

Weak Political Institutions as the Bane of African Developing Economies

Okwara, Emmanuel Chukwuma

*Department of Political Science & Diplomacy,
Veritas University, Abuja*

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Abstract

A major criticism of the American economic historian W.W. Rostow in his model of “Stages of Economic Growth” is that the theory does not appear to be working for contemporary developing nations as they lack the institutional framework which existed in Europe. Nigeria certainly lacks strong political institutions as is easily observable from events which unfold in the country on daily basis. The study examined the effect of weak political institutions on African developing countries with a focus on Nigeria. Data was obtained from secondary materials including books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, the internet, etc. Content analysis was adopted in its methodology while the institutional theory (Amenta and Ramsey, 2009) was employed as the theoretical framework. Results showed that weak political institutions - legislature, political parties, the executive, etc. have not lived up to the demands of the Nigerian society. The study suggested that these institutions be strengthened if efforts to improve the society must begin to yield the desired results.

Keywords: *Political institutions, African developing economies, Desired results, Nigerian society, Stages of growth model.*

Corresponding Author: **Okwara, Emmanuel Chukwuma**

Background to the Study

Institutions may be perceived as rules, enforcement mechanisms and organisations (Nabli and Nugent (1999). Such institutions may vary according to their organizational structures, i.e., the extent to which organizations and institutions overlap. North (1991) views institutions as consisting of formal rules, informal constraints – norms of behaviour, conventions, and self-imposed codes of conduct- and their enforcement characteristic. According to the 2001 World Bank Development Report, institutions provide an important role in affecting people's standards of living and in helping protect their rights. They exert much influence on the macro-economic performance of countries as they affect transaction costs by decreasing uncertainty, directing economic activity to productive areas and by building trust and enhancing cooperation.

A major criticism of the stages of growth theory by Rostow is that the model cannot be effective in the contemporary developing nations since they lack the basic institutional framework which existed in Europe at the time. Obviously, the institutions in the emerging economies lack sufficient activity needed to support productive investments and solve the problem of low efficiency. In these societies, one discovers that legal principles discriminate among individuals, the properly rights are not valid for the majority of the population, the elites have unlimited economic and political power, only a few fortunate citizens can benefit from quality education, have access to credit and the opportunity to engage in production. In developing countries, bad institutions that do not function well have adverse effect on the performance of the economy. The inefficiency of the official institutions engaged in economic operations; increase the cost of doing business. Governments are unstable. In Africa and Latin America, the basic flaw in terms of economic growth and development is the nature of arrangements by political institutions which are often inconsistent with the interests of the citizens. The result is that bad public services are provided. There is uncertainty and manipulation in every sphere of public services rendered e.g. “the judicial system, corruption, bribery, tax evasion, ill-defined property rights and the existence of inefficient institutions as ill-conceived arrangements cause those countries to be risky and unattractive” (Luiz, 2009; Fosu, Bates and Hoeffler, 2006; Balamoune, 2005; Birdsall, 2007; Charnock, 2009).

Over the decades, there has been a recurrent and sustained argument that the Nigerian state, like its counterparts in Africa and other countries of the developing world, underperforms due to lack of state capacity to deal with the contemporary realities of governance. The study conducted by Yagboyaju and Akinola (2009) on Nigerian State and the crisis of governance: A critical exposition, found that the state has failed in three major areas such as security of lives and property, promotion of the rule of law, and provision of visionary leadership. The paper concluded that the nature and characters of the political leadership explains the Nigerian state's incapacity for effective governance. In the views of Owoye and Bissessar (1992), “bad governance is a symptom of institutional and leadership failure, explicitly “manifested by its long list of dictatorial leaders, non free media and undemocratic elections”. Obviously, all fingers in the above definition point at the weakness of the political institutions in Nigeria. It is a worrisome state that stimulates investigations. Against this background, this study seeks to assess the effect of weak political institutions on the Nigerian quest for development. Specifically, the paper will be focusing on:

- (a) The effect of the budgetary institution on Nigeria's quest for development.
- (b) The effect of civil service bureaucracy on Nigeria's development effort.

