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MANAGING LEGISLATIVE BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Usman Rabi'u
Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja.
urdaura@gmail.com
Ishaq Ibrahim Yawale
Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja.
Ibrahimyawale001@gmail.com

Abstract
Legislative bureaucracy plays a critical role in democratic governance by structuring the internal administrative framework that supports legislative functions. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–present), the National Assembly bureaucracy has experienced significant institutional reforms, yet continues to grapple with systemic challenges that undermine legislative efficiency and democratic consolidation. This paper presents an institutional analysis of the management of Nigeria's legislative bureaucracy, evaluating its challenges, achievements, and prospects. Anchored in Max Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy and contextualised through New Public Management (NPM) theories, the study draws upon archival analysis, secondary quantitative legislative data (1999–2023), and a review of official National Assembly records to assess the institutional evolution of the National Assembly Service. The findings indicate that despite major reforms such as the establishment of the National Assembly Service Commission (NASC), the Legislative Institute (NILDS), and digital shifts like IPPIS and TSA, the legislative bureaucracy remains constrained by political interference, weak accountability, patronage-based recruitment, and inadequate professional development systems. However, significant opportunities exist for capacity enhancement, legislative digitalisation, decentralisation, and knowledge-driven administration. The study concludes by recommending first, a rigorous institutionalization merit-based recruitment and professionalization to insulate the bureaucracy from patronage and, second, the enhancement of legislative~~staffing, fiscal autonomy safeguards~~, and full operationalisation of institutional innovations such as the National Assembly Budget and Research Office (NABRO). The paper contributes to the discourse on legislative administration in emerging democracies and offers insight for institutional governance reform across Africa.

Keywords: Legislative bureaucracy, National Assembly, Nigeria, institutional reform, Fourth Republic, parliamentary administration, governance.

1.0 Introduction

Democratic governance rests fundamentally on the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial branches, with the legislature occupying a critical role as the body responsible for law-making, representation of citizens' interests and oversight of the executive. A legislature's performance is therefore not only a function of elected lawmakers but also of the administrative and technical infrastructure which supports the chamber's operations. This administrative arm, often referred to as legislative bureaucracy, encompasses clerks, research officers, legal draftsmen, support staff and committee secretariats. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–present), the bureaucracy of the National Assembly of Nigeria (NASS) forms an essential yet under-examined component of parliamentary capacity. Since 1999, the National Assembly has been re-defined from an institution under military super-control to a constitutionally autonomous legislature with its own staff, budget and

administrative apparatus. Institutional reforms have included the establishment of the National Assembly Service Commission (NASC) in 2000, the creation of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) in 2011, and the introduction of more standardised salary and staffing structures for legislative staff (National Assembly Service, 2018). Yet, despite these institutional advances, the legislative bureaucracy remains beset by structural and operational challenges, for example, political interference in appointments, weak professionalisation, limited staff capacity and inadequate digital infrastructure (Adegboro, 2022; Onyekakie, 2022).

Understanding the administrative underpinnings of the National Assembly is vital because the legislature's ability to make appropriate laws, conduct oversight, and represent citizens effectively depends heavily on this bureaucratic engine~~–~~. If the staffs that support committees, draft bills, maintain records and ~~advise~~ advice members are weak, the institution's performance will suffer. For instance, recent research into legislative oversight in Nigeria highlights how administrative weaknesses can reduce the legislature's capacity to hold the executive accountable (Olaogun, Iwuoha, Ememobong, Oduh & Chiazor, 2024).

In institutional terms, there is a need to interrogate not only the formal rules and statutes which establish the legislative bureaucracy, but also the practices, routines, staffing patterns and institutional culture that shape its performance over time. This institutional analysis is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where hybrid political-bureaucratic structures mean that ideal-type rational bureaucracy (in Weberian terms) is consistently undermined or subverted by patronage and informal networks (Riggs, 1963; Alozie, 2019).

