

# Political and Administrative Dichotomy in the Local Government System in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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## ABSTRACT

*This study attempts to espouse and further brings into focus the age long conflict between political executives and administrative executives in the local government system in Nigeria. In an attempt to make public administration an independent branch of knowledge, this work contends that a sharp distinction be made between politics and administration in the local government system. It goes further to declare that politics must not interfere with administration and the latter should not meddle with the functions of the former. Using the Alienation Theory as postulated by Karl Marx, this study posits that this conflict is central to all other issues plaguing the local government system in Nigeria. It therefore asserts that this has adversely affected its service delivery to the populace. Hence, it recommends that the seniority conflict between political executives (Politicians) and administrative executives (Civil Servants) should be well understood between the actors; the political executives should understand that they are the political masters in comparison with the administrative executives; and their success to a large extent is dependent on the degree of the administrative executives' advice. This will enable the local government to deliver the dividend of democratic culture to the people.*

**Keywords:** Politics, administration, dichotomy, local government.

## INTRODUCTION

In the discourse of the Local Government System in Nigeria, is a loud denouncement of conflict between political executives and administration executives. This controversy is between the political classes (Politicians) and career civil servants (administrators). It is Wilson (1887), who foresaw the damaging effect of this dichotomy in his article "the study of administration". To him administration is a separate activity with its own well marked field and principles. This work purposes a better performance for the local government system in Nigeria. Insisting that politics should remain clearly committed to policy making, while administration should be for implementation. Politics must not interfere with administration and the latter should not meddle with the former. It stresses that the local government chairman (political head) should strictly be confined to policy making; while the head of service (administrative head) consolidate in policy implementation.

For purposes of clarity, administration should maintain its own techniques and goals. Policy making today is universally regarded as an integral component of administration (Nwizu, 2002). It should however, be emphasized that the importance of policy making has steadily been increasing over the years; and today many civil servants find policy

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making more glamorous than the usual administrative tasks, which has been their traditional sphere of activities (Self, 1984). Theoretically, we understood that politics and administration are interpenetrative and inter-mingled, but for purposes of efficiency the demarcations in their powers and functions should be well spelt out. Therefore, our focus in this study is that administration should be allowed to remain a detailed and systematic execution of policy; since every policy is an act of administration. This work advocates for a water-tight demarcations between the political office holders (policy makers) and career officials (administrators) in the local government system in Nigeria. Scholars have looked into the lingering conflict between politicians and administrators and come up with quite a number of propositions which can suitably be used to conduct this kind of research. Most of them can be used to assess the functioning of the local government system in Nigeria; as well as the relationship between administrators and politicians. This specific issue of conflict between the political executives and administration executives can best be examined through the alienation theory.

### **The Alienation Theory**

As a philosophy, alienation has been dealt with by scholars like Hegel before Marx (Marx, 1972). Marx is the thinker who applied the concept of alienation to the study of society (Nwizu, 1999). This is perceived as one of his most significant contribution to the organization theory; especially, given the dehumanization and exploitation of man in capitalist societies as a consequence of alienation (Marx and Engels, 1980). Again, Marx sees two basic factors affecting its well-being which are directly the product of the development of the capitalist industrial system. This is premised in high correlation between increasing industrialization and the rising material poverty of which the latter is manifested in unemployment.

Furthermore, he states that workers in any capitalist society become alienated from their fellow men, from themselves and the product of their labour. This leads to loss of humanity, freedom, creativity and morality of the administrative class (Marx, 1977). The quest for dominance between the politicians and administrators lead to alienation; as they become powerless in the competition for supremacy with politicians. The second aspect of industrial capitalism which Marx argues and which affects the life of the working masses is the spiritual poverty of the workers which is manifested in alienation. He goes further to identify two kinds of alienation:

- i The first concerns the relation of the worker to the product of his labour; and
- ii Secondly, he emphasizes on the relationship of the worker to his activity in the capitalist system.

According to him the worker (career civil servants) is only happy outside the sphere of the local government. Marx strongly believes that bureaucracy contributes to the alienation of people. It becomes an autonomous and oppressive force which is felt by the majority of the people as something which although regulating their lives, is beyond their control and comprehension, a sort of divinity in the face of which one feels helpless and bewildered (Abrahamson, 1977). The administrative class is said to be an instrument of development;

but the political class sees it as an instrument of exploitation. The administrators get alienated because they are powerless in policy formulation. Policies are made by politicians and the administrators are expected to carry out innovative activities in the administration of the local government. They can not do this because, they don't have the power, they are slaves to the politicians; knowing that slavery and creativity are Strange to each other. It is the position of this paper that career civil servants in the local government are instruments of exploitation to the political class; and hence are completely alienated.

### **The Contending Issues in Politics and Local Government Administration**

The relationships between politics and administration have evolved through a period of time. From the time of Locke and Montesquieu till today, it has been the subject of debate among scholars, administrators, politicians and others. The American statesmen right from the beginning of their republic observe a differentiation between policy matters and administrative matters. This develops into a dichotomy between politics and administration. Although this thesis was finally abandoned after the Second World War, yet, this ancient administrative proverb that politics and administration are separate enterprises continues to be debated. Many authors have attempted to lay this proverb to rest, it has displayed amazing powers of survival in many numbers of our political systems (Self, 1984). It was Wilson, a combination of political reformer and executive leader, scholar and statesman, politician and administrator, who made one of the first dogmatic distinctions between politics and administration in the 1880's. In his work "The study of Administration" which was published in 1887; Wilson formally launched the subject of administration as distinct from politics. He states that:

*...administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices (Wilson, 1941).*

Wilson was motivated by the considerations of reforming of the American administration which was suffering from the great evils of the day, which is spoiled in politics and the patronage system. Other scholars such as Goodnow (1994) and Pfiffner (1935) support this view. Goodnow (1994) and Wilson (1934), felt constrained to make the distinction between politics and administration because of the contemporary necessity of administrative efficiency, but he also insisted that administration had constantly to be related to politics, if government was to work successfully.

Pfiffner (1935) is also one of the strong advocates of this separation. In his opinion, politics must be controlled and confined to its proper sphere, which is determination, crystallization and declaration of the will of the State. Administration therefore, is the carrying into effect of this will once it has been made clear by political processes. To him politics should concern itself with determination of policies and leave administration to apply its own technical processes free from the evil influence of political meddling and interference. Though politics and administration cannot in all cases be separated or isolated. They should however not be allowed to mix or interact in a meddlesome manner. Also, Goodnow (1994) made distinction between politics and administrative behaviours. To him, politics is

the expression of the States will, while administration is the expression of that will. This implies that politics make known what the intent or the will of the State is while administration does the carrying out or the implementation of the will or intent. On his part, Willoughby as quoted in Nwizu (2002), apart from making distinction between the two concepts, further asserts that administration should be seen as the fourth arm of government. The proposition based their analysis on the machinations and influence by politicians. They insisted that administration should be given the opportunity and freedom to use their professional knowledge, technical competence and capability in the implementation of policies and programmes of government already formulated by the political class (Uduma, 2004). It means that, if Political office holders interfere in the implementation, they would likely bring in their partisan judgement against the overall interest of the State.

### **The Oppositions**

There are some scholars who believe that it is futile to make attempt at separating what ordinarily belongs to the same side of the coin. In reality, political office holders do not make any meaningful impact or contributions in their office, without making reference to the advice and inputs from the career government servants. As corroborated by Onah (1995), administrators are involved in policy-making. Administrators therefore, cannot avoid some political issues. For Dimock (1945), the two processes of politics and administration are mutually co-ordinative, rather than exclusive. This is equally supported by Riggs (1963) who states that the distinction between politics and administration is a misguided missile. From the perspectives of reality, these groups of antagonistic scholars duly contend that it is necessary for effectiveness in the running of the affairs of the state; civil servants working in the local government can co-operate and work together with the political class in order to ensure that the work of administration is given a human face. This is because the administrator can advise the Political office holder on how best to run his office. This can be done without bickering and rancour, as both should work towards the attainment of a common goal.

### **Conflicting Areas in the Local Government System**

In Nigeria, it is not strange to hear or see Head of Personnel Management (HPM), Treasurers, Departmental heads and other top career officers in the system, complaining that the Political office holders like: Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen, Supervisory councilors, Party officials, interfere unnecessarily in the implementation of already approved policies. This interference is usually seen in transfers, promotion, control and discipline, even in the area of payment or award of contracts. Consequently, some career administrators complain openly that the inexperienced and incompetent political office holders are the ones seen making policy decisions for them to implement. Thus, they make clumsy decisions that often conflict with the already established civil service rules, constitution, guidelines and procedures. To them such situations do not help in the work process; as it stalls administration in the local government. Again, the interplay of political rivalries, between key political actors (Chairman, Vice Chairman, Special Advisers) on one side and the legislative arm

(Councilors) on the other side most often leave the career civil servants at the receiving end of such altercations. This has destroyed the basic work ethics and spirit of comradeship.

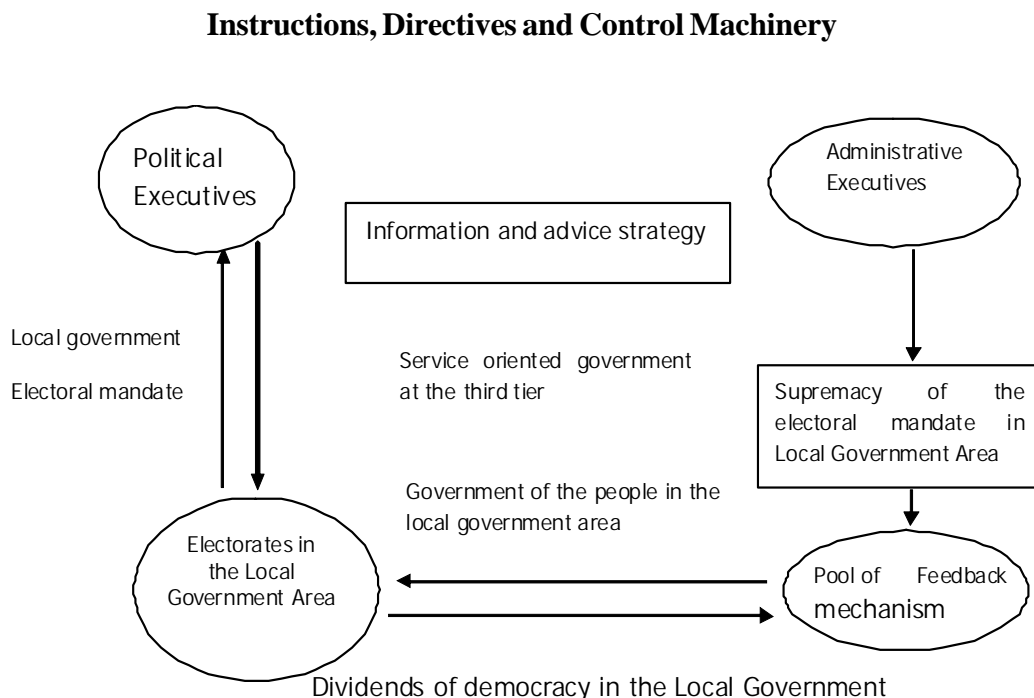
**Table 1: Procedures on Performance of Local Government Duties**

S/N	Political Office Holders (Politicians)	Career Local Government Staff (Civil Servants)
1.	Establishment of objectives, programmes, procedures and plans.	To provide the necessary advice and data that will help the Political office holders to establish such objectives, procedures and plans
2	To exercise maximum power, directives and control of established responsibilities.	Exercise of power over minor and routine policies and actions on settled or approved guidelines.
3	The determination of peculiar problems arising in the work process.	To provide the needed strategy and policy inputs arising from the problems in the work process.

**Source:** Adebayo (1981)

Also, situations abound where the administrator is in opposition with the executives or vice versa. It does not help the local government to function well. Rather, it breeds acrimony, tension and instability; and if such conflicts are not resolved amicably, it will not help the local government to function well as a tier of government. Sometimes, it may lead to reluctance or refusal to sign vouchers and salaries, among others. The continuum below is a guide into how a healthy relationship should be cultivated between political executives and administrators. This, of course, will provide a conducive atmosphere for an effective functioning of the local government system in Nigeria.

**Figure 1: A continuum of industrial Harmony between the Administrative Executives and Political executives.**



**Source:** Uduma, 2006

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Political and administrative dichotomy in the local government system in Nigeria is a misunderstood and mishandles philosophy. It is this misunderstanding that sets in such concept as dichotomy, seniority and the like. Actually, the idea salient in both political and administrative sphere that is worthy of note to all is that of service. A person that renders service is a servant to whom the service is rendered. Diffusing this in the context of this work, it is bluntly revealed that the issue of seniority or dichotomy among the operators of the local government councils is a misdirected priority. In essence, both classes of the council (political and administrative) are during the course of their legitimate responsibilities, rendering service to a single unit - the electorate or the governed. Therefore, instead of battling seniority, both parties should see themselves as partners in progress. This is because while the politicians have a constitutional responsibility of providing dividends of democracy, the career civil servants should concentrate in policy implementation. There is the need to streamline functions of both the political office holders and administrators, so that there would be no over-lapping and conflicting in their spheres of authority. For a proper functioning of the local government system, this work recommends a continuum that will be a guideline and specify areas of relationship between the Political office holders (politicians) and career civil servants (administrators), despite the position of no clear cut dichotomy between politics and administration, as it is not practicable and unrealistic (Adebayo, 1981). Although, he emphasized that the essence of the guideline is to ensure efficiency and harmonious relationship.

The administrative executives should imbibe the spirit of separations of power, checks and balances between both cadres. For the local government to work very well there should be an understanding that the political executives should tap from the reservoir of the experience of the administrators. Therefore, for effective functioning of the local government the constitution, the civil service rules, the guidelines on local government administration, and other government documents should be the basis and ought to be followed in the execution of policies that guide the functioning of the system.

The political class is to issue orders, directives, and guidelines on how best to run the local government; while on the other hand; the administrative executives are bound to effectively assist in the implementation of the guidelines or policies. Furthermore, career officers are to offer advice, logistics and useful guides, which are necessary for sound policy formulation by the Political office holders. This of course must be done with every sense of modesty, tolerance, tactfulness and professional competence. Humility and not pride should be the guiding principle of the Political office holders as the advantages of duration, knowledge, experience and intrigues of partisan politics in the council constrain them from making rational policy inputs in the running of the local government. They should therefore, make effective use of the administrative executives which is their sure way to political success. The seniority conflict between political executives (Politicians) and administrative executives (Civil Servants) should be well understood between the actors; the political executives should understand that they are the political masters in comparison

with the administrative executives; and their success to a large extent is dependent on the degree of the administrative executives' advice. This will enable the local government to deliver the dividend of democratic culture to the people.

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