Research Questions

The study will address the following questions:

- (a) What is the effect of the budgetary institution on the quest for development in Nigeria?
- (b) How has civil service bureaucracy influenced Nigeria's quest for development?

Literature Review

Conceptual literature

Budgetary institution: Budgetary institutions refer to the set of rules, procedures, and practices used to prepare, approve, and implement budgets. This is to imply that budgetary institutions determine –(a) the size of total public expenditure, the fiscal deficit, and public borrowing (and implicitly the sustainability of public sector accounts,) and (b) the appropriation of resources by type of expenditure and by groups of beneficiaries. These institutions are important because they influence the rules of the game, either by imposing restrictions on the entire budgetary process, or by distributing the power, responsibilities, and information among the various actors, thus affecting the fiscal results. In his study, Raudia (2014), observes that “budgetary institutions encompass two different types of institutional arrangements: Fiscal rules and budget process rules”.

Bureaucracy: This is an unavoidable concept both in common language and in organizational analysis. Generally speaking, bureaucracy is associated with very negative features of organization. It is a concept that was proposed by Max Weber in a context in which “he considers rationalization of society as inevitable” (Pollit, 2008). Godoi, Silva, and Cardoso (2017) observe that the negative features of organization with which bureaucracy is associated include – “delays in operation, action centred on opaque standards, executive requests for documentation, or even countless difficulties in meeting users or customers' requests”.

Civil service: Ipinlaiye (2001), perceives the term civil service as one “normally used when referring to the body of men and women employed in 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, Abba and Anazodo (2006) in Anazodo (2012), argue that “civil service in Nigeria comprises workers in the various ministries or departments apart from those who hold political appointments”. The Nigerian Constitution (1999) section 318 sub section I posits that:

Civil service refers to service of the federation (stated) in a civil capacity, staff of the office of the president, (Governor), vice president, (Deputy Governor), a ministry or department of the federation (state), assigned with the responsibility for any business of the government of the federation(state), (FRN, 1999).

Institution: Institution refers to established ways of doing things. It refers to those rules and regulations which in their abstractness, focused on the practicality of them by maintaining social interaction and cubing human emotions and behavior. Institutions form choice sets. They influence behavior by shaping responsibilities, liberties and people's motivations.

Institutions are created(laws) or emerge (norms) to serve specific purposes, while also protecting certain values. Institutions specify who gets access to which resources, and also influences how these resources are used.

The human society is characterized by more or less complex and overlapping networks of regular and social interactions and practices. Economic, political or cultural as the case may be, such repeated interactions require agreed and predictable rules. i.e. ways of doings. Such sets of rules constitute institutions. According to North (1990),

Economic activity- whether silent barter, the operation of stock markets, the conditions for opening a new business or obtaining credit – is shaped by the rules of the game' which forbid some forms of behavior and encourage others; the form which such rules take may either hinder or promote growth.

Institutions are neither static nor neutral, they distribute advantages and disadvantages in different ways, and they will always be winners and losers in the course of establishing or changing them. Emile Durkheim (1895/1938), observed that social science is 'the science of institutions, of their genesis and their functioning'.

Political Institutions: These are the organizations in a government that create, enforce, and apply laws. They often mediate conflict, make (governmental) policy on the economy and social systems, and otherwise, provide representation for the population. Political institutions include political party organizations, trade unions, and the (legal) courts. The term 'political institutions' may also refer to the recognized structure of rules and principles within which the above organizations operate, including such concepts as the right to vote, a responsible government, and accountability. In the views of Wittman (1995), political institutions arise exactly in order to mitigate potential 'political market failures', such as principal agent problems between voters and politicians or among political bodies. Again, competition for political office reduces political opportunism.