Therefore, this study investigates the evolution, management and reform prospects of the legislative bureaucracy of the National Assembly in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Specifically, the study addresses three interrelated questions: (1) ~~What~~what structural changes and reforms have shaped the bureaucratic management of the National Assembly since 1999? (2) What are the key institutional and operational challenges undermining the effectiveness of the National Assembly bureaucracy? (3) How can the prospects for legislative bureaucracy be harnessed to strengthen Nigeria's democratic development? By applying a dual theoretical lens combining Weberian bureaucracy and New Public Management (NPM), the study contributes to the literature on legislative administration in emerging democracies and provides policy- relevant insight for institutional strengthening in Nigeria and beyond.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Bureaucracy

The term *bureaucracy* has been foundational in public administration discourse and is often associated with organisational efficiency, procedural order, and institutional longevity. Originating from the combination of the French word *bureau* (desk or office) and Greek *kratos* (power or rule), bureaucracy literally translates as "rule by the office" (Njoku, 2009). Max Weber's ideal-type definition remains the cornerstone of bureaucratic theory, in which bureaucracy is characterised by rational-legal authority, hierarchical organisation, merit-based recruitment, specialisation, and impersonal rule enforcement (Weber, 1947). Weber viewed bureaucracy as technically superior to any other organisational form due to its precision, stability, and predictabilityqualities essential for modern governance.However, several scholars have critiqued Weber's model for its rigidity. Riggs (1963) argued that the model primarily reflects the administrative reality of Western societies and does not account for the complexities of developing nations where traditionalism, political patronage, and overlapping institutional cultures shape bureaucratic behaviour. Similarly, Albrow (1970) warned that bureaucracies can devolve into systems of red-tapism and exclusion if not accompanied by strong ethical and accountability frameworks. This critique remains highly

relevant, as illustrated by contemporary analyses of African bureaucracies (e.g, Bach, 2021; Mkandawire, 2022).

In Nigeria, bureaucracy has evolved through colonial, post-colonial, military, and democratic eras, each defining new administrative norms and structural arrangements (Nwosu, 1985, Chikere, 2020). The colonial system introduced hierarchical civil service structures, while post-independence governance saw bureaucratic adaptation to national development aims (Alozie, 2019, Aiyede, 2021). The military regimes (1966–1999) consolidated command-style bureaucracy, and the Fourth Republic (1999–present) has witnessed a hybrid model where bureaucratic structures coexist with political pluralism and democratic expectations.

Contemporary scholarship, Scholars like Bach, Gazibo, Dunleavy et al., 2021 has further evolved the debate, moving beyond the rigidity of classical models. The rise of new public management (NPM) in the late 20th Century championed a shift towards managerialism, performance, and market-oriented efficiency (Hood, 1991).

2.2 Legislative Bureaucracy

Legislative bureaucracy constitutes the core administrative and technical infrastructure that enables parliaments to function effectively. It includes clerks, committee secretariats, legislative drafters, research analysts, sergeants-at-arms, librarians, technologists, and other procedural staff responsible for ensuring continuity, impartiality, and technical accuracy in legislative business (Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2012). These administrative units ensure that bills are drafted to acceptable standards, motions are properly documented, records of proceedings are maintained, and parliamentary committees receive the analytical support needed to undertake evidence-based oversight. As such, a well-functioning legislative bureaucracy is indispensable to modern democratic governance, where legislative processes have become increasingly complex and knowledge-driven.

In advanced democracies, legislative bureaucracies are distinguished by their high degree of institutionalisation and professionalisation. For example, the United States Congress relies heavily on specialised, non-partisan institutions such as the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which collectively provide policymakers with technical briefs, budget analyses, and oversight evaluations (Katz, 2021; Johnson, 2020). Similarly, the United Kingdom Parliament maintains a strong clerking system, an advanced research service, and extensive procedural documentation that ensures transparency and continuity across parliamentary sessions (Norton, 2020). These support agencies operate with high levels of autonomy and are protected from political interference, allowing them to provide objective, evidence-based input to lawmakers. Research shows that such institutional autonomy correlates strongly with legislative effectiveness and democratic resilience (Russell & Gover, 2017).

