



International Journal Research Publication Analysis

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EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN ENUGU STATE'S CIVIL SERVICE PROMOTIONS

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Article Revised: 28 August 2025 Everwinners Construction Company, Nigeria Limited.

Published on: 18 September 2025 Email Id: ecatonia2008@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of political interference on promotion of civil servants in Enugu State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The population for the study was seven thousand, one hundred and sixty-three (7163), drawn from five selected ministries in Enugu state. A sample of 379 was derived from the population using the Taro Yamane statistical formula. Simple random sampling was used to administer the copies of questionnaire to the respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage and mean. The findings of the study indicated that political interference in civil service distorts merit-based promotion which brings individuals lacking the necessary skills into the civil service, discourages hardworking officers from putting in their best, encourages mediocrity, reduces commitment to innovation in service delivery, leads to prioritizing of the interests of political leaders which leads to inefficiency, encourages rent-seeking behavior among civil servants thereby eroding integrity in the service, difficulty in maintaining long-term planning, which undermines development outcomes, leads to poor service delivery and discourages growth in expertise of civil servants. It was recommended amongst others that modalities should be put in place to curb undue political interference using stronger institutions, clear legal safeguards, improved welfare, digitization, and a culture of professionalism capable of boosting the morale of civil servants and improve their productivity.

KEYWORDS: Civil servants, Political Interference, Promotion, Impact.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The civil service is the machinery through which the policies and programmes of government are formulated, implemented and evaluated. It is the backbone of public administration and governance. Evance (2025) asserted that ideally, the civil service should function as a neutral and professional body that ensures continuity and efficiency in government operations, regardless of political transitions. According to Okeke (2015), the civil service is a critical contact between the government and the people in the area of good governance and service delivery. The success of any government depends on a virile civil service. Similarly, Uduma, Ogbag and Emerole (2015) see civil service as an organised institution of the State with all the basic features and principles of rational authority which defines its modus operandi as it is governed by rules and regulations that specify how it operates and also its own internal control that ensures its commitment towards the government and the society in general. The civil service is the service within government ministries and departments charged with the responsibility of implementing public policies. It is also an institution of government saddled with the responsibility of designing, formulating and implementing public policy, and discharging government functions and development programmes in an effective and efficient way.

In Nigeria, the civil service is expected to function as a neutral, professional, and merit-driven institution that ensures efficiency, continuity, and stability in governance regardless of changes in political leadership. Promotion in the civil service is not merely an administrative task; it is vital to shaping employee behaviour, motivation, and overall performance. Promotion practices within the Nigerian civil service largely influence organisational outcomes, such as commitment, efficiency, responsiveness, and goal attainment. Promotion practices in the civil service can significantly influence employee morale and organisational effectiveness (Gould-Williams, 2020).

Promotion within the civil service is traditionally intended to be based on merit, seniority, competence, and adherence to established rules and regulations. However, over the years, political interference has increasingly undermined this process, raising concerns about fairness, efficiency, and productivity. Historically, the Nigerian civil service inherited from the colonial administration was designed to be apolitical, efficient, and rule-bound (Fayemi, 2019). However, successive military regimes and civilian administrations introduced a culture of patronage, political favoritism, and interference in the promotion system. For

example, seniority and merit were often ignored in favour of candidates with political connections or ethnic ties, thereby weakening institutional integrity (Adebayo & Oyetunde, 2023). This trend has continued into the democratic era, raising questions about the independence and professionalism of the civil service.

Political interference in civil service promotions occurs when appointments and advancements are influenced by political considerations, favouritism, ethnicity, nepotism, or patronage, rather than by objective performance evaluation and merit-based criteria (Olaopa, 2014). Political interference occurs when political leaders unduly get involved directly or indirectly on the key decision-making in public sector matters such as promotion (Allan, Africanus & George, 2019). These political leaders often use the public sector as reward platforms to maintain control and extend their domination in every aspect of public organisations. Evance (2025) averred that the civil service in many African nations like Nigeria has increasingly become entangled in political patronage, where appointments and promotions are influenced more by party loyalty than by competence or expertise. This has led to a decline in efficiency, transparency, and accountability, undermining public trust in government institutions. The rise of individuals who owe their positions to political allegiance rather than merit has had far-reaching consequences for governance and economic development. Political interference in the civil service erodes institutional independence, weakens public administration, and fosters corruption, as officials prioritise partisan interests over national development. Moreover, the entrenchment of political appointees in key bureaucratic positions stifles innovation and discourages competent professionals, ultimately hindering efforts to build strong and effective institutions.

In Nigeria, where politics is often highly polarised and ethnically charged, the civil service has been accused of being politicised, with promotions and appointments sometimes reflecting political loyalty rather than administrative competence (Oyedele, 2016). Kalu and Nwaorgu (2021) noted that the civil service has been politicised to the extent that most top officials openly support the government of the day. The introduction of the quota system of promotion, adherence to the federal character principle, and the constant interference of the government in the day-to-day operation of the civil service especially through frequent changes in top officials and massive purges points to the fact that political factors rather than merit alone plays a key role in promotion in the civil service system. Ifaka and Odigie (2021) asserted that political interference has often been used as a disruption mechanism of

administrative tasks that requires a programmed decision format and due process. In the civil service, political prestige motivates the promotion of preferred individuals with bold moves that bypass bureaucratic procedures and outcomes. Under this circumstance, political pressure rather than merit influences the promotion of civil servants.

The effects of political interference in promotions can be far-reaching. It could lead to low morale among deserving civil servants who are overlooked, reduce productivity, and foster corruption as workers may seek political godfathers to secure advancement. Furthermore, it could create a culture of mediocrity, undermine institutional capacity, and hinder the realisation of sustainable development goals. A politicised civil service also risks losing public trust, as it fails to deliver services impartially and effectively. Given the critical role of the civil service in national development, it is essential to examine how political interference affects the promotion of civil servants in Nigeria.

2.0 Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted in this study. The design is considered appropriate because this study seeks to examine the impact of political interference on the promotion of civil servants in Enugu State, Nigeria. Also, it allows for the collection of data from a large population, facilitates the identification of patterns and provides insights into respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding political interference in promotion processes in the civil service.

Table 1 shows the mean score of respondents on the impact of political interference on the overall performance of civil servants in Enugu State, Nigeria. The mean score ranged from 3.82 to 4.24. All the items had their mean above 2.50. The implication is that all the respondents "Strongly Agreed" on all items presented.

3.0 RESULTS

Table 1: Impact of political interference on the overall performance of civil servants in Enugu State, Nigeria.

S/N	Options	SA5	A4	UD3	DA2	SD1	Total	Mean	Dec
1	Distorts merit-based promotion which brings individuals lacking the necessary skills into the civil service	264	42	2	25	41	374	4.24	SA
2	Discourages hardworking officers from putting in their best in the system	158	132	9	26	49	374	3.87	SA
3	Encourages mediocrity	213	72	7	47	35	374	4.02	SA
4	Reduces commitment to innovation in service delivery	206	94	12	33	29	374	4.11	SA
5	Leads to prioritizing of the interests of political leaders which brings about inefficiency	194	127	4	34	15	374	4.21	SA
6	Encourages rent-seeking behavior among civil servants thereby eroding integrity in the service	243	64	5	19	43	374	4.19	SA
7	Difficulty in maintain long- term planning, which undermines development outcomes	143	129	24	47	31	374	3.82	SA
8	Leads to poor service delivery	154	127	16	41	36	374	3.86	SA
9	Discourages growth in expertise of civil servants	164	137	21	35	17	374	4.06	SA
Grand Mean								4.04	SA

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

The analysis indicated that all the items had mean scores above 2.50. The import is that political interference in civil service promotion distorts merit-based promotion which brings individuals lacking the necessary skills into the civil service. This aligns with Rogger, Rasul and Williams (2018), who asserted that promoting on political grounds can place less-qualified staff into managerial and supervisory positions, creating capability gaps. The consequence is weaker technical decision-making, poorer project supervision, and reduced organizational learning. Promotion that is tied to political affiliation often produce leadership that lacks the technical skills required for effective planning and service delivery. Furthermore, officials promoted via patronage networks are often beholden to political sponsors, altering their accountability away from public service norms toward patron satisfaction.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study found that political interference is an anomaly with great impact on promotion of civil servants in Nigeria. The study recommends a competence and performance based evaluation for promotion, decentralized decision making process and clear legal safeguards to mitigate undue political influence on Civil service promotions.

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