Empirical Review

Past and current works on the subject matter are hitherto presented in a tabular form as follows:

Table 1.

Names of Researcher(s)/year, Title of study	Geographical and content scope covered	Data source(s) & Analytical tools	Findings/Conclusion/Recommendations
Fosu (2019), Institutions and African economic development.	Africa: Institutions and Development	Secondary materials (data) were employed, review of extant literature.	The paper concluded by flagging the potential risk of backtracking by African countries from achieving the democratic consolidation required to sustain the gains in growth and development.
Cheeseman (2018). Institutions and Democracy in Africa	Africa: Institutions and democracy.	Secondary materials like books, journals etc.	African political institutions, historically are seen as weak. Such institutions constitutions, legislatures and judiciary – all seen as being vulnerable to manipulation, leading to some claiming that the continent is “institution less”.
Nomor, Orjime and Miswenem (2018). Political participation and economic growth in Nigeria.	Nigeria: Political Participation and economic growth. 1999-2016.	The study used GDP per capita as proxy for economic growth while political participation was measured by political participation index Auto-regressive distributed lag (ARDL) model was used to estimate the model of the study.	The study found no long run relationship between political participation and economic growth in Nigeria. Thus, the study concludes that political participation has not favourably contributed to economic growth in Nigeria due largely to low participation of citizens in political activities in the country. The paper recommends increased participation of citizens in political activities in Nigeria so as to reap the full benefits of political participation.
Fosu (2017). Governance and development in Africa: A concise review.	Africa: Governance and Development.	Secondary sources were employed to obtain the data for the study.	The paper found amongst others that both economic governance and political governance have improved considerably sine the late 180 – or early 1990s.
Adegboye (2015). Political Institutions and Fiscal Management in Nigeria. Do state governments matter?	1970-2012 political institutions and Fiscal Management in Nigeria: Do state governments matter?	Data was processed using OLS and GMM estimation techniques.	The study found that fiscal dependence (state government dependence on oil resources) is the strongest institutional factor promoting fiscal procyclicality in Nigeria. The effect is more pronounced during the democratizera – fiscal deficits to income ration have responded more positively to state government dependence on the fiscal pool since 1999.

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Theory (Amenta and Ramsey, 2009)

Basically, all institutional theoretical claims are similar as they emanate from fact that something identified at a higher level is used to explain processes and outcomes at a lower level of analysis (Clemens and Cook, Amenta, 2005). Political institutionalists typically situate their claims at the state or macro-political level and argue that process of formation of states, political systems, and political party systems strongly influence political processes and outcomes (Amenta, 2005).

Political and historical institutionalists are institutionalists who see institutions as formal or informal procedures, routine, norms, and conventions in the organizational structure of the polity or the political economy (Hall and Taylor, 1966). Institutional theories as applied to politics posit two distinct forms of institutional influences over policy and political action. Institutions can be constraining, superimposing conditions of possibility for mobilization, access, and influence. Institutions limit some forms of action and facilitate others. Arguments about institutional constraint evoke an “architectural or maize-like” imagery, to the extent that institutions are hypothesized to proceed from powerful states; such architecture becomes a “concrete, massive, autonomous” fortress (Clemens and Cook, 1999: 445-461). Theories of “political mediation” (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky, 2005) and “Political opportunity” (Meyer and Minkoff; 2004) are, partially, institutional constraint arguments, to the extent that they posit that political institutions limit the conditions under which organized interests mobilize and attain collective goods from the state. This theory clearly explains the extent of influence an institution can have on various spheres of humanity, Hence, its adoption as the theoretical framework of this study.

Methodology

In this study, data was obtained from secondary materials. It is a descriptive study in which content analysis is adopted as the technique for analysis. The analysis is carried out in the following order –

Research Question One (1): What is the effect of weak budgetary institution on Nigeria's quest for development?