In contrast, legislative bureaucracies in many African democracies face structural and operational constraints that limit their effectiveness. Countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana have undertaken various parliamentary strengthening initiatives, often supported by development partners and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to improve research capacity, committee support systems, and parliamentary digitalisation (Dodzi, 2021; Leston-Bandeira & Thompson, 2019). For instance, the Kenyan Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was created to provide non-partisan budget and fiscal analysis, helping to enhance legislative oversight of public finances (Wanyama & Njeru, 2020). Similarly, Ghana has made incremental gains through staff training, parliamentary archiving reforms, and committee-support frameworks. However, despite these improvements, many African legislatures still suffer from weak administrative autonomy, inadequate staff expertise, limited research capacity, and continued executive dominance over legislative processes (Ayee, 2020; Osei-

Mensah, 2021). These challenges impede the ability of legislative bureaucracies to provide high-quality support to elected representatives.

In Nigeria, the National Assembly bureaucracy is often cited as an exception because it enjoys formal administrative autonomy through the National Assembly Service Commission (NASC), distinguishing it from the federal civil service (National Assembly Service Act, 2014). This autonomy is intended to safeguard the neutrality, professionalism, and stability of parliamentary administration. However, empirical studies highlight persistent gaps in the capacity and performance of the National Assembly bureaucracy. Adegboro (2022), in a detailed assessment of the 8th National Assembly, observed that while the bureaucratic structure mirrors global parliamentary standards on paper, the practical effectiveness of the system is constrained by limited training, insufficient research support, inadequate digitalisation, and recurrent human-resource bottlenecks. Onyekakie (2022) similarly found that despite advancements in parliamentary support systems, career legislative staff often lack the specialised skills needed for legislative drafting, fiscal analysis, and evidence-based committee work.

Furthermore, recent studies indicate that political interference, patronage-based recruitment, and role ambiguity between bureaucrats and legislators continue to weaken the administrative effectiveness of the National Assembly (Olaogun et al., 2024; Nwagwu & Oshewolo, 2021). The limited operationalisation of expected support agencies such as the National Assembly Budget and Research Office (NABRO) has also constrained the legislature's capacity to undertake rigorous fiscal scrutiny. Despite being one of the most structurally autonomous legislatures in Africa, Nigeria's parliamentary bureaucracy therefore struggles with challenges typical of emerging democracies,such as insufficient institutional memory, capacity gaps, inadequate research infrastructure, and low levels of digital integration.Overall, the literature shows that In contrast, legislative bureaucracies in many Africa democracies face structural and operational constraints that limit their effectiveness. Countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana have undertake various parliamentary strengthening initiatives while Nigeria's National Assembly bureaucracy is comparatively better positioned than its regional counterparts due to its formal autonomy and institutional structures. However, this formal separation from the executive-controlled civil service is more robust than the arrangements in many peer ligislatures, such as the parliament of Ghana, whose service remains more integrated within the broader public service, or the Kenyan parliament, where the autonomy of its parliamentary service commission can be more susceptible to executive influence (Wanyama&Njeru, 2020; Ayee,2020). This formal autonomy, in principle, provides a stronger foundation for neutrality and institutional continuity. Significant reforms are still needed to close gaps in technical capacity, digital innovation, and administrative neutrality. Strengthening these areas is crucial for enhancing legislative performance and consolidating democratic governance in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Nigerian Bureaucracy and Legislative Administration

Most empirical scholarship on bureaucracy in Nigeria has historically prioritised the executive branch, a focus rooted in the nation's political history and the distribution of institutional power. This executive-centric orientation is a legacy of both the colonial administration and the prolonged period of military ruled (1966-1999), during which the civil service served as the primary, and often sole, instrument policy implementation and state control. The executive bureaucracy's vast size, its direct role in service delivary and patronage, and its centerally to all major public sector reform initiatives (e.g the civil service reform of 1988) with limited attention paid to the legislative bureaucracy as an independent administrative institution. Much of the classic literature has focused on the inefficiencies of the federal civil service, administrative corruption, and the challenges of public-sector reforms (Alozie, 2019; Adamolekun, 2002). This executive-centric orientation has left

significant gaps in understanding how legislative support structures function, even though parliaments rely heavily on bureaucratic expertise to perform lawmaking, oversight, and representational duties. As a result, legislative bureaucracies in Nigeria have not enjoyed the same scholarly scrutiny or policy reform momentum that executive institutions have received, thereby limiting the extent to which their institutional weaknesses are systematically addressed.

