

INSTITUTION BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES, IMPACT, AND THE PATH FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the critical role of institution-building in shaping development administration in Nigeria, analysing the persistent challenges, impacts, and viable pathways for reform. Drawing on the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state, the study underscores how weak institutions, entrenched corruption, capacity deficits, and policy inconsistencies have impeded Nigeria's socio-economic progress. The resultant consequences were sluggish economic growth, inadequate service provision, and a rising lack of trust in government. This paper recommends a dynamic approach to institutional reforms, improved anti-corruption measures, capacity development, and increased citizen participation based on an extensive examination of scholarly articles, reports, and empirical evidence. The study concludes that without a committed drive to strengthen institutions and democratize governance processes, Nigeria's quest for sustainable development will remain elusive.

Keywords: Institution Building, Development, Administration, Issues, Challenges

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since gaining independence in 1960, several efforts have been initiated in Nigeria to establish institutions capable of enhancing governance, delivering public services, and promoting national development. Despite these reforms, including civil service restructuring and the creation of oversight bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the institutional framework remains fragile, politicised, and inefficient. Gado (2025) contends that Nigeria's institution-building efforts have been largely rhetorical, lacking genuine structural changes that emphasise autonomy, merit-based leadership, and performance-driven governance.

Nigeria's institutional weaknesses are rooted in its colonial history, where administrative systems were designed primarily for control and resource extraction, rather than inclusive governance or capacity development (Imhanlahimi & Ajiteru, 2023). The situation was further compounded by successive military regimes that centralised authority, eroded bureaucratic professionalism, and disrupted institutional continuity, resulting in poor coordination, systemic corruption, and inconsistent policy implementation (Bello, Adamu & Maina, 2023).

At the heart of these challenges lies the state's failure to build a capable, accountable, and responsive administrative system, which scholars term "development administration." This framework enables governments to transform policy into practical programs that enhance

citizen welfare (Onah, 2023). In Nigeria, development administration is hampered by limited institutional capacity, politicised appointments, inadequate funding, and minimal citizen engagement (Etalong & Aduma, 2022).

Reform attempts such as the establishment of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) in 2004 and recent moves by the Tinubu administration to restructure over 200 government agencies have aimed to address inefficiency and waste (Reuters, 2024). Despite these efforts, these initiatives frequently face resistance from entrenched political interests and suffer from inconsistent implementation.

This study critically examines the trajectory of institution-building and development administration in Nigeria, identifying the structural and political barriers to progress, assessing their impacts on national development, and proposing actionable strategies centred on institutional autonomy, capacity building, anti-corruption, and participatory governance.

2.0 HISTORY OF BUILDING INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Colonialists who invaded Africa in the 19th century realised that it had many adequately developed strong kingdoms, institutions, and governance structures, especially in Nigeria (Gavin, 1971). Some of Nigeria's strong kingdoms include the Benin, Oyo, Kanem-Bornu empires, and the Hausa kindoms. Adequate strength of empires and kingdoms in Nigeria constituted one of the rationales for the large number of wars of conquest and the insurrections that colonialists fought in parts of Africa. The colonialists adopted native African governance systems in the form of assimilation and indirect rule over the natives. The colonists changed the existing style of governance and institutions in Africa. This destroyed the existing administrative and political structures through the superimposition of alien political, administrative, and cultural values, from which Africa has not recovered to date.. Some of the imported structures and refinements on the indigenous political systems were undertaken to facilitate colonialists' interests and to destroy Africa's strong institutions, especially where they created different national identities. The colonialists were interested in weakening administrative institutions in Africa, thus rendering them ineffective for national development. Acemoglu & Robinson (2008) argue that Europeans established "extractive states" in Africa by not introducing much protection for private property, nor providing checks and balances against the government's arbitrariness. Building strong public institutions in countries where the Europeans settled in large numbers, according to Acemoglu & Robinson (2008), was also for the protection of the future benefits of the Europeans. They were more interested in oppressive and highly centralised public institutions, which were aimed at serving extractive interests. In communities with fairly large populations in parts of Africa, particularly Nigeria, tax collection was rigorous to allow for revenue collection. According to Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson (2002), European settlements centralised political organisations in parts of Africa, which made it possible for them to collect taxes. Taxation was a major source of revenue for the British Government in Nigeria and hence rigorously pursued by the colonialists. Tax collection was very successful, except in a few places such as the Niger Delta and Aba, where women resisted tax payment. The exercise was promoted under strong institutions of government, which were not transferred to the succeeding Nigerian nationalists, or because the latter failed to sustain it for their selfish reasons. The country's revenue generation capacity is weak because institutions in charge of taxes in Nigeria are weak.

Spending European money to develop the African continent was also a driving force for the early departure of the British colonialists from Nigeria. British disinterest in spending the British pound on the development of Nigeria and its public institutions could also be inferred from the colonial development plans' expenditure profiles. For example, the "Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria (1946-56)" had a total of N110 000 000.00 out of which only N46 000 000.00 was to come from the British government whose "main emphasis... was on building the transport and communications system" (Ayo, 1988: 4). The remaining N64 000 000.00 was to be sourced from Nigeria through citizen taxation and other levies (Imhanlahimi, 2000). With a large amount of revenue generated from taxes, the British focused on building transport and communications systems.

When the British found in Nigeria, they discovered that Northern Nigeria was financially inadequate, they reimburse the north from the revenue derived in the Southern Nigeria to augment the lean financial revenue for the administration of the north. The British colonial administrators' financial problem in Northern Nigeria rested on weak public institutions in general, which could have been a negative impetus to terminate colonialism in Nigeria as soon as it was practicable. There was also the problem of eloquent, vibrant, articulate, very critical and restive Nigerian nationalists such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who gave the British little or no break in colonial administration of Nigeria, the same way some other nationalists like Kuameh Nkrumah of Ghana and Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of the Congo did in their countries to the colonialists. The activities of African nationalists, particularly in Nigeria, constitute one of the reasons why the British chose to build weak public institutions which they could easily abandon with little cost to the British government. Unfortunately, the history of building weak public institutions in Africa by the nationalists who succeeded the Europeans, especially in Nigeria, has continued. In spite of their rhetoric to their people from the colonial times, through the decades of independence, the nationalists have imbibed the elites' selfish and arbitrary monopoly of state power for the promotion of weak governments in Africa to promote their interests at the expense of the citizenry. This situation has been exacerbated by the military's incursion into state governance, which successive civilian administrations in many African countries, including Nigeria, have been unable to reverse. The situation seems to have come to a head, especially with the previous administration (2015- 2022) under President Muhammadu Buhari, in which public institutions seem to have completely broken down, and the Nigerian state is dubbed, in some quarters, as a failed state.

3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Huntington, as cited in Matthew et al (2023), defined institutions as the stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour which can be referred to as the mechanisms which govern the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given community. According to Matthew et al (2023), Institutions are often identified with social purposes transcending individuals and intentions by mediating the rules that govern living. From a disciplinary perspective, institutions are the principal object of study in social sciences such as political science, anthropology, economics and sociology. For example, Durkheim, as referenced in Matthew, et al (2023), explained that institution is the science of institutions, their genesis and functions and that it is central to law and a formal mechanism for political rule-making and enforcement. He stated that an institution is a social structure in which people cooperate and influence the behaviour of others and the

way they live. The most generally agreed definition of institutions is provided by North (1990), who states that 'Institutions are the rules of the game of a society, institutions structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic, which may take any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction.' Matthew, et al (2023) further noted that institutions are made up of formal rules instituted by people, such as statute law, common law, and regulations; informal constraints such as conventions, norms of behaviour and self-imposed codes of conduct; and the enforcement characteristics of both. They are generated from socially transmitted information and imposed by people upon themselves in order to structure their relationships with each other. Finally, there are the enforcement mechanisms, which are an integral part of the institutional framework of a society and can function fully, marginally, or not function at all – institutions are ineffective when they are not enforced. Yeager (1998) also acknowledged that the major role of institutions is to reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable but not necessarily efficient structure to human interaction and points out that both formal and informal institutions are evolving and changing, thereby continually altering the choices available to man.

3.1 Institution Building

Matthew, et al (2023) in their study assert that one of the many features of development administration is institution building. Seen as an element of economic development, it leads to development actions which bring about change in society, and describes the concept of institutional building as it relates to development. The phrases often used include: 'civil service reform', 'institutional development', 'capacity building', 'institutional strengthening', etc.' Although these terminologies are widely used, they are yet ambiguous; there is a need to ensure common interpretation for better explanation that will bring about a broad understanding of the matter under consideration in this study, so it will be worthwhile to define institution building in a way that will guarantee uniformity in meaning and application.

Institution building is an approach of the developmental process which relies on the notion of 'social engineering', which underlines the leadership role of bureaucrats that ensures the success of that process and the approaches available to them. It could also be described as a set of activities that support organisation building or organisational efficiency, and other activities meant to change the method through which society is regulated. However, the weaknesses of political, legal and administrative institutions tend to hamper the process immensely (Okwuchukwu, 2011). The political aspects of institution building entail the creation of a system that focuses on organisation-influenced change toward progressive political, economic and social objectives.

Esman & Bruhns, as referenced in Matthew et al (2023), observed that institution building is an approach of the development administration processes, which rely heavily on the concept of social engineering, which stresses the leadership functions of elite groups within that process and the alternative action/strategies available to them. Institution building implies programmes of sustainable and constructive change in organisations which are designed to make them better at doing what they already do, and more efficient; or which are designed to change the character of societies by transforming their goals and strategies, cultures, ways of functioning, management styles and so on (Habib, 1980). A level of self-sufficiency which enables organisations to manage their affairs effectively, equitably and efficiently in the interests of

development through the process of institution building to help governments to interpret and define the philosophies behind human development (UNDP, 1993). Institution building must be in harmony with local customs and practices, which are built upon to complement what is already known and accepted by the society. It also entails the formulation of policies that strengthen and manage the resources needed for the realisation of suitable programmes and projects.

Institution building most often takes account of what could be referred to as the imperatives of effective organization which include: articulated missions, goals, strategies and main function which entails arranging functions into logical groups for the attainment of organizational objectives; methods of coordination and control adapted to the circumstances of the organization; the delegation of sufficient authority to enable managers or groups to exercise direct control over their areas of responsibility and clearly defined roles and relationships; the institutionalization of planning and communication at all levels; strong connections between performance and reward; credible transformational leadership capable of setting directions, motivating and inspiring employees and colleagues, and creating an organization culture which places high value on productivity (Blunt and Jones, 1992).

In practice, most development administration practitioners are now more concerned with improving what exists rather than building from scratch. Institution building and development administration are used interchangeably, as they attempt to improve the functioning of societies by creating, strengthening or changing the way people relate to one another in the context of public action and public activities.

Effective institution building may sometimes involve changing relationships among important actors without apparently changing the formal organisational context of regular informal interaction between different groups of public servants involved in economic policy-making (Schiavo-campo, cited in Matthew et al, 2023). The term is used to refer to attempts to improve the functioning of societies by creating, strengthening or changing institutional framework, the main thrust of institution building is the strengthening of institutional and human resource capacities of governments for the achievement of national development objectives and the internationally agreed development agenda for sustainable development by assisting countries in transforming public administration institutions into effective, efficient, transparent, accountable, innovative and citizen-oriented ones to accomplish missions of the State including delivery of services and sustainable development goals and targets; promoting the development of public sector human resource leadership capacities, professionalism and ethical conduct that fosters commitment to public service among the civil servants (Israel, 1987).

Changes in institutions occur incrementally since it is a consequence of the embedded nature of informal constraints in societies. While the change in formal rules as a result of political or judicial decisions may occur so fast, "informal constraints embodied in customs, traditions, and codes of conduct are much more impervious to deliberate policies (Blunt & Collins, 1994). These cultural constraints represent the link between the past and the future and provide "the key to explaining the path of historical change." Therefore, it is a representation of the complex interaction between the State as a designer of formal rules and the society as being bounded by its informal constraints, where the actors or players –groups of individuals are bound by a common purpose to achieve objectives, while institutions are the rules of the game of a society.

These players can be “political bodies (political parties, the senate, a city council, a regulatory agency); economic bodies (firms, trade unions, family farms, cooperatives); social bodies (churches, clubs, athletic associations); and educational bodies (schools, universities, vocational training centres) (Blunt & Collins, 1994).

3.2 Development Administration

The task of development in post-colonial nations has always presented unique challenges, distinct from those faced by advanced economies. Unlike developed countries, where governments typically respond to demands for enhanced social services within already advanced societies, newly independent states like Nigeria had to address the absence of even the most necessary services for the majority of their populations. The urgency of development was underscored by the need to secure the very survival of these embryonic nation-states, with citizens expecting rapid improvements in their living conditions following independence.

It became evident that traditional public administration, which focused primarily on maintaining law and order, would be insufficient for guiding transformative nation-building efforts. This led to the emergence of a new administrative paradigm termed development administration, situated within the broader discipline of public administration. Development administration was conceived as a vehicle to modernise economies, foster industrialisation, and elevate social welfare in line with the standards of advanced nations. The model draws heavily from Max Weber's concept of a rational-legal bureaucracy, emphasising technical expertise, efficiency, and the replacement of traditional authority structures with institutional governance (Fainsod, referenced in Avijit, 2020).

Development administration concerns the administration of development, which is further simplistically referred to as administering development. It focuses on government departments, public enterprises, regulatory agencies, public corporations, cooperative institutions, etc. The government machinery is responsible for achieving the broader socio-economic and political goals. Development administration has two main objectives. First, it relates to realising development goals and objectives, and the second is to improve and enhance the capabilities of those involved in development goals and objectives. Based on the foregoing, Development Administration focuses on the policies, projects, programmes, and projects undertaken to achieve economic, political and social development objectives carried out by talented and skilled bureaucrats (Chandler & Plano, 1982).

According to Fainsod, as cited in Avijit (2020), development administration as a carrier of innovation and values, encompasses the new functions undertaken by developing countries committed to modernisation. It is defined as a system that initiates and manages political, social, and economic innovations, often through planned economic growth and the strategic mobilisation of resources to expand national income.

Eneh and Aduma (2023) argue that the nature of a country's administration is shaped by its environment, particularly its level of development. While traditional public administration emphasises resource extraction—such as tax collection or revenue from petroleum in Nigeria—primarily for state security and maintenance, development administration redirects these resources towards building infrastructure and social amenities. In Nigeria, government efforts

in constructing hospitals, roads, power plants, schools, and public utilities exemplify this model, despite trends towards privatisation and commercialisation.

Avijit (2020) further defines development administration as the execution of developmental programs and projects aimed at nation-building and socio-economic progress. These dual objectives—nation-building and socio-economic development—are central to its purpose. Supporting this perspective, Emordi and Onuegbu (2020) identify three factors that spurred the rise of development administration: the emergence of newly decolonized states after World War II, international economic and technical assistance initiatives led by the United States, and the formation of the Comparative Administrative Group, which fostered academic interest in the administrative systems of developing nations.

While the foundations of development administration were established to drive nation-building in newly independent states like Nigeria, the persistence of institutional weaknesses, capacity deficits, and governance failures suggests a gap between the theoretical ideals and practical realities.

4.0 THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

This study adopts the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state, which posits that the state is not a neutral or independent force serving the collective interest, but rather an instrument of domination and exploitation by the ruling elite. According to Okolie, as cited in Ayka (2017), while the state is often portrayed as an impartial arbiter that equitably regulates socio-economic transactions, in reality, it functions to protect the interests of the dominant class and their collaborators. According to Alavi (as referenced in Ayka, 2017), the post-colonial state continues to serve as a mechanism for elite appropriation and control over national resources.

Understanding development administration in Nigeria through this theoretical lens is crucial. Power is concentrated in the hands of a few, who manipulate state institutions to control the allocation and distribution of resources. This concentration of power fosters systemic corruption, resource mismanagement, and social inequality, which in turn manifest as persistent development challenges and perceived underdevelopment. Practices such as misappropriation of public funds, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, extortion, and electoral fraud are symptomatic of this exploitative structure, undermining effective governance and national development.

4.1 The Role of Institution Building in Development Administration

According to Joseph Easten, cited in Matthew et al (2023), hypothesise that "resident and entrenched leadership can easily command resources for a new programme and develop strong enabling linkages with other institutions in society than absentee and changing bad leadership. The institution must relate its environment to ensure survival and appropriate growth. An effective adjustment between organisational needs and environmental norms and values must be made, and the leadership must claim and establish the legitimacy of the organisation. Because institution-building is essentially a group process, leadership is one of its important elements. The critical role of formulating the doctrines and programmes, as well as defining the set of values to which the organisation attaches itself, rests on leadership. Leadership is the process by which one member of a group influences other members of the group towards the

attainment of specific group goals. It is the ability to lead others to bring about change in an organisation (Carlson, 1998). Esman (1967) believes that leadership is critical to institution-building because the induced-change process requires intensive, skilful and committed management of both the internal and environmental relationships. Besides the conviction that the set goal is achievable, Tang (2005) suggests that there are four important ingredients or set of skills necessary for effective leadership in institution-building which are: optimism-the belief that the ultimate goal is attainable; devotion- willingness to pursue the goal relentlessly; pragmatism - setting time lines and deadlines for achieving and reaching the goals before the deadlines; and skill- possessing the intellectual and technical capacity for understanding every issue relevant to realizing the set goals. Leadership, therefore, is akin to a bow which drives and gives direction to an arrow to help it reach its target.

The place of institutions in economic performance and nation building in general is easy to assume that all agree on or understand its primacy of place in the quest for human progress. Though scholars and thinkers are moving towards consensus on the importance of institutions for human advancement, there has been a considerable body of literature that emphasises how important institutions are for progress. They include Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's *Why Nations Fail*; Neil Ferguson's *Civilization – the West and the Rest*; Raghuram Rajan and Luigi Zingales' *Saving Capitalism from the Capitalists*; Hernando De Soto's *The Mystery of Capital*; and the ground- breaking book by the Nobel Laureate Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.

These books generally emphasised the importance of institutions, policy choices, human capital, entrepreneurship, culture-value system and leadership. A development administration explanation for the function of institutions and their linkage to governance suggests that they evolve functionally within societies to address checks and balances and comparative advantage issues. Contemporary attitudes and beliefs about institutions and the role that they play constrain centralisation of authority in the sense that national government becomes deterred just as predictably, informal bodies exert their influence when decentralisation provides better approaches to solving societal problems. Governance cannot be said to be in place if the people do not identify with the state, if the system continues to be alien to the cultural norms, corruption in its behaviour fails to guarantee the people's security and does not influence the economic activities of the people positively. The system must recognise the importance of local institutions and realise that institution-building cannot take place without taking the super institution of the state into consideration. In the Nigerian context, the formal structures of government have increasingly become a fiction in governance. According to Olowu & Erero cited in Matthew et al, (2023), the services they provide have declined sharply in quality and quantity, which inadvertently has given rise to the development of alternative institutional structures for providing essential services; empirical studies have shown that highly centralized states are expensive to run, cumbersome, inflexible and are subjected to being abused (Esman, 1991). Governance must be rooted in functioning local, participatory self-governance institutions (Wunsch, 2004).

There is no doubt that governments have not been doing well politically and economically, but that emphasis should now be shifted to the growth of civil societies, public ownership of political institutions, mobilisation of talents and resources into constructive patterns and countervailing power vis-à-vis national institutions. This new re-awakening is undoubtedly a

reaction to years of frustrating experience with highly centralised national governments; any explanation that can be given for the continuing malaise of governance in our societies is the choice of their policies and the strategies employed in pursuing them. These policies include centralization (Olowu, 1995), central control of resources both fiscal and jurisdictional (Gboyega, 2003); turbulent economic and policy environment which have undermined local institutions (Olowu & Wunsch, 1995, 1996); leadership impunity to the laws of the land as if they are unchangeable and the absence of complimentary reforms in the legal systems (Aye, 1997). According to Wunsch (2004), governments tried to develop policy and deliver services. States must share their powers of governance with regional and self-governing communities, and there should exist a jurisdictional integrity that recognises the political and legal competence of a unit of government to operate within a spatial and functional capacity where the citizens should be able to give consent and pass judgment on the exercise of authority over that governmental entity. There should be the transfer of responsibilities and resources from the central government to local entities and the development of networks between governments at all levels (Mukoro 2017). One of the many aspects of development administration is institution building as a component of economic development (Mutahaba, 1989). Weak institutions must be combated for the love of the next generation. To fail to build institutions that support growth and stability is to betray the mission of this generation. If institutions are to be involved in nation building, among the critical areas for institutions to be built or invigorated are education, law and order, financial markets, communication and land reforms (Utomi, 2020). Determining the degree of appropriateness of return on investment, determining the level of oppression and expropriation, and determining the degree to which the environment is conducive to cooperation and increased social capital. North (1990) opined that institutions are the rules of the game in a society, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. They structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic. Institutions comprise, for example, contracts and contract enforcement, protection of property rights, the rule of law, government bureaucracies, and financial markets. They also, however, include habits and beliefs, norms, social cleavages and traditions in education (Hall & Jones, 1999).

Formal institutions typically tend to be the crystallisation of informal institutions (North, 1990). As social norms in the realms of gender, class and caste, for example, determine rules of political participation and representation, methods of economic exchange, and inclusion of different groups in society (Pateman, 1988). Rodrik, Subramanian & Trebbi (2002) assess the relative importance of institutions, geography and integration (trade) in determining the differences in incomes between the world's most developed countries and the poorest ones. They find that institutional determinants surpassed all others. It is not a new intuition that is responsible for the prosperity of economic activity, but it is institutions that matter. Adam Smith had noted the importance of a justice system, private property rights, and the rule of law in his text called *The Wealth of Nations*. Aron (2000) surveys the studies which correlate indices of development to institutional ones and show a positive correlation with property rights and enforcement, with civil liberties, others with political rights and democracy, with institutions for cooperation (e.g., clubs and associations), and find a negative correlation of development with political instability.

4.2 Development Administration Institutions in Nigeria

These institutions are the ministries, departments, agencies and corporations, local authorities, any business or undertakings entrusted by the government and any company registered or deemed to be registered under the Companies Act No.7 of 2007 in which the government holds more than fifty per cent (50%) of the shares. These institutions perform administrative functions; e.g., the civil service as government institution functions as an administrative machinery to formulate and implement government policies and programmes while other are political in structure but work in synergy with the other institutions to achieve political objectives of government e.g., the political parties, INEC, the executive and the legislature (national and state assemblies) perform political functions. Others yet perform economic functions, e.g., the Central Bank. Some of the institutions in Nigeria are highlighted below, as referenced in Matthew et al (2023):

- Code of Conduct Bureau
- Central Bank of Nigeria
- Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre
- Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).
- Independent National Electoral Commission
- Federal Ministry of Finance
- Federal Ministry of Justice
- National Agency for Food, Drug, and Control, NAFDAC.
- National Planning Commission
- National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).
- National Pension Commission
- Nigeria Customs Service
- National Population Commission of Nigeria
- Nigerian Communications Commission
- Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency
- Securities and Exchange Commission
- Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission
- Nigerian Stock Exchange
- The Legislature (National Assembly)
- The Nigeria Immigration Service
- The State House, Abuja
- Standards Organisation of Nigeria
- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Institutional set-up is likely to unfavourably affect the rents earned by the elite (Manjumbar & Mukand, 2004). This is why the elites have insistently and clandestinely resisted the existence of strong institutions in Nigeria. Their monopoly is not just on economic institutions; they have also infested the political, judicial and law enforcement institutions in order to consolidate their positions to protect themselves against any possible repercussion. The elites are not only powerful, but everywhere with different nomenclatures such as ‘cabal’ or ‘vested interest groups’ in virtually all critical sectors of the Nigerian polity and economy (Manjumbar & Mukand, 2004).

4.3 The Impact of Institution Building on Development in Nigeria

The long-standing weakness of Nigeria's public institutions has had profound effects on national development. From economic stagnation and broken service delivery systems to widespread public distrust, the consequences of poor governance and ineffective administration in Nigeria continue to undermine the country's growth trajectory and social cohesion.

Weak institutions have directly contributed to Nigeria's persistent economic stagnation. Infrastructure, particularly in transport, energy, and logistics, is severely underdeveloped, discouraging both domestic and foreign investment. According to a report published by Josephine Punch Newspapers correspondent (2023), Nigeria faces an infrastructure deficit of around \$3 trillion, which will take three decades to close at current spending rates. This massive gap continues to stifle productivity, reduce competitiveness, and limit job creation.

Energy supply is a key bottleneck. Despite an installed capacity of about 13,500 MW, the country consistently generates and distributes only a third of that amount. Reuters (2024) notes that Nigeria's unreliable power supply leads to frequent blackouts, and the World Bank estimates that these outages cost the economy approximately \$29 billion annually in lost output. This has a chilling effect on industrial growth, small business operations, and investor confidence.

Further linking infrastructure and growth, Aworinde and Akintoye (2019) find a strong correlation between the quality of institutions and economic development in Nigeria. Their study shows that improvements in infrastructure and institutional accountability could significantly boost GDP and long-term growth prospects.

In sectors like education, healthcare, and utilities, the failure of institutions to effectively deliver public services is glaring. Despite having detailed policy frameworks, poor execution and chronic underfunding continue to weaken outcomes. In the education sector, Nigeria had over 20 million out-of-school children as of 2023, the highest number globally. This figure is attributed to school infrastructure deficits, insecurity, and prolonged industrial actions by education unions (Wikipedia, 2023).

In healthcare, underinvestment remains a central issue. According to the World Health Organisation and summarised in Wikipedia (2024), Nigeria routinely allocates less than the 15% target set by the Abuja Declaration for healthcare funding. This has led to critical shortages of equipment, underpaid workers, and mass emigration of medical professionals in search of better opportunities abroad. The result is a dilapidated healthcare system unable to meet even basic public health needs.

Institutional corruption also directly affects infrastructure protection. Ukaeje (2022) argues that misappropriation of funds and the absence of maintenance culture have left many service facilities in states of disrepair. Cases of vandalism and looting of public utilities persist because of poor oversight and ineffective enforcement mechanisms.

The erosion of public trust in government is another major consequence of institutional failure. Human Rights Watch (2011) estimates that Nigeria has lost over \$400 billion to corruption since its independence. According to Wikipedia (2024), the misuse of public office for personal or political gain remains widespread, reinforcing a public perception that government serves elite interests rather than collective welfare.

This distrust is compounded by Nigeria's overdependence on oil revenues, which decouples governance from accountability. As discussed in a Reddit public analysis (2023), governments reliant on natural resource rents are less incentivised to deliver services or respond to public demands, focusing instead on redistributing oil wealth through patronage and clientelism.

Most recently, economic reforms under President Tinubu, such as the removal of fuel subsidies and the unification of exchange rates, have triggered steep inflation and widespread public hardship. According to the Financial Times (2024), these reforms, though necessary, were implemented in a context of weak institutional safeguards, resulting in growing public frustration, protests, and fears of deeper instability.

5.0 CHALLENGES TO STRONG PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS BUILDING IN NIGERIA

There are numerous challenges to building strong public institutions in Nigeria. The challenges discussed in this section are only a tip of the iceberg of elements that conspire to hinder strong institutions in Nigeria. This paper discusses the following challenges: weak institutions in Nigeria, corruption and patronage in Nigeria, capacity deficits, policy inconsistency and implementation gaps in Nigeria.

5.1 Weak Institutions in Nigeria

Nigeria's institutions often lack the autonomy, consistency, and resilience needed to function independently of political pressures. Key bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the civil service have been routinely undermined by political interference and leadership instability. According to Nzereogu (2024), INEC's independence is persistently compromised by executive influence, especially during pre-election and post-election periods. Similarly, Azoro, Onah, and Agulefo (2021) argue that weak institutional frameworks contribute directly to poor governance outcomes, with fragmented mandates and politicised leadership appointments destabilising the system.

Policy continuity is another institutional weakness. Every new administration often discards previous development plans without a comprehensive evaluation, creating implementation vacuums and wasted public resources. Without entrenched institutional systems, policies remain vulnerable to political whims.

Umar, Samsudin & Mohamed's analysis (2018) of EFCC's challenges highlights issues such as "insufficient budgets and incompetent personnel," urging stronger legal backing, funding, and staffing reforms. A 2024 report in *The Nation* also emphasised that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of Nigeria has been one of the more vocal – and at times controversial – anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) in Africa. It has been instrumental in charging and prosecuting senior political leaders and businessmen with political links, as well as in recovering and repatriating significant stolen resources that belong to the Nigerian state. Yet it is also subject to frequent political interference, which reduces its effectiveness and means that it is often seen as an arm of the incumbent government without an independent mandate. Senior-level functionaries of EFCC are perceived as not being immune to political pressures, which is one reason why the commission has not been able to function credibly, while operational inefficiencies caused by insufficient funding and lack of technical capacity and expertise among staff also undermine the effectiveness of the commission.

5.2 Corruption and Patronage in Nigeria

Corruption remains a defining feature of Nigeria's public administration. Public office is often viewed as an avenue for personal enrichment rather than service. Inuwa (2021) observes that public resources are routinely diverted through inflated contracts, ghost workers, and bureaucratic red tape. The civil service, which should be an engine of national progress and a vehicle for social engineering, is riddled with patronage-based appointments that prioritise loyalty over competence.

Onah, Asadu, and Amujiri (2022) link Nigeria's underdevelopment to elite-driven corruption, where appointments are exchanged for political favours, and public budgets are manipulated to serve narrow interests. The result is a systemic culture of impunity that makes effective development planning almost impossible.

Satope and Funmilayo (2023) reinforce this view with empirical evidence from their study of civil servants across three south-western states. They found that more than 80% of respondents believed promotions were driven by personal connections rather than merit, while many reported instances of bribery and favouritism influencing job placement. Such practices undermine morale, distort professionalism, and sabotage institutional efficiency.

Zakari and Button (2022) argue that Nigeria's corruption problem is not just individual but systemic. Drawing from interviews with insiders, they document how entrenched patronage networks dominate the public sector. These networks rely on ethnic and political loyalty, rather than formal rules or competence, to distribute public resources, positions, and contracts. The result is a system where corruption is normalised and where oversight institutions like the EFCC and ICPC are often sidelined or politicised.

This patron-client culture, also known as prebendalism, makes institutional reform particularly difficult. According to Igiebor (2019), prebendal politics creates a situation in which public offices are treated as private estates, used to reward allies and suppress opposition. It explains why anti-corruption campaigns often falter: those benefiting from the system are also the ones controlling it.

Furthermore, patronage distorts policy implementation. Bassey and Edemidiong (2021) highlight how political interference in recruitment often results in unqualified personnel being appointed to critical public service roles, thereby weakening the technical capacity of institutions. Over time, this entrenches a bureaucracy that lacks the skill, discipline, or independence required for effective service delivery.

5.3 Capacity Deficits in Nigeria

Beyond corruption, Nigeria's administrative workforce suffers from severe capacity constraints that continue to cripple development administration. Political interference in recruitment has led to the widespread appointment of underqualified personnel across ministries and agencies. Dosunmu and Lamidi (2021) reveal how state-level bureaucracies, such as those in Ondo State, are heavily influenced by political actors who prioritise loyalty over competence. This distorts the recruitment process and erodes professional standards,

leaving key public institutions staffed with personnel lacking the technical and ethical foundations to perform effectively.

The problem, however, goes beyond entry-level recruitment. Even where skilled personnel are in place, their potential is rarely fully developed or supported. Okorie et al. (2025) argue that Nigeria's bureaucratic reform efforts have been sporadic, reactive, and poorly coordinated. Training and re-training programs, which are essential for maintaining a capable and adaptive civil service, are either underfunded or inconsistently applied. As a result, public servants often lack the knowledge and tools needed to manage complex administrative tasks, particularly in areas like planning, budgeting, data analysis, and policy monitoring.

This deficit is particularly damaging in sectors that require technical expertise, such as health, infrastructure, education, and digital governance. According to Satope and Funmilayo (2023), capacity challenges are further compounded by the absence of performance evaluation systems, weak accountability structures, and an outdated curriculum in training institutions like the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON). These gaps reduce institutional memory and innovation, while fostering a "business-as-usual" culture within government agencies.

Moreover, the politicisation of public administration has discouraged merit-based career progression, undermining morale and disincentivising service excellence. When promotions and training opportunities are awarded based on political connections rather than performance, the civil service becomes stagnant and resistant to reform.

These capacity gaps weaken Nigeria's ability to translate national development plans into effective action. Without a well-trained, well-resourced, and politically shielded bureaucracy, even the best-designed policies will fail to achieve their objectives. Strengthening administrative capacity requires not just training programs but a deep restructuring of the public service culture anchored on professionalism, accountability, and continuity.

5.4 Bureaucratic Obstacles and Duplication of Duties and Roles

Our institutions are filled with bureaucratic inconsistencies, duplication of duties and roles. The institutions are set up to provide employment and generate revenue rather than provide essential services to the general public. There is no distinction between essential services and luxury. Governments have shied away from their responsibilities to provide necessary social services to their citizens, such as power supply, clean piped borne water, standard gauge roads, educational institutions, health services, agricultural extension services, social security services and adequate economic assurance of their career after retirement. Most of their services have been privatised, where, in most cases, the highest bidder gets the companies sold to them. Some of the factors adduced for th failure of public enterprises include duplication of duties, over-bloated employment and huge salary arrears and allowances. Furthermore, most of their liabilities exceeded their assets, and in the end, the companies are sold off by the government to their cronies, who are rich and can afford to operate with high prices and taxes. Those institutions and companies collapse or fail to deliver because they were operating like the core ministries instead of being commercial entities.

5.5 Policy Inconsistency and Implementation Gaps in Nigeria

Nigeria's public sector often initiates good policies but fails during implementation. While many of these frameworks are technically sound, they rarely translate into effective action due to poor implementation, weak institutional capacity, and a lack of political and administrative continuity. Etalong and Aduma (2022) provide a clear example from the education sector, where well-structured development policies exist on paper but are undermined by inadequate infrastructure, late disbursement of funds, and bureaucratic inaction. Despite decades of reform, key educational initiatives continue to suffer from shortages in trained personnel, instructional materials, and physical learning environments, evidence of a persistent gap between policy and practice.

This implementation failure is closely tied to accountability breakdowns within Nigeria's public administration system. A study published by Scientific Research Publishing (2010) highlights a key issue within institutions: the overlapping responsibilities of political appointees and career civil servants. This duplication of roles creates institutional confusion and ultimately leads to weakened oversight. According to the research, ministers and directors often pursue conflicting priorities, resulting in duplication of efforts, misaligned goals, and delays in execution. Without clearly delineated roles and a culture of collaboration, public institutions struggle to implement even the most basic policy objectives.

A major contributor to these challenges is Nigeria's fragmented federal structure. There is often a disconnect between federal policies and state-level implementation, especially when political affiliations differ. Federal agencies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) may initiate programs that are poorly supported or outright neglected by state governments. For example, Ripples Nigeria (2024) reports that Kwara State consistently allocated far below the UNESCO-recommended 15–20% of its annual budget to education, hovering between 7–10% between 2018 and 2022. This underinvestment undermines federal educational reforms and highlights the consequences of uncoordinated governance.

The dearth of reliable data further exacerbated the problem. As of 2024, Nigeria still lacks a centralised education database that can guide evidence-based policymaking. According to the Minister of State for Education, Dr. Yusuf Sununu, the absence of comprehensive national education data has significantly impeded effective planning, monitoring, and evaluation across all levels of government, as reported by Chidimma Daily Trust correspondent (2024). Without dependable data, policies remain guesswork and are obsolete by the time they reach the execution phase.

6.0 THE WAY FORWARD

Rebuilding Nigeria's development administration requires more than surface reforms. It demands structural systemic actions rooted in autonomy, accountability, civic involvement, and modern public sector tools. The following strategic pillars provide a roadmap for meaningful transformation.

6.1 Institutional Reforms in Nigeria

Strengthening institutional autonomy is essential for long-term stability and performance in Nigeria. The operations of public institutions, including INEC, the Auditor General's Office, and SERVICOM, should be devoid of political interference and influences. In 2022, the

Nigerian government launched the Central Delivery and Coordination Unit (CDCU) and a Presidential Delivery Tracker to monitor real-time implementation of federal projects and receive citizen feedback (The Guardian, 2022). These tools are part of broader performance-tracking frameworks to enforce public service delivery across ministries.

The establishment of SERVICOM is another core reform measure. Designed to institutionalise service standards and promote public satisfaction, SERVICOM encourages ministries to adopt measurable performance charters (RSIS International, 2021). However, for reforms like these to be effective, they must be backed by legislation, funding, and enforcement capacity.

6.2 Anti-Corruption Enforcement in Nigeria

Despite Nigeria's anti-corruption frameworks, enforcement remains weak due to political interference and institutional fragility. The IMF (2024) recommends that anti-corruption agencies such as the ICPC and the Office of the Auditor General be insulated from executive influence and provided with sufficient legal authority and funding. It also endorses tools like the Freedom of Information Act and a public beneficial ownership registry to enhance transparency.

In parallel, civil society organisations have pioneered citizen-facing solutions. The Akin Fadeyi Foundation's FlagIt app enables Nigerians to anonymously report corrupt practices and misuse of public funds (Wikipedia, 2024). Such tools are critical to bridging the gap between citizens and enforcement bodies.

6.3 Capacity Building in Nigeria

Capacity building is central to public sector transformation. In March 2025, UNESCO conducted training for 80 Nigerian civil servants in AI, digital governance, cybersecurity, and open government practices (UNESCO, 2025). This initiative, targeting the Ministries of Youth Development and Information, was designed to equip government professionals with tools for effective digital leadership.

In addition, the Federal Civil Service Commission has introduced a "Digital Government Professional" career path, and the Ministry of Communications has launched national Innovation Labs to enhance digital competencies (Next Disruptor, 2024). These reforms signal a shift to a merit-based e-governance for managing complex modern development challenges.

6.4 Citizen Engagement and Accountability in Nigeria

Engaging citizens in governance is key to strengthening accountability and restoring public trust. BudgIT and Tracka are two leading platforms that enable Nigerians to monitor budgets and public projects in real-time. Tracka currently operates in over 20 states, and citizens can report on abandoned or incomplete public projects (Wikipedia, 2024).

In 2024, AI tools developed by BudgIT and the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) found that ₦39.5 billion was duplicated in projects in the 2025 national budget, prompting a major public debate (TheCable, 2024). This implies that technology can enhance transparency and drive government responsiveness.

SME Guide (2024) outlines further steps to boost civic engagement, which include the expansion of open data portals, institutionalisation of public hearings, enforcement of whistleblower protection, and mandatory timelines for responding to information requests. These measures will bridge the gap between policy initiation and policy implementation.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's efforts to build strong institutions and achieve effective development administration have been characterised by cycles of reform and regression. The persistence of weak, politically influenced institutions has reinforced corruption, policy discontinuities, and inefficiencies that hamper both economic growth and public service delivery. This has led to infrastructural deficits, declining public trust, and social disengagement.

However, these challenges are not insurmountable. The path to sustainable national development lies in implementing comprehensive institutional reforms that ensure autonomy, accountability, and professionalism within public administration. Strengthening anti-corruption agencies, enhancing civil service capacity through digital innovation, and fostering active citizen participation are essential strategies for institutional renewal.

Ultimately, Nigeria's developmental aspirations hinge not on the absence of policy frameworks but on the will to execute them effectively. A concerted effort from policymakers, civil society, and the citizenry is necessary to transform the rhetoric of institution-building into tangible governance outcomes that benefit all Nigerians.

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