# MODERN DEVELOPMENTS AND BUREAUCRATIC POWER IN NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

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## Abstract

Bureaucracy is believed to be the most rational and efficient system of running a modern government. Modern government finds it difficult to succeed without the bureaucracy. In fact, even the most ardent critics of bureaucracy cannot provide a better alternative to it. Bureaucracy, coined by monsieur de Gourney in 1845 was given wide currency by Max Webber, a brilliant sociologist of German Parentage. Though pejoratively associated with red-tape, excess paper work, inefficiency and sluggishness, bureaucracy may be thought of as a complex system of men, offices, methods and authority which large organizations employ in order to achieve their goals. Bureaucracy operates on time tested principles such as well-defined chain of command, systematized procedures and processes of doing things, operating on framework of rules and regulations, division of labour based on specialization, impersonality in human relations among others. The traditional role of the bureaucracy is to execute government policies and programmers. Moreover, in the implementation of these policies and programmers, bureaucrats face inconsistencies, challenges and alternatives which they promptly initiate actions to tackle them. Powers of the bureaucracy reside in the staying power of the bureaucrats. Bureaucrats usually outstay political appointees in government and this imbues them with power and knowledge accumulated over the years to advise political appointees. Bureaucrats are also in control of the administrative secrets of government which they sometime hide from political appointees so as to feather their wings and remain safe in service. Besides, there are usually complex and technical administrative matters which can only be effectively carried out by bureaucrats. Also, bureaucrats most times framed legislation for politicians because of the latter lack of specialized knowledge and time to carry out such task.All these combine to make the bureaucrats powerful and indispensable in modern government. In fact, no modern government can run successfully without the bureaucracy and inputs from the bureaucrats who drive the machinery of modern government.

## Introduction

Bureaucracy is a traditional system of managing large scale complex organizations that heavily rely on applying set of rules and regulations follow hierarchical arrangement of personnel, a clear division of labor, and detailed procedural rules and precedents in carrying out their functions.

Bureaucracy is perceived as the best way of managing any large scale or complex organizations to achieve meaningful result. Those who disdain bureaucracy appear to have no alternative to it for they cannot advocate an alternative system of managing large organizations that can replace bureaucracy. Ideally, bureaucracy operates under rules and procedures with a chain of command or hierarchy of authority. It allows government operates with some rationality, uniformity, predictability and supervision. Modern government cannot really

succeed without the bureaucracy. In other words, modern government depends on the bureaucracy to succeed. Thus, without bureaucracy there can be no modern government.

## Origin of Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy was invented by Monsieur de Gournay in 1845. He added to the word 'bureau' meaning both an office and a writing table, a term derived from the Greek and a word meaning "to rule". Bureaucracy is thus the rule of officials. Max Weber, a German Sociologist gave currency to the word. The term 'bureaucracy' was therefore used by Max Weber (1864-1920) to describe a rationalistic and efficient organization of government, administration and industry.

However, while some scholars use the concept in some pejorative sense as red-tape, excessive paper work, rigidity, remoteness, inefficiency, arrogance and corruption, others see it as a model of carefulness, precision and effective administration.

## So, what is bureaucracy?

Weber defines bureaucracy as that type of hierarchical organization which is designed rationally to co-ordinate the work of many individuals in large scale administrative tasks. Put differently, bureaucracy is an organization with a hierarchy of paid, full-time officials who form a chain of command. In contemporary usage, bureaucracy is concerned with the business of involving the process of controlling, managing and co-coordinating a complex series of duties to achieve pre-determined goals or objectives.

In Weber's postulation, a pure type of bureaucratic organization has clearly defined goals, precise calculation of the means of attaining these goals and which systematically remove hindrances that blockade the realization of such objectives.

Weber's analysis of bureaucracy describes a form of not only organization of rationally co-ordinated unequals, but also a form of organization which assures the predictability of the behaviors of the employees of the organization (Ihejiamaizu, 1996).

Another definition of bureaucracy – or "civil service" – is that it is permanent government. Much of what we study about other aspects or system of government might be called "temporary government of elected officials who come and go" while bureaucracy remains as permanent government that does not go with the elected officials.

Bureaucracy, though used in the traditional sense to describe government by bureaucrats that does not encourage participation by the governed, Weber believed that a bureaucratic organization is superior to any other form of organization in precision, stability, reliability and achievement of a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness. As Haralambos (1980) puts it, bureaucracy is a rational action in an institutional form. Bureaucracy being referred as a hierarchical organization means that it is a system of control in which superiors strictly control and regulate the activities of the subordinates. Since bureaucracy involves a system of co-coordinating, this presupposes that there must be those to co-ordinate, control

and supervise the work of others in administrative set-ups. To ensure effective co-ordination and control, it must be seen as legitimate by members of the bureaucracy hence its reliance on legal- rational authority.

## Models of bureaucracy

The best known models of bureaucracy is that proposed by Morstein Max in his fourfold division of historical and current systems into guardian, caste, patronage and merit bureaucracies, (Marx, 1957).

## Guardian Bureaucracy

Under this bureaucratic pattern, the functionaries are regarded as guardians acting as the custodians of the ideals and values of society. Emphasis was placed on education and indoctrination of the officials. The guardians were seen as source of knowledge and expected to excel on the ethos of the society and be greatly versed in the classics of the time as the case in Plato's The Republic. In China, the bureaucrats were recruited mainly from the gentry's class with membership of men learned in the classical Confucian philosophical literature without consideration of the fact that such literature contained little or no administrative know-how. In guardian bureaucracy, exemplary character is believed to be the most worthy trait a bureaucrat should exhibit. Thus, morality took precedence over technical competence.

## Caste bureaucracy:

Caste bureaucracy looms large in a society with those in controlling positions based on rigid distinctions of birth, rank and wealth. It exists essentially to serve the interest of a particular class or group which deliberately sets standards of entry to preclude invasion from other groups or classes. In Nigeria, the military constitutes a large caste bureaucracy serving the interests of top military officials, business tycoons, sectional and religious interest groups (Ihejiamaizu, 1996). Also, some staff of the judiciary, companies, academic, health and religious institutions and even politicians now 'plant' their children, wards and relatives to take over from them when they retire from service in order to preserve their family caste in such systems or institutions. (Ekang, 2014). In fact, this appears to be a sort of an unwritten commandment among public servants and politicians these days.

## Patronage bureaucracy:

It operates on a quid-pro quo arrangement as public positions are used to dish out personal rewards and favors to those who had supported successful candidates in elections. In other words, those who had worked for or supported the emergence of a particular candidate in a struggle, contest or election are expected to be rewarded through appointments, contracts, gifts, donations, etc. Under this kind of arrangement, appointments as Commissioners, Minsters, Directors- General, Heads of Boards and members of Boards, Agencies and Parastatals are contingent on patronage. In this model of bureaucracy, the relationship that

exists is that between the patron and the clients. The clients will always get what they want, like contacts, promotions, scholarship, appointments, posting to better stations, employment, etc. as long as he/she remains loyal to the patron. In the long run, patronage bureaucracy is dangerous and ruinous to the system. In the first place, the assumed neutrality by bureaucrats is nothing but flies in the face of reality.

It contravenes the concept of impartiality which Weber identified as characteristic of bureaucracy and culminates in the exhibition of low hanging traits such as low discipline, erratic principles, low morale and lack of competence, ethnicity and god-fathers. It usually creates internecine conflicts as appointments and promotions are based on patronage. This type of system creates a condition in which junior workers are promoted or appear to have power over their senior officers. Clerks, messengers, cleaners, typists, security guards, etc would tend to disesteem senior officers because of the junior officer's connections or relationships with the patron in such organizations.

Here, corruption becomes institutionalized. Nepotism and favoritisms become the order of the day and the ultimate aim is that the organization suffers from inefficiency and waste of resources. This appears to be the incubus that presses the Nigeria's bureaucracy down.

**Merit bureaucracy**

Merit bureaucracy is governed by objective criteria postulated by Weber in his ideal type bureaucracy. In merit bureaucracy, positions are achieved and not ascribed. The basis for admission, employment, award of contract, promotion, appointment, etc, in the bureaucracy is based on one's qualification rather than patronage or connection. One becomes a University professor, not because he or she is a primary or secondary dropout and has a patron or godfather, but because he or she possesses the requisite qualifications and meets the required standards to become a University Professor.

The same holds true for appointment as a lecturer, bank manager, principal or registrar of public institutions, or being called to bar as a lawyer or taking the Hippocratic Oath as a medical doctor. In each of these cases, one must pass through due processes and meet the set standards and prerequisite to be eligible for such appointment or position (Ekang, 2014).

**Elements of bureaucracy**

The position of officials in Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy includes:

- The staff members are personally free, observing only the impersonal duties of their offices.
- There is clear hierarchy of offices.
- The functions of the offices are clearly specified.
- Officials are appointed on the basis of a contract.
- They are selected on the basis of professional qualifications, ideally substantiated by a diploma gained through examination.

- They have a money salary, and usually pension rights.  The salary is graded according to positions in the hierarchy. The officials can always leave the post, and under certain circumstances it may also be terminated.

- The official's post is his sole major occupation.

- There is a career structure, and promotion is possible both by seniority or merit, and according to the judgment of the superiors.

- The officials do not have to appropriate either the post or the resources of the organization.

- He is subject to a unified control and disciplinary system.

- There is specific sphere of competence based on a division of labour with authority and sanctions to ensure proper role of performance.

- A hierarchical arrangement of offices in terms of supervision and control.

- The governing of the conduct of an office by technical rules or by norms and the requirement of specialized training for incumbents of these offices.

- Complete separation of the property belonging to the organization and the property belonging to the officials.

- The lack of rights to the office by the incumbents. The office holder must not use the official position for personal or private interests.

- Administrative acts, decisions and rules are formulated and recorded in writing. The combination of written documents and a continuous organization of official functions constitute the office which is the central focus of all types of modern bureaucracy.

According to Jacob (1966), the central points behind Weber's ideal construct of bureaucracy are as follows: (i) men (ii) offices (iii) methods and (iv) authority.

**Men**

The officials or bureaucrats who hold offices in a bureaucracy do so on the basis of the specialized educational or technical qualifications or professional accomplishments symbolized in certificates, diplomas, university degrees or other forms of records of achievements. His office is by appointment not election. He is promoted in a series of ascending steps throughout his career. Based on his qualification, he may not be promoted beyond certain steps or levels in the graded system. His pay is in the form of fixed salary not determined by the amount of work done, but rather on the position of his office in the organization's graded system. Besides, he is entitled to pension after retirement and in turn, his duties, obligations, loyalties and primary relationships are toward the organization, (Ikwen, 2014).

**Offices**

The relationship of the offices of the organization is determined by the arranged principle of hierarchy. This is the cornerstone of all bureaucratic organizations. Here, there is a system of graded authority. People at the peak of the hierarchy have more power and influence than those in the base or bottom of the organization. Authority and power flow downward

while obedience flows upward. That is, each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one, and takes orders and directives as such. In this bureaucratic postulation, the office is separated from the person who occupies the office – loyalty is owed to the office and not the individual occupying the office. There is an atmosphere of impersonality in the bureaucratic set-up. In other words, bureaucratic offices do not really belong to anyone as the occupiers of such offices come and go but the office remains. The office is no man's property.

## Methods

The method of operation is based on established rules and norms. In other words, there is a set of rules, regulations and norms that guides the conduct of the office and its operations. Every bureaucratic organization operates within a framework of law which guides both the superior and the subordinates. Each employee relies on specific rules, policies and procedures to guide his behaviors.

Rules and regulations spell out the rights and duties in each post or position and help to coordinate activities in the hierarchy and ensure uniformity and stability of employee's action. The bureaucrat is expected to act within the prescribed rules to ensure that his actions are safe and justified, hence the heavy reliance on records, files and precedents. All communications must be prepared in multiple copies and records of all conversations, orders and transactions must be systematically filed away for future reference.

## Authority

In a bid to find a system of authority which produces the highest degree of goal achievement in the organization, Weber advocated the rational- legal authority derived from impersonal, abstract rules, based upon rational decisions or calculations for all members of the organization in order to achieve maximum efficiency (Okoro, 2005).

Unlike the traditional authority which is based on custom, tradition, culture, etc, and the charismatic authority (based on personal traits, wisdom, eloquence in speech, etc), Weber advocated an organization where in practice, an official obeys a superior person, but obedience is not actually given to the person but to the office which is a legitimate personification of the rational –legal authority.

## Merits of the bureaucracy

A number of advantages result from bureaucracy. These include:

a. **Specialization:** Bureaucracy serves as a vehicle of making specialization possible and workable. Specialization enables the organization to cope with the complexity of job activities as a result of which work can be easily and efficiently carried out by specialists trained in the job. In other words, bureaucracy converts complex activities into simple tasks with each person handling the aspect of the job in which he is most competent to handle.

b. **Bureaucracy creates structure:** Bureaucracy helps to give the organization some form of structure. The duties of each position are clearly spelt out to make for easy co-ordination of organizational activities. Structure eliminates indecision and incessant review of activities.

c.  **Recommending Policy:** Traditionally, policy determination is the function of the legislature. Since bureaucrats are experts, they are usually called upon to make policy recommendations to politicians who are amateur in policy making (Ikwen, 2014).

d.  **Ensuring Survival and growth:** It is to be noted that the bureaucracy ensures survival of the polity as an entity by performing certain crucial functions on a continuous basis necessary for the existence of the country. For instance, throughout the turbulent period of the Nigerian civil war (1966-1970), the continuous existence and survival of Nigeria as a country owes much to the dedication and actions of the bureaucracy (Okoro, 2005).

e.  **Carrying out the routine work of government:** Bureaucrats carry out the routine work of government. As said earlier, many workers are found at the base of the pyramid- like structure of bureaucratic organizations. These people are those carrying out the routine work of government, ranging from refuse disposal, issuing of stamps, cleaning offices, delivery of mails, court orders, maintaining laws and orders, etc.

f.  **Implementing legislation:** This has been the traditional function of the bureaucracy. This involves translating policies or decisions of government into reality. These days, in the process of implementing government policies and programmers, technology has replaced the manual or analogue method of doing things. For instance, computers are gradually phasing out manual typewriters and files in typing and storing of information. For one thing, the bureaucracy is slow to perceive change and even slower to adopt it.

## Dysfunctions of the bureaucracy

The following are seen as dysfunctions or demerits of the bureaucracy.

1.  Strict adherence to rules and routines poses a lot of problems to the bureaucracy. This kind of situation is not conducive for creativity and ingenuity to flourish. This stifles organizational growth and efficiency.

2.  Again bureaucracy does not provide for rapid and unplanned changes as it is always startled by emergency occurrences. It thrives best under stable routinized conditions. Bureaucracy is blindly attached to ritualistic routine procedures that may not breed immediate results in terms of organizational efficiency. Thus, bureaucracy cannot readily imbibe the influx of new technology.

3.  According to Ihejiamaizu (1996), Weber's abstract rules may have unintended consequences which may be detrimental to the interest of the organization.

4.  Also, there is the problem of conflict between the needs of the individual and those of the organization. This conflict is self-perpetuating since the employees and managers have divergent interests.

5.  The so called emphasis on specialization seems to breed narrow-minded specialists who develop the tendency of not seeing issues and circumstances that do not fit easily with their programmed behaviour or area of specialization (Ekang, 2014).

6.  According to Abba (2008), managers in a bureaucratic organization may ignore issues of employee's productivity while protecting and expanding their own authority. If this persists in organization, there is the tendency for the employees to be frustrated in achieving their individual goals while organizational goal will equally suffer.

7.  Weber did not seem to recognize that environmental factors affect the operation of the bureaucracy. For example the Nigerian bureaucracy is affected by ethnicity, federal character, quota system and such other cultural and environmental variables which affect the proper functioning of Weber's ideal bureaucratic postulations. These variables must be taken into consideration if the Nigerian bureaucracy is to experience harmonious co-existence of members in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria.

8.  Weber failed to see men as endowed with limited intelligence despite their level of training or experience. Men are not omniscience and therefore organizations must be designed for the normal man and not for super intelligent men. For example, the requirement that higher offices and their incumbents should give commands and instructions based on their superior knowledge and experience to the subordinates is predicated on a misleading belief that higher level officers are always more intelligent than junior level officers. In modern government, knowledge of organizational effectiveness of operations may not always come from the superior. There are situations in which the subordinates could have knowledge that could be more useful than that of the boss.

9.  Communication overload is often a problem. Communication and innovative ideas are often thwarted or distorted due to hierarchical processes. The result being that the full human resources of the bureaucracy are not being utilized due to mistrust and fear of reprisals.

10. Extreme bureaucracy breeds frustration, timidity and lack of personal initiative and discretion because of over conformity arising from rigidity, red tapes and absence of scope. Bureaucrats therefore have the inclination of defending procedures and rules and offering excuses for their failures rather than working hard to solve the problems.

11. Kramer in Peretomode (2006) has argued that bureaucracies in practice are not paragons of pure efficiency. Weber's belief that rules could be complete guides to action cannot be substantiated in practice, especially in period of crisis. Rules are generally incomplete in that there is rarely a rule to cover all possible occurrences in a social relationship. If there are no rules, then initiatives must be used to handle the issue.

12.    Bureaucracy is also to be blamed for condoning and protecting the lazy, inefficient, lethargic and task-avoiding officials.

Powers of the bureaucracy and how they are acquired

Bureaucracy is a pot where power is brewed for bureaucrats. That is to say that those who work in the bureaucracy have power.  According to Henry (2006) "because powerful political, social, economic and technological forces underlie bureaucracy, it follows that a bureaucracy has power. But the power of bureaucracy comes clothed in clouds, curtained in fog, and cloaked in mist".

Generally speaking, the bureaucrats offer advice to the political rulers on policy measures and also offer information on the implementation of such policies to the political elites. This power of advice often leads to misuse or abuse of power by the bureaucrats by insisting that their opinions or advice be adhered to in the best interest of the nation. According to Ihejiamaizu (1996), the function of the bureaucrat is limited to the way he executes assigned tasks. In a democratic state, the power position of the bureaucrat, based on his expert knowledge constitute the major source of conflict with boss, the politicians such as the President, Governors, Ministers or commissioners, etc. Also the possession of technical or expert knowledge may be used as a powerful weapon of the bureaucrat against his political master. The politician being inexperienced in bureaucratic tasks is not in a position to control the bureaucrats because of the latter's deep knowledge of the operation of the bureaucracy.

**Bureaucrats check the excesses of political heads in the following ways:**

The bureaucrats can refuse to obey orders that go against generally accepted rules or professional standards or norms of the civil service bureaucracy by advising the politicians against such advice. Legislators are politicians who come and go, but bureaucrats are career officials who provide continuity in their respective ministries. It therefore becomes reasonable for the politicians to depend on the experience of the bureaucrats to get a better understanding of the implication of the actions on governance. (Abba, 2008).

The bureaucrats can equally refuse orders or instructions that directly impinge on their private sphere of life. But where there exists a cordial relationship between the bureaucrat and his political boss, the bureaucrat is expected to follow faithfully the orders and directives of his boss (the politician), even if such directives are against his personal opinions. In other words, in so far as general policy is concerned, the bureaucrat is a mere tool in the hands of the politicians, who should put aside his own preferences and executes, in a dispassionate way, his master's will or policies.

According to Henri (2006), "one major form of power that the bureaucracy has is simply its staying power". Thus, the more the bureaucrats stay in office, the more power they acquire more than the politicians who are normally regarded as "a bird of passage" in the bureaucracy (Adebayo, 2004). The inevitability of bureaucratic power in modern government can be evident in the following ways:

(a)     The complexity and technicality of administrative problems which can only be handled by experts like the bureaucrats give them so much power over the politicians.

(b)     Need for continuity of policy decisions and actions. It is the bureaucrats alone that can ensure the continuity of government even during interregnum. They also promote continuity of policy decisions over an extended period of time because of the security of tenure that they enjoy, over 35 years and in the case of a university professor or high court Judges, about 40 years – the advantage politicians don't enjoy. Politicians stay in office for four years except they are re-elected or reappointed for another term in office which may not exceed two terms for local government chairmen, governors and presidents but legislators who are loved by their constituents may be re-elected for an extended period, usually more than two terms in office.

(c)     Lack of time and information on the part of politicians which inevitably leads to the delegation of power to the bureaucrats further enhances the power of the bureaucrats. According to Assibong (2002), one reason for the growing power of the bureaucracy is that bureaucrats have knowledge and experience in affairs of civil government and in administration acquired over the years than their political counterparts. This is not available to political appointees like Ministers, Commissioners, Special Advisers, Special Assistants, Chairmen and members of Boards, Agencies and Parastatals. Based on the above, the bureaucracy has come to acquire so much power, making political appointees to depend, almost exclusively and helplessly on the advice, knowledge and expertise of the bureaucrats in running the bureaucracy which is the engine room of modern government.

Ihejiamaizu (1996) posits that bureaucrats control the administrative secrets of government. Thus, this in a way seemingly makes the bureaucrats indispensable to the effective operation of modern government. Bureaucrats are usually in custody of files and documents that if not made available to politicians, they will not know the administrative details and secret of government. Bureaucrats may hide some of these files from politicians thus making the latter unaware of some government secrets. Weber acknowledged that bureaucracy has power but warned that too much concentration of power on the civil service bureaucracy is dangerous. In his view, members of the public will be in a weak position to control the bureaucrats. Thus, Weber argues that such increasing power of the bureaucrats increases the danger that political positions would be monopolized by the bureaucrats.

Also, as argued by Roskin, Cord, Medeinros and Jones (2003), the career civil servants, that is the bureaucrats, often stay with one agency over a long period of time. They take orders from elected or appointed officials, but they also follow the law do things "by the book", that is, according to civil service rules, financial instructions, civil service norms,  tradition and precedents in order to remain safe in the service. The bureaucrats often know a lot more about their specialized areas than their new politically appointed or elected bosses, who usually want

to redo the system with bold, new ideas. The bureaucrats, who have seen bold, new ideas come and go, move with caution. A bureaucracy, once set up, is patently conservative, and trying to move it with speed is one of the hardest tasks for politicians.

Another area where bureaucracy acquires so much power is when it comes to framing legislation. Once the legislators have passed a bill on broad principles, the details of the legislation will be spelt out for effective implementation by the bureaucrats. In the process of doing this, the bureaucrats, because of their expert knowledge coupled with detailed information available to them, may exercise wider discretion and can extend the legislation beyond its original form. This function of the bureaucrats is important especially in situations of strong executives. In fact, in modern government most of the executive legislations are framed by bureaucrats, (Abba, 2008).

One vivid example of bureaucratic rule-making was the fight to place health warnings on cigarette packages and in advertisements. Congress would never have moved by itself because the tobacco industry is generous to candidates. Change came via a branch of the bureaucracy-public-health specialists and statisticians equipped with computers. Since 1971, cigarette advertisements must show health warnings. A. Leefritchler in his "Smoking and Politics', in Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003) concluded:

> *The initiation and continuation of the cigarette controversy were possible because of both the political power and delegated authority possessed by bureaucratic agencies. Had the decision on cigarettes and health been left to congress alone, it is safe to assume that the manufacturers would have triumphed, and no health warnings of any kind would have been required. The cigarette-labelling controversy is a clear example of agencies' power to influence and even formulate public policy.*

This clearly shows how bureaucracies wield power in modern government by helping to formulate public policies even in developed democracies of the west.

## Summary and Conclusion

As had been discussed earlier in this work, modern bureaucracies have witnessed phenomenal growth in their powers. This growth is occasioned by the involvement of bureaucrats in decision and policy making processes of government. Outside their traditional role as implementers of policies handed down by politicians, bureaucrats, in modern government are also involved, in not only formulating but influencing policy making by politicians also. Their involvement in policy making is as a result of the fact that they possess the requisite skills, knowledge, experience, staying power and technical know-how in the art of governance and administration than the politicians.

As is common in most countries, especially in developing countries, politicians depend almost wholly on Special Advisers, Special Assistants, Ministers, Commissioners and whom they appoint once elected or voted into power to help them in the art of governance because of the politicians obvious lack of skills in all areas of governance. These political appointees rely, almost helplessly on bureaucrats for guidance in the civil service tradition and in different areas

of governance because of bureaucrats knowledge in civil governance accumulated over the years. This serves as a major source of power to the bureaucrats such that the tail now wags the head.

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