Recent empirical studies, however, have begun to highlight the importance of legislative support systems in shaping the performance and autonomy of the National Assembly. For example, the process for appointing senior officials, such as the clerk to the national assembly, is frequently subject to intense political lobbying, with allegations that seniority and merit are often bypassed in favor of candidates with strong political backing, as witnessed during the leadership transitions of the 9th and 10th assemblies (Nwagwu & Oshewolo, 2021). This politicalization creates role ambiguity, as bureaucrats may feel accountable to the political patrons who secured their positions rather than to institutional norms, thereby compromising their ability to provide impartial advice (Olaogun et al., 2024). The effects of system are also evident in the stymied development of key support agencies. A clear case is the continued failure to fully operationalize the national assembly budget and research office (NABRO), a situation widely attributed to a lack of political will from legislators who may be wary of establishing a powerful, independent body capable of scrutinizing their budgetary allocation and constituency projects. Rogger (2018) conducted a large-scale empirical assessment of bureaucratic behaviour in Nigeria and found that political interference significantly reduces administrative efficiency, disrupts organisational continuity, and weakens adherence to procedural rules. Although his research focused on broader public-sector bureaucracies, the implications are directly relevant to parliamentary administration, where political influence over staffing, promotions, and decision-making can compromise the objectivity and technical independence of legislative staff. These findings are reinforced by Nwagwu and Oshewolo (2021), who analyse how the politicisation of bureaucratic processes systematically in Nigeria undermines the professionalisation of legislative support services and results in inconsistent administrative performance. They are argue that this occurs through several mechanisms: first, by prioritizing political loyalty over technical competence in recruitment and promotions, which de-incentivizes skill acquisition and creates a staff body ill-equipped for complex legislative tasks; second, by fostering high turnover among senior administrative staff with new legislative session to make way for political allies, which severes institutional memory and disrupts procedural continuity; and third, by creating a climate of fear and preemptive compliance, where career staff avoid giving impartial, evidence-based advice for fear of contradicting or displeasing their political benefactors.

Within the specific context of the National Assembly, Adegboro's (2022) case study of the 8th Assembly provides one of the most detailed empirical assessments of parliamentary bureaucracy. The study revealed that although the organisational structure of the National Assembly is broadly aligned with international parliamentary standardsfeaturing directorates for research, legal services, legislative drafting, and committee support, significant operational constraints persist. These include chronic resource shortages, limited staff training, weak information-management systems, and inadequate technological integration. Adegboro's findings demonstrate that while the National Assembly bureaucracy may appear structurally modern, its functional capacity remains uneven, thereby constraining its contribution to legislative performance.

The role of career legislative staff has also received increased scholarly attention. Onyekakie (2022) emphasises that career staff constitute the backbone of parliamentary operations, providing institutional memory, procedural guidance, and technical expertise. However,—study highlights notable deficiencies, including the absence of systematic

professional development programmes, insufficient clarity in staff roles and job descriptions, and inadequate performance evaluation mechanisms. These challenges contribute to role ambiguity, inefficiencies in committee coordination, and inconsistent quality of legislative drafting and analysis. Similarly, Uwa and Ogunleye (2023) observed that the effectiveness of legislative support services in Nigeria is hampered by limited access to research tools, a lack of modern ICT resources, and insufficient training opportunities for new staff.

More recent work has stressed the centrality of bureaucratic support to effective legislative oversight. The study by Olaogun et al. (2024) shows that oversight performance by parliamentary committees is significantly dependent on the availability and capacity of administrative staff who conduct background research, prepare briefs, document proceedings, and support investigative hearings. Their research argues that weak bureaucratic support limits the legislature's ability to scrutinise executive actions, thereby undermining democratic accountability. This finding aligns with earlier research by Gyimah-Boadi (2020), who notes that oversight failures in African legislatures often originate from weak institutional capacity rather than political unwillingness alone.Overall, contemporary empirical studies reveal that the effectiveness of Nigeria's legislative bureaucracy is undermined by persistent structural, organisational, and political challenges. While the National Assembly has made important strides in establishing autonomous administrative structures, gaps remain in training, research capacity, role clarity, and technological adoption. These constraints limit the ability of legislative staff to provide high-quality support to lawmakers and hinder the legislature's broader contribution to democratic governance.

2.4 Theoretical Developments: ~~NPM and Legislative Support~~

Contemporary reform frameworks such as New Public Management (NPM) emphasise managerialism, performance measurement, digitalisation and decentralised structures (Hood, 1991; Barzelay & Armajani, 1992). In Nigerian public sector reforms, innovations such as the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) and Treasury Single Account (TSA) reflect NPM principles. However, the literature emphasises that in developing democracies the translation of NPM reforms into effective practice is often hampered by weak institutional culture, political interference and capacity deficits (Polidano, 2001). Within legislative bureaucracy, NPM suggests that professionalised staff, digital systems, performance appraisal and research orientation should enhance parliamentary support, but studies in Nigeria indicate that implementation remains uneven (Adegboro, 2022).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a dual theoretical framework comprising Weberian Bureaucracy Theory and New Public Management (NPM) to analyse the structure, evolution, and management of the National Assembly bureaucracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The use of these two theories allows for a balanced understanding of the administrative foundations and reform-oriented developments shaping legislative bureaucracy in a hybrid political context such as Nigeria's.

3.1 Weberian Bureaucracy Theory

Max Weber's bureaucratic theory remains one of the most influential in public administration scholarship. Weber conceptualised bureaucracy as a rational-legal organisational form grounded in procedural order, formal rules, hierarchical authority, and merit-based recruitment (Weber, 1947). It is designed to achieve high levels of efficiency, predictability, and impartiality in the execution of public functions. In this model, the performance of official functions is determined by competence rather than personal preference, and all administrative actions are governed by codified rules. Such a system, in theory, guarantees technical superiority and administrative stability.

The relevance of Weber's theory to the Nigerian National Assembly bureaucracy lies in its organisational structure, which is constitutionally anchored and exhibits many of the elements Weber described. The position of the Clerk to the National Assembly, for instance, exemplifies the bureaucratic ideal of a career-based, rule-guided administrative head tasked with ensuring institutional continuity regardless of changes in political leadership (National Assembly Service Act, 2014). The National Assembly bureaucracy is also formally structured into directorates and departments, with graded career progression tied to public service regulations.

Yet the application of Weber's model in the Nigerian context is not without limitations. Scholars such as Riggs (1963) and Albrow (1970) have argued that the Weberian framework does not fully account for bureaucracies in developing societies where informal networks, traditional power structures, and political interference often shape institutional behaviour. In Nigeria, bureaucratic systems are frequently influenced by patronage appointments, politicisation of recruitment, and non-compliance with administrative norms, all of which inhibit the realisation of Weber's rational-legal ideal (Alozie, 2019). As such, Weber's theory offers a benchmark for evaluating where and how legislative bureaucracy conforms to or deviates from expected standards of administrative rationality.

3.2 New Public Management (NPM) Theory

New Public Management emerged in the late twentieth century as a reformist response to the perceived inefficiencies of classical bureaucracy. It advocates for the adoption of private-sector management practices in public administration, with emphasis on decentralisation, performance measurement, managerial autonomy, customer orientation, and the strategic use of technology (Hood, 1991). Unlike Weber's rigid and rule-bound model, NPM promotes flexibility, innovation, and efficiency, making it particularly attractive to governments seeking to modernise public institutions.

The NPM framework is relevant to the analysis of Nigeria's National Assembly bureaucracy because several reform initiatives undertaken since the beginning of the Fourth Republic have been inspired by NPM principles. These include the introduction of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), the Treasury Single Account (TSA), biometric attendance systems, and the adoption of e-procurement processes in line with the Public Procurement Act. Reforms such as the monetisation policy, staff auditing, professional development through the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), and restructuring exercises carried out under successive Clerks reflect NPM-driven attempts to improve efficiency, accountability, