

Research Article

An Assessment of the Impact of Politics on Public Service Administration in Sierra Leone: Case of the Civil Service in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This study critically examines the intricate relationship between politics and public administration with a specific focus on the civil service in Sierra Leone. The paper investigates the historical context of public administration and politics in Sierra Leone, elucidates the challenges emanating from political interference, evaluates the resultant consequences for service delivery and professionalism, and proposes strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of political influence. Findings revealed many challenges facing public administrators in executing their responsibilities due to party politics which result to maladministration and bad governance, partisan appointments, poor service delivery, corruption, lack of accountability, improper and non-adherence to the rule of law, improper use of resources. The paper recommends the separation of politics from administration, promotion of merit-based appointments, independent oversight mechanisms, increased accountability and transparency and performance-based agreements.

Keywords: Party Politics, Public Administration, Service Delivery, Civil Service, Accountability and Transparency.

1. Introduction

Politics plays a crucial role in shaping public administration and its service delivery charter. The interplay between politics and public administration can have a profound impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions. This section gives an overview of the historical background and socio-political landscape of Sierra Leone, laying the groundwork for a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between politics and public service administration, specifically within the civil service. Sierra Leone is a country on the West Coast of Africa with a history marked by colonial rule, civil conflicts, and post-independence governance challenges.

1.1. Historical Legacy and Governance Challenges

The colonial legacy of British control, which laid the groundwork for Sierra Leone's administrative framework, is crucial to the country's history. Administrative frameworks were created during colonial rule to advance the goals of the colonial authority over those of the native populace. As a foundation for the post-independence civil service, the country's governance system was profoundly impacted by the hierarchical and centralized administrative framework (Bangura, 2014).

1.2. Post-Independence Era and Political Turmoil

A new era in Sierra Leone's history began in 1961 when the country declared its independence from British Colonial Rule. But the shift to self-governance was followed by political instability, which was seen in the battle for political supremacy and repeated changes in the administration. A fractured political landscape resulted from the legacy of colonial administration as well as the difficulties of nation-building.

1.3. Political Interference and Public Service Administration

Political interference occurs when politicians interfere with the decision-making administrative matters such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting as well as the

allocation and use of public funds. As stated by Dixit, and Pindyck, (1994) in the supply of roads, schools, hospitals in the developing countries, politics plays a role. Among the various leadership challenges facing low developing countries is the political interference in administration (Wangwe, 2012). Politics has had a significant influence on the management of public services in Sierra Leone, especially within the civil service. Political interference can lead to corruption, favoritism, and lack of impartiality in decision making processes. Politicization of the civil service undermines the principles of meritocracy, professionalism and accountability which are essential for effective public administration. In the past, political figures have appointed supporters of their parties or use connections in an effort to solidify their hold on power. This behavior, which is frequently motivated by nepotism and favoritism, has undermined the civil service's efficacy and professionalism (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). In many African countries including Sierra Leone, the public becomes a platform and the politicians want to maintain their fraction in it and try to extend their domain in every other section of public administration. Thus because of the political activities in the administration and the undue influence of the politicians the public and administrative institutions get politicized (Bendor, *et al.*, 2003).

1.4. Bureaucratic Capture and Policy Implementation

Bureaucratic capture, in which particular political factions or interest groups have undue control over administrative agencies, is one of the main problems brought on by political meddling. This capture skews policy priorities, taking funds away from initiatives serving the public interest and compromising the successful execution of policies (Musa and Ndulo, 2016).

1.5. Partisan Appointments and Meritocracy

A persistent problem in Sierra Leone's governance environment has been partisan appointments inside the civil service. Political loyalty over competence in appointments erodes meritocracy and impedes the growth of a competent, professional civil service (Dijkstra and Hudson, 2015). Patronage politics undermines the merit-based recruitment and promotion systems, compromising the professionalism and competence within the civil service. Such patronage appointments can also undermine the public's trust in the civil service's ability to deliver impartial and effective services. The political climate, historical legacies, and governance issues that have molded Sierra Leone's background and context shed light on the intricate web of relationships that exist between public sector management and politics. An objective, efficient civil service is essential to bolstering democratic governance and service delivery, as demonstrated by the nation's self-government journey and the ensuing conflicts for political supremacy. Further exploration of the problems caused by political meddling in the civil service and suggestions for solutions to improve professionalism, effectiveness, and accountability will be provided in the ensuing sections of this research.

2. Literature Review

With substantial ramifications for governance, service delivery, and democratic functioning, the relationship between politics and public service administration is intricate and diverse. The impact of politics on public sector administration in Sierra Leone is examined in-depth in this study of the literature, with a particular emphasis on the civil service. The review aims to clarify the difficulties presented by political intervention and its effects by incorporating theoretical frameworks, historical background, and empirical findings.

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Politics and Public Administration

A country's policy implementation and service delivery processes are largely determined by the interactions between public administration and politics. Since administrators must make difficult judgments under the sway of political pressure and policy goals, public administration is intrinsically political, as suggested by Rainey (2003). Still, to preserve the efficacy and professionalism of the civil service, a delicate balance must be struck between political direction and administrative autonomy (Hood, 1991).

2.2. Historical Overview of Public Service in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's public service history is marked by colonial legacy, post-independence political changes, and civil conflicts. The colonial administrative structure laid the foundation for the bureaucracy, with a hierarchical organization characterized by centralized decision-making (Bangura, 2014). The transition to independence brought challenges of governance, including the politicization of the civil service through partisan appointments and patronage networks (Kamara, 2011).

2.3. Political Influence on Public Service Administration

Sierra Leone's public service has suffered greatly from political meddling, which has created a number of difficulties that obstruct professional and effective service delivery. Conteh-Morgan (2005) has pointed out

that nepotism has led to the appointment of unfit people to important posts via political or family ties. As a result, citizens' confidence in the ability of the civil service is weakened, undermining meritocracy as well.

In a politicized civil service where party allegiance frequently takes precedence over professionalism, partisan appointments have resulted in what Dijkstra and Hudson (2015) have discussed. It is difficult to effectively plan and implement long-term projects when there is a lack of continuity in policies and programs as a result of shifting governments another effect of political meddling is bureaucratic capture, as examined by Musa and Ndulo (2016). Governmental factions or interest groups may have disproportionate influence over administrative agencies, devoting money and attention away from goals and interests of the general public.

2.4. Implications for Service Delivery and Professionalism

Political meddling has serious repercussions that impact the professionalism and quality of service provided by Sierra Leone's public sector. According to Osman and Sheku (2019), the general competency of civil servants has decreased as a result of the degradation of meritocracy, which has a negative impact on the standard of services offered to citizens. An increasingly politicized workforce results in diminished efficacy as talented professionals frequently experience restricted advancement opportunities. Politicization leads to inefficiencies, which, as Koroma (2017) points out, results in poor service delivery and delayed policy implementation. Public employees may put short-term political ambitions ahead of long-term developmental goals out of fear of political retribution.

As Koroma and Sengeh (2014) have investigated, a general outcome is less professionalism. A decrease in public trust and disenchantment with governance institutions is a result of political pressures undermining the neutrality and impartiality that civil workers are supposed to portray. According to the literature assessment, political meddling presents serious difficulties for Sierra Leone's public sector administration, especially for the civil service. These problems show up as politicized appointments, nepotism, and bureaucratic capture. The results include a decline in professionalism, inefficiencies in the provision of services, and a weakening of meritocracy. The necessity for reform in Sierra Leone's civil service is shown by the historical background and empirical findings.

3. Research Objective

The primary research objective of this study is to comprehensively assess the impact of politics on public service administration in Sierra Leone, specifically focusing on the civil service. This objective encompasses understanding the historical context, identifying the challenges arising from political interference, and evaluating the consequences of such interference on the effectiveness, professionalism, and accountability of the civil service. The research aims to provide insights into the multifaceted dynamics at play and offer practical recommendations to mitigate the adverse effects of political influence, thus contributing to the enhancement of public administration and governance in Sierra Leone.

4. Methodology

With regard to public service administration in Sierra Leone, particularly in the civil service, the methodology used in this study attempts to give a thorough evaluation of the influence of politics. The study adopted an exploratory research design in order to make in-depth investigation on the impact of politics in public administration with generalisations on the activities of the Sierra Leone civil service. With respect to administration, service delivery, accountability, and professionalism the survey seeks to draw the connection between politics and administration. Data was collected through secondary sources.

5. Discussions

In order to provide a thorough assessment of the Impact of party politics/political interference in public administration on public service administration in Sierra Leone, as well as strategies to lessen its negative effects, this section of this article will go into a deeper investigation of these issues. These sections used case studies.

5.1. Political Manipulation/Maladministration within the Civil Service

Public sector institutions are primarily institutions of public concern and are only neutral and professional when no hands from the other organs of government are involved. In Sierra Leone however, public administrators because of their attachment towards political parties, the leaders of political parties connive with them in the administration of the bureaucrats. This study therefore posits that that politics should be separated from administration. However, studies shown that politicians interfere in planning, organizing,

staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting allocation and use of funds which result to administrative corruption, abuse of power and poor accountability. There are no impartial and unfettered decisions that the government can make.

Factionalism in the administration can occasionally be exacerbated by political influence, which leads to demoralization, complete work neglect, and frequently severe friction among the bureaucrats. Those with more political clout, influence, and initiative, ministers have a tendency to emphasize their general supervisory position as a means of controlling and guiding subordinates in the administration, starting with secretaries. Under such circumstances, ministries tended to function as virtual executive heads, but they were not required to assume the duties of principal accounting officer or executive head, which remained, in theory, primarily, with the secretaries.

5.2. Nepotism and Patronage

In Sierra Leone, nepotism is encouraged by the rules. They provide unjustified advantages and privileges on public resources to their relatives, kin, and family. Lack of qualifications for important jobs has resulted to nepotism and cronyism, which has damaged the civil service's professionalism and morale.

5.3. Improper and Non-Observance of the Rule of Law

Arguably, the rule of law may be applied selectively and arbitrarily where political interference is pervasive. It is stated that although laws exist, they are only enforced in favor of privileged individuals or certain social classes. Justice is thus compromised and denied to the whole public. Additionally, even while social mobility is a crucial component of good governance, party politics therefore, affects the fundamental rights of those not connected to the party in power.

5.4. Improper Use of Resources

Budgets are frequently mishandled and used for unapproved reasons. Therefore, the general public is unable to make any measures to ensure good governance.

5.5. Bureaucratic Capture

Some political groups will take control of bureaucratic organizations, focusing resources and attention on matters not directly related to the public interest. The public's trust in public authorities is eroded by this system. Public servants now play the role of lapdogs for the ruling party, advancing political objectives despite public backlash.

5.6. Partisan Appointments

The civil service will become less professional as a result of appointments made more out of political loyalty than on the basis of competence. This is known as the "spoils system" in public administration, and it is correlated with inadequate governance practices, corruption, and subpar service delivery. Political appointees will be more concerned with their party activities than their office positions, thus will lead to lack of commitment and they will answer more to their party's "big guys" than to their office bosses.

5.7. Corruption/Improper Enrichment and Lack of Accountability

Civil servants are under political pressure to compromise their integrity, which will result in political intervention perpetuating corruption. The widening income gap between the elite and the poor, which corruption has exacerbated, poses the greatest threat to the nation's ability to maintain peace and order.

5.8. Unemployment

Due to refusal to follow the policies or dance to the tunes of the governing administration, several young people will be unable to obtain suitable jobs. Despite their qualifications, this kind of political and tribal discrimination causes brain drain, which in turn pushes frustrated adolescents toward political violence and extremism, particularly during election seasons, which are typically the height of the nation's political activity. It was clear in the early 1990s that young people without jobs had few options but to turn to crime or enlist in the armed forces, as demonstrated by the large-scale enlistment of unemployed youngsters into rebel fighting groups. Young people who are unemployed or underemployed are more likely to be involved in criminal activity and conflicts, armed and insurgent groups take advantage of several of them.

5.9. Tribalism/Ethnicity or Sentimentalism

Public administration that is connected to party politics is also impacted by sentimentalism, ethnicity, and tribalism. In an instant, it devastates a state. When it comes to employment opportunities and other

development projects, one tribe/ethnic group/ political party is given preference over another. In actuality, this was one of the main causes of the rebel war in Sierra Leone in 1991. Instead of helping the common populace, APC government led by Siaka Stevens and J.S. Momoh 1967 and 1985 respectively engaged in such behavior to appease and serve their party governance. Instability could easily happen when certain groups are ostracized due to their political affiliation or tribe. Majority of the masses were neglected, only few were favoured by the system and enjoyed opportunities that came along with politics. The genocide in Rwanda between the Tutsi and Hutus was also evidence of it. It is irrefutable that political favoritism and tribalism cause more harm than good in a particular state. Conflict can also be easily started rather than resolved. Because of this, it will be extremely difficult for development to take place when there is an existence of maladministration and bad governance.

6. Implications for Service Delivery and Professionalism

- ✓ Erosion of Meritocracy: A decrease in overall competence and efficiency has resulted from the marginalization of qualified civil servants through political appointments.
- ✓ Ineffectiveness and Inefficiency/Poor Service Delivery: Political meddling has led to bureaucratic inefficiencies that have impeded the proper execution of policies and the provision of services.
- ✓ Loss of Public Trust: The public's confidence in the civil service is damaged by perceived political manipulation, which makes it more difficult for residents to receive basic services.
- ✓ Diminished Professionalism: The impartiality and professionalism that ought to be the hallmarks of civil service operations are compromised by political meddling.

7. Civil Service Reforms in Sierra Leone

- ✓ The Need for Reforms: In order to restore effectiveness and professionalism, the deficiencies caused by political interference call for comprehensive civil service reforms.
- ✓ Reform Efforts and Challenges: Previous reform initiatives have encountered difficulties because of political opposition, a lack of funding, and insufficient implementation strategies.
- ✓ Lessons Learned: Effective reforms need political commitment, stakeholder engagement, and a phased approach to implementation.

8. Mitigating Political Influence for an Efficient Civil Service

- ✓ Proper division of government power/separation of power.
- ✓ Creation of awareness of distinct roles of politicians and administrators.
- ✓ Enforcement of public administrator autonomy.
- ✓ Enhancing Civil Service Self-Governance: For the civil service to remain unbiased and professional, protection against political pressure must be put in place.
- ✓ Increasing Accountability and Transparency: Corrupt practices can be minimized by open hiring procedures, promotions on the basis of merit, and channels for reporting political meddling, ethical codes and standards, citizens engagement and participation, Independent Anti-corruption Commission, Open data initiative Judicial independence, Media Freedom and investigative journalism, freedom of information Laws and independent audits and evaluations and E-governance initiatives.
- ✓ Career Advancement and Education: The capacity of civil officials and the impact of political influence can be increased by investing in ongoing training and skills development.
- ✓ Reforms in Law and Institutions: Political meddling can be reduced by strengthening institutional control systems and updating legal frameworks to depoliticize appointments.

9. Conclusion

- 1) It was revealed that public administrators were facing many administrative problems some of these problems were maladministration and bad governance, abuse of power, poor service delivery, improper and non-adherence to the rule of law, improper use of resources, corruption and lack of accountability. It is essential for policy makers and stakeholders to recognize and address these issues to foster a professional, merit based civil service that can contribute to the sustainable development of the nation. By promoting transparency, professionalism, and accountability, Sierra Leone can work towards a resilient and robust civil service that serves the interests of its citizens.
- 2) Repercussions for Politics and Public Administration: Political meddling must be stopped in order to improve democratic governance and the functioning of the civil service.
- 3) The establishment of a professional and independent civil service is a prerequisite for sustainable transformation and calls for cooperation between the government, civil society, and foreign partners.

- 4) Through the prioritization of autonomy, transparency, and capacity building, Sierra Leone can establish a civil service that is impartial, effective, and fulfills the needs of its people.
- 5) Politicians should not be part of projects implementation and must not instruct public or civil servants how projects should be managed.

10. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The challenges posed by political interference in Sierra Leone's civil service demand urgent attention and comprehensive reforms to restore professionalism, enhance service delivery, and strengthen democratic governance. This section outlines a series of recommendations for policy and practice that can serve as a foundation for addressing the adverse effects of politics on public service administration in Sierra Leone.

i) Enactment of Legal Reforms

Promoting merit-based appointments in the public service and reducing political meddling are two important goals of legislation. To guarantee that appointments are made on the basis of credentials, experience, and expertise rather than political affinities, the government should enact legislation requiring open and honest hiring procedures. Laws should also set up oversight and accountability procedures so that public employees can report instances of political pressure without worrying about facing consequences.

ii) Demonstrating Political Will and Leadership

In determining the course of public service administration, political leaders are extremely important. Professionalism and the public interest ought to take precedence over immediate electoral benefits for elected officials. Transparent policies that stress the value of an impartial and independent civil service are a good way to show a commitment to change. Together with abstaining from participating in administrative matters, political leaders should also give civil officials the freedom to carry out their responsibilities without undue influence.

iii) Investment in Capacity Building and Training

Improving civil servants' abilities and capabilities is essential to lessening the effects of political meddling. The government ought to fund extensive training initiatives that provide civil officials with the know-how needed to carry out policies, provide effective services, and behave ethically. In order to support civil officials in bucking political pressure, these programs should also emphasize the development of a profound awareness of the values of impartiality and professionalism.

iv) Strengthening Civil Society Engagement

As watchdogs, civil society organizations can hold the government and civil servants responsible for their actions. Forming alliances between government and civil society organizations can support the promotion of meritocracy and transparency while keeping an eye on political meddling. In an attempt to establish an impartial civil service, civil society organizations must be urged to report incidents of political meddling.

v) Implementing Transparent Recruitment Processes

Open and competitive processes should be used for hiring and promoting employees within the civil service. Jobs should be openly posted, and candidates should be chosen primarily on their qualifications rather than their political affiliation. By using this strategy, the civil service will be more competent and result-based because only qualified people will be selected to jobs.

vi) Establishing Independent Oversight Mechanisms

A good way to protect the civil service from excessive political influence is to create independent oversight committees. Investigating claims of political meddling and taking appropriate actions should be within the purview of these entities. Furthermore, their contributions can facilitate the development of an atmosphere of openness and accountability in the civil service, allowing employees to perform their jobs without worrying about facing political backlash.

vii) Promoting Merit-Based Promotions

Within the civil service, performance and demonstrated competence should be the primary criteria for promotions rather than political allegiance. Promotion choices ought to be made using merit-based criteria and performance reviews to make sure that people with the right qualifications are given more responsibility.

viii) Supporting Continuous Professional Development

To keep public servants abreast of best practices and to improve their abilities, they should be offered opportunities for professional development and ongoing training. Political influences that could undermine civil servants' professionalism should be resisted, allowing them to carry out their duties with efficiency. To sum up, the suggestions mentioned above provided a thorough strategy for addressing how politics affect public sector administration in Sierra Leone, particularly in the civil service. To promote an autonomous, effective, and professional civil service, it is imperative to enact legal reforms, exhibit political commitment, invest in capacity building, bolster civil society engagement, and establish transparent, merit-based procedures. Sierra Leone may overcome the obstacles caused by political meddling and open the door for a more transparent and efficient public administration system by implementing these suggestions.

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