democracies to function. Hans Rosenberg (quoted in Krygier, 1979:1) correctly observed that, for better or worse, modern societies are completely reliant on an essential component of the current governance structure, namely its dispersed system of professionalized administration and its officials. "Let parliament be sacked; let political parties be banned or the constitution be suspended; bureaucracy remains relevant and relatively intact even in wartime," Ekanem (2012:317) writes. According to Joseph Schumpeter, "Bureaucracy is not an impediment to democracy, but an inevitable complement to it." Rosenberg, Ekanem, and Schumpeter's words signal and illustrate the burgeoning and indispensable nature of public administration.

Public administration is the single most important aspect of all governments, whether democratic or authoritarian, socialist or capitalist. It is the mechanism by which values are delivered to citizens. Its scope and role in the modern state are expanding all the time. Akpan (1982) attributes this occurrence to several factors, the most important of which are the effects of the eighteenth-century industrial revolution, the emergence of administrative professionalism, the effects of wars and economic cycles, reforms in Britain and the United States (Travelyan Civil Service Reform in Britain and the Penalization Act of 1883 in the United States), the devolution of power to newly created states and later local governments in newly independent states, civil service reforms, and the devolution of power to newly created states. These factors expanded the scope and role of government administration.

As a result of the foregoing, the thrust of this work is to critically and thematically x-ray and bring to light the prominent role that public administration has assumed in recent times in engendering the workability of democracies.

Public Administration: Meaning, Nature and Scope

We can understand public administration by defining it, just like any other concept. There are several approaches to this. We will make some attempts to demonstrate some of these ways. However, it is worth noting that there are as many definitions of the subject as there are scholars in the field. Public administration, according to Adamolekun (1983), is "the total activities of the state in the exercise of its legislative, judicial, and executive departments of government." According to Waldo (1983), as cited in Ezeani (2006:3), public administration refers to both the activities of bureaucrats concerned with the management or administration of government organizations as well as the study of these activities. Adebayo (1981), on the other hand, states that "public administration is government administration as it operates in a particular sphere of government as well as a means of carrying out government policy." Essentially, it refers to administrations such as the public service, state boards, corporations, and agencies, says Adebayo (1981). The public nature of public administration's goals is its distinguishing feature, he continues.

If we venture into semantics by terminologically distilling the definitions given by Adamolekun (1983), Waldo (1883), and Adebayo (1981), we get the following:

i. Public administration is a process as well as a field of study;
ii. It involves all of the state's institutions (legislature, executive, and judiciary) through which the state's will is formulated and expressed;
iii. It focuses on government operations rather than private administration (though governed and regulated by it); and
iv. It incorporates both civil service and public service.

These characteristics are the distinguishing features of public administration. As will be seen in the following sections, public administration has evolved from being merely an activity of the executive branch of government tasked with policy implementation. Several authorities, however, have expressed varying perspectives on the scope of public administration. Walker (1955) and Adamolekun (1983) provide the most in-depth explanation.

Walker (1955) classified public administration into two categories: administrative theory and applied administration. From the perspective of administrative theory, Walker defines administration as "the structure, organization, functions, and methods of all types of public authorities engaged in carrying out administration, as well as the study of all processes connected with external control of the legislative and judiciary over administration, internal control of administrative machinery, administrative tribunals, planning, programming, and execution of public actions." Walker focuses on the practical aspects of administration in the second (applied administration), namely:

i. **Political:** involving executive-legislative relations, political-administrative activities of the cabinet, ministerial-official relationships;
ii. **Legislative:** It includes delegated legislation as well as the preparatory work done by officials in the drafting of bills for enactment;

iii. **Financial:** It encompasses all aspects of financial administration up to and including budget enactment;
iv. **Military:** administration is included in the definition of defense;
v. **Education:** This term refers to all aspects of educational administration;
vi. **Economic:** This covers all administrative activities in the economic field, i.e., industries, agriculture, foreign trade, commerce, and public enterprises; and
vii. **Foreign:** It covers international administration, which includes international cooperation, international agencies for international peace and prosperity, diplomacy, etc. (Walker (1955) quoted in Nyong, 2003:14-15).

Adamolekun (1983), cited in Inakefe, Bassey, and Innah (2021), identified the scope of public administration in Nigeria as constituting the institutions through which government work is carried out. These include:

i. The Federal Civil Service
ii. The 36-State Civil Service
iii. Federal and state government statutory corporations;
iv. 774 local governments
v. Companies in which the federal or state governments own all or a majority of the stock;
vi. Federal or state government-created authorities or commissions;
vii. Education institutions that are primarily funded or established by the federal or state governments
viii. The Nigerian Police Force
ix. The Armed Forces; and
x. The judiciary.

From Adamolekun's perspective, it is clear that public administration pervades and plays an important role in the state. It encompasses both civilian and military bureaucracies. The artillery of those institutions and the diverse functions they perform, as identified by Walker, provides not only a clue but also an insight into the critical role of public administration in democracy.

Democracy, as a form of government, advances the practice of public administration in a number of states. Democracy, according to Anyaele (1998), is "a system of government in which the majority has their way without undermining the interests and rights of the minority." The utilitarian content of this definition is found in the fact that it de-emphasizes majority tyranny while assuaging minority fears and protecting their rights and interests in the process. It is distinguished by several characteristics, the most important of which are free and fair elections, periodic elections, the independence of the judiciary, equality before the law, press freedom, and the guarantee of fundamental human rights.

Significance of Public Administration in Democratic Governance

There is no better way to understand the overwhelming role and importance of public administration than to have a general understanding of how pervasive and indispensable it is to society. Nyong (2003) puts it succinctly:

Public administration affects your life many times each day. You may already be working for the government and attending school part time, and your school may be state-supported. Even if your school claims to be private, many of its students probably receive sizeable amounts of government aid and feel the constant security of government officials. You travel on public roads in vehicles built according to government standards for safety, pollution, and fuel economy, or on public transportation that is operated, subsidized, and regulated by the government. Neither your food nor your clothing escapes the concern of public administrators. There are programs for farming, marketing, and labeling food and fiber, plus controls on the amount of food and clothing imported from overseas. Your insurance and bank accounts come under public control. Your pursuit of leisure may depend on public libraries or parks, or on vehicles and toys that meet government standards. Should there be an accident, you will surely enter a hospital that enjoys a public subsidy and whose physicians must comply with numerous controls. The quality of your retirement may largely depend on the social security administration. And also, when you die, perhaps there will be a final social security payment for burial expenses, including the services of an undertaker who is licensed and regulated for reasons of professional standards and consumer protection (Nyong, 2003:1).

This is the best graphical representation of how important public administration is and how it plays a dominant role in society, without which the essential gains of democracy would be lost. Sharma, Sadana, and Kaur (2012) bring this to a head by asserting that, "in all countries, whether developed or developing, public administration plays an important role in regulating the economy through licenses, quotas, price fixing in certain circumstances, preventing unfair trade practices, preventing monopolies, and regulating imports and exports."

In modern times, public administration has taken on a massive role. It has evolved from being preoccupied with the implementation of public policies. It is the vehicle through which democratic gains reach the people. It also serves other vital functions that keep democracy running smoothly.

Public administration, as an academic field and a practice, contributes to democratic governance in the following ways:

(a) Policy Development or Advisory Role

The regimental dichotomy between administration and politics established by Frank Goodnow and Woodrow Wilson is long gone. Wilson (1887) considered administration to be outside the purview of politics. Later, Goodnow (1900) pushed this dichotomy to its logical conclusion, seeing politics as "the expression of the will of the state" and administration as "the execution of that will." Politics and administration, in their opinion, existed in separate spheres and were concerned with distinct functions—policy formulation and implementation, respectively. According to Rutgers (2010), there is a distinction between administrative and political (legal) actions, as well as between administrative and political functionaries.

However, in existing literature, such academic renditions have been rendered insignificant. In Nigeria, for example, there is a constant interaction between

administration and politics. Experience has demonstrated that there is a link between administration and politics, particularly in the latter's role in shaping and influencing public policy formulation. According to Nyong (2003), "the necessity of the present complex government functions has forced the abandonment of the policy/administration dichotomy as folklore and political metaphysics." Desmond Keeling has called this point of view a "myth." Anderson (1979) elaborated on this point, stating that politics and administration are inextricably linked and that administrative agencies are frequently heavily involved in the formulation of public policy.

Gulick (1933), White (1936), and Appleby (1949) all acknowledge public administrators' policy-making role. Nyong (2003) highlights the significant role that public administration plays in policy formulation by career officials, namely; defining policy options, analyzing the environment, anticipating problems and proffering suitable advice; and their role in assembling, storing, and retrieving data upon which decisions are based, etc. In the course of this, "administrative agencies are traditionally saddled with the execution of policies, and in the course of this, they interact closely with the clientele and the environment of policy implementation," writes Onyishi (2010). He went on to say that "aside from their technical know-how, White (1936), and Appleby (1949) are "on the spot" and generate the majority of memos that form the basis of policy decisions." He emphasizes that, in most cases, legislators rely on public servants from the Assembly Service Commission to generate inputs and draft bills for presentation to the Legislative Assembly. In the same vein, he observes that administrators are inevitably burdened with delegated legislation that has a deep influence on the character of policies enacted. This corroborates with Box (2018), who stated that:

Unelected public professionals, chosen for their demonstrated ability rather than political loyalty, learn much about public needs and preferences in their daily work. They use this knowledge to adjust operating procedures and to recommend new policies and changes to existing policies, so they share with elected leaders the function of representing perceived public will in the policy making process (Box, 2018:2).

In the same vein, Thomas (1966), as quoted in Onyishi (2010), stated that it is unlikely that any modern industrial society could manage the day-to-day operations of public affairs without bureaucratic organizations in which officials play a significant policy-making role. Adebayo (1981:1) even claims that "the public service administrator is a policy maker, policy adviser, program formulator, program manager, program implementer, and agent of political and political continuity."

(b) Implementation of Public Policy for Socio-Economic Development

This is the traditional function of government administration. It is tasked with turning public policies into concrete action for socioeconomic development through policy implementation. Policy implementation, according to Ekot (2012), is "the activities directed at translating goals and objectives into the reality of what was desired." According to Eminue (2005), "implementation refers to the process of converting inputs (informational, financial, human, material, technical, demands, support, etc.) into outputs of goods and services." Citizens expect the government to keep the environment clean and to care for the disabled and the socially and economically disadvantaged; to provide health, educational, and general welfare services; to provide

material and social support to people displaced by environmental disasters; and to provide institutional support for development, among other things.

When such needs are expressed in public policy, it is the responsibility of public administrators to put them into action so that they become public goods (Oslon, 1965). Ikelegbe (1996) identifies and places this task in the hands of career officials in government administrative agencies or the bureaucracy who are in charge of coordinating, monitoring, and enforcing implementation activities. Ogunna (1999) recommends that "such administrative personnel should be politically neutral, highly dedicated, professionally trained, and highly competent" in order to achieve this lofty goal. The pervasiveness of bureaucracy and its influence on the implementation process stem from the bureaucracy's ability to interpret, alter, delay, promote, re-evaluate, and otherwise shape much of the substance of a policy while implementing it (Rosenbaum, 1981).

(c) Running of Administration

Public administrators play an important role in global leadership. Public administrators are seen running government ministries, parastatals, departments, and so on in Nigeria, as they are in other countries. According to Izueke (2010), this class has different nomenclature depending on the government agency they work for, such as general managers, directors, permanent secretaries, and so on. He stated that regardless of the name he is given, he must have a basic understanding of work standards, designs, space and time management, and so on. They function with the help of the pneumonic POSDCORB, which involves planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. They manage the day-to-day operations of government institutions in accordance with the government's laws, rules, regulations, and decisions, whereas the minister, as in federal agencies, and the commissioner, as in state agencies, simply perform supervisory and control functions.

(d) Financial Management

Public administration, with the assistance of the civil service, plays an important role in every state's financial management. Duru (2014) observes that civil servants, with their knowledge and expertise in accounting and public finance, assist in the planning and preparation of the government budget, which is then presented to the executive for modification and then to the legislature for debate, passage, and approval. Administrators also aid in the collection of taxes.

(e) A Stabilizing Force in Society/Catering for the Weaker Section of Society

Public administration is a major force in restoring democracy's stability. According to Brooks Adams, "the function of administration is to bring social stability by facilitating change." Public administration is a powerful social stabilizer. Governments change frequently, but the administration (civil service and public service) rarely undergoes violent change. It maintains a sense of continuity between the old and new orders. This is true not only in the case of constitutional changes in democratic countries, but also when revolutionary changes in the form and character of government occur (Sharma, Sadana & Kaur, 2012).

The state, through the instrument of public administration, ensures equality of opportunity and protects the weak in the areas of health, education, and housing, as well as a variety of other social welfare programs. In times of crisis, it is the state, through administrators, that can put in place the necessary measures to significantly reduce unemployment and eliminate the explosive situation caused by the exclusion of certain groups of the population and the development of abject poverty (Sapru, 2013).

(f) Preservation of polis

Globally, public sectors are being drawn into the interplay of addressing unprecedented yet similar challenges. In an ever-changing world, civil servants must confront and present solutions to problems ranging from unsustainable resource consumption and global environmental concerns to the polarization of politics and rapid advances in technology (Bohne, 2014).

On the other hand, the public sector must address these issues with fewer resources as governments around the world race to reduce public sector funding in the aftermath of the financial crisis (Bohne, 2014). Far from being hollowed out, civil service and public service around the world are responding to their new mandate by becoming an even larger and more important part of government (Bohne, 2014). Nnoli (2003) provides a practical illustration of this process when he writes:

The Ministry of Information takes responsibility for the dissemination of news about the government; the Finance ministry coordinates all the financial transactions of the government; the Ministry of Defense uses the armed forces to protect the society from external and internal attacks and displacement; the External Affairs Ministry conducts the nation's foreign policy; and the Ministry of Internal Affairs looks after internal security through such institutions as the police, prisons, customs, and immigration control.

As a result, the collective exercise of these functions by the state's public agencies is what propels the wheels of governance.

(g) The Function of Public Administration as a Specialized Field of Study

The importance of public administration as a specialized field of study cannot be overstated. Wilson's definition of the subject as an efficiency-promoting and programmatic field was the first expressly articulated statement on the importance of a separate discipline of public administration, which is now universally acknowledged (Kaur and Singhe, 2008). As a specialized discipline, it aids in the training and development of administrators who will lead state administrative institutions. Books and publications by eminent scholars in the field have also influenced public administration practice. They make recommendations to address administrative problems. Kaur and Singhe (2008:3) explain, emphasizing the role of public administration in democracies as a specialized area of study, as a result of which:

Public administration, as witnessed, holds a place of significance in the lives of people. It touches them at every step. For most of their needs, citizens depend on public administration. In view of the important role of public administration in the lives of the

people, the citizens of a country cannot ignore it. Therefore, its teaching should become a part of the curriculum of educational institutions. People must get to know about the structure of government, the activities it undertakes, and the manner in which they are actually performed.

As a field of specialization and intellectual inquiry, it is clear that public administration is enormously important, as models and theories developed by experts' aid in the resolution of real-life administrative problems.

Conclusion

Without public administration, democracies all over the world would grind to a halt and eventually collapse. Expert advice in public policy formulation, implementing government policies through which the gains of democracy are delivered to the people, direct running of administrative institutions, involvement in state financial management, preservation of the polity, and the provision of government institutions with trained personnel and recommendations from their specialized discipline are some of the critical functions that are critical to the functionality of democracy.

We cannot imagine how disordered and chaotic democracy would be in the absence of public administration in the performance of these roles and functions. It is instructive, however, to note that these roles and the pervasiveness of public administrators will vary across the globe's various social formations. Its role will be more prominent in socialist states than in capitalist states where the government wields undue power.

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