Budgetary institutions in Nigeria are generally perceived as inefficient, ineffective, weak and unable to create a meaningful contribution to the entire national growth process. There is quite a plethora of empirical support for the above stance. One such support is the study of “Budget and Political institutions and budgetary performance” in Nigeria by Adegboye and Iweriebor (2016). The empirical results from the study compare well with both regional and international positions and submits as follows:

The budgetary process in Nigeria is fraught with large-scale inefficiencies in terms of preparation and allocations. Moreover, budget institutions in Nigeria are shown to be weak in terms of maintaining accelerated processes or efficient resource use. The institutions do not provide the expected formidable guard against inefficiency of budget outcomes in Nigeria.

In a related development, the study by Edeme and Nkaku (2017) titled “Budgeting for development: Lessons from 2013 capital budget implementation in Nigeria, recorded the following –

Findings suggest that the level of capital budget implementation is insufficient to foster the desired development. This poor performance is attributable to inadequacy in the budget implementation plans, non release or late release of budgeted funds and lack of budget performance monitoring.

Lacey (1989), in his observation, pointed out that, in most developing countries, there is always a disjoint between broad objectives of the plan and the interconnection in budget preparation. Empirical evince from Ghana and Nigeria reveal that national budgets possess the principal features of repetitive budgeting whose sources of financing is unpredictable. According to Omechinwa and Roe (1989), Nwagu (1992), “this unpredictability of resource flows creates uncertainty in resource allocation and capital budget implementation”.

Studies have also exposed the fact that the manner in which new projects have been planned, appraised, approved and included in the budget are not in conformity with the laid down guidelines designed to facilitate the linkage between development plans and annual budget. The capital budget of a country is a veritable instrument in the provision of capital investment and it is often more directly related to development because it contributes to the capital stock needed to drive the growth process in the economy. This is hardly the case with Nigeria where Oke, (2013), Obadan (2010), assert that, “annual budgets over the years have not contributed significantly to the growth process”. This assertion is made more manifest as Ogujiuba and Ehigiamusoe (2014) noted that, “only 51% of the total budgeted funds for capital expenditures in the 2012 Federal Government Budget were utilized”.

Research Question Two (2): How has Civil Service Bureaucracy influenced Nigeria's Quest for development?

Bureaucrats play vital roles in the formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes. However, the frequent incursion of politics into the domain of the public service in Nigeria has undermined these roles to an unimaginable extent. In his study titled “Bureaucratic politics and policy development: Issues and challenges, Agboola (2016), observe that, “public bureaucracy in Nigeria is expected to play a leading role in the socioeconomic transformation through innovation and social engineering”. In its analysis of data (secondary) obtained from official documents, books, reports and proceedings papers, the study came to the conclusion that, “public bureaucracy is a catalog of failed policies and development projects”. The paper believes that the inability of government bureaucracy to deliver the much needed services to the citizens and the resultant decline in the standard of living of the people may be held by the same as a conclusive evidence of failed Nigerian state. Okotoni (2001), laments that, “the public bureaucracy in Nigeria is plagued with a number of problems that have hindered its effective role in the country. A major problem of the public sector is the politicization of jobs in the sector. Going further, Okotoni (2001), sums up the problems of the public service to include – “politicization of the offices of the permanent secretary and the head of service, corruption, nepotism, and introduction of the Federal character”.

In a recent study, titled, “Public bureaucracy and service delivery in Nigeria: The Neo-Weberian Explanation, Ajibade and Ibieta (2016), employed the tool of the Neo-Weberian model to highlight the deficits in public service delivery in Nigeria. It infers that for the Nigerian bureaucracy to achieve its mandate to qualitative service delivery to the populace, government should make use of professionals in the provision of public services as reinforced in the neo-Weberian model.

It is on record, that “the Nigerian public sector has undergone a process of restructuring in the last two decades” (Bureau of Public Service Reforms, 2007). This was in an attempt to improve service delivery by government agencies. Makinde (2005), and Abah (2010), believe the justification for the reforms has been to make it more responsive to the needs of the citizens by increasing the levels of accountability, promoting efficiency and effectiveness, introducing participative decision making and adopting pro-active steps and practices in the public sector. According to Njunwa (2007), “the introduction, adoption and implementation of public the adherence of formalized procedures to an emphasis on resources allocation and goal achievement for improved service delivery to the public. However, the reforms notwithstanding, public service delivery still remains unimpressive. For instance, the depressing state of public service delivery in Nigeria is noticeable in the collapse of public utilities and educational system. State hospitals which had earlier degenerated into consulting clinics have now become 'places to die' and the quality of services rendered by government agencies being the subject of continuous lamentation by citizens (Akume, 2015; Osawe, 2015).

Findings

This study revealed the following:

1. The budgetary process in Nigeria is fraught with large-scale inefficiencies in terms of preparation and allocations.
2. Budget institutions in Nigeria are shown to be weak in terms of maintain accelerate processes or efficient resource use.
3. The level of capital budget implementation is insufficient to foster the desired development.
4. The poor performance in the budget system is attributable to inadequacy in the budget implementation plans, non-release or late release of budgeted funds and lack of budget performance monitoring.
5. In Ghana and Nigeria as revealed by empirical evidence, national budgets possess the principal features of repetitive budgeting whose source of financing is unpredictable.
6. The manner in which new projects have been planned, appraised, approved and included in the budget are not in tandem with laid down guidelines designed to facilitate the linkage between development plans and annual budget.
7. In Nigeria, annual budgets over the years have not contributed significantly to h growth process.
8. The frequent incursion of politics into the domain of the public service in Nigeria has undermined the roles of the formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes.
9. Public bureaucracy in Nigeria is plagued with a number of problems that have hindered its effective role in the country.
10. Problems of public service in Nigeria include – politicization of offices of the permanent secretary and head of service, corruption, nepotism, and the introduction of the federal character.
11. In an effort to improve public service delivery, the Nigerian government has introduced reforms. However, these reforms have not yielded the desired results.

Conclusion

Rostow's model of growth has been criticized on the grounds that the model cannot work in the contemporary developing countries as those nations lack the basic institutional framework which existed in Europe at the very earlier stage of their development process. Generally, African institutions are known to be weak and this has had adverse consequences for the development process of countries in the continent. Nigeria is no exception as her institutions are also known to be weak. This study examined the extent to which these institutions have influenced the development of the country. Data for the study was obtained from secondary sources – books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, the internet, etc. Using content analysis as its analytic technique, two public institutions – the budgetary system and the civil service bureaucracy were examined. The paper found that both the budgetary system and the civil service were fraught with ineffectiveness and inefficiency with the tendency of leading the nation to attain the status of a failed state. While the budgetary system has failed to enhance adequate planning and implementation, the civil service bureaucracy has led to a situation in which hospitals have turned to mere consultancy centres, water and electricity supply are grossly inadequate, and the public service delivery is nothing to write home about. It is the conclusion of the paper that urgent reforms must be embarked upon to bring the Nigerian political institutions back on track if the country must avoid a total collapse in the nearest future. The paper goes on to suggest that the civil service and the budgetary system be reinjected with fresh blood to get it working again.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are made –

1. Reforms must not stop on paper. They have to be activated and implemented if the desired results must be received.
2. Annual budgets can only be effective and contribute in the growth process when the rules of the budgeting process are adhered to.
3. The challenges that have plagued public bureaucracy in Nigeria should be addressed seriously.
4. The politicization of the offices of permanent secretary and head of service must be stopped to give the civil service the professional look it deserves.
5. The federal character which has been counter productive should be scrapped.
6. Repetitive budgeting is a dangerous practice particularly in a situation of unpredictable sources of finance. It has to be stopped.
7. Frequent incursion of politicians into the budget process and civil service should be addressed seriously with a view to putting a permanent end to the practice.
8. It is necessary to beef up the level of capital budget implementation to foster the desired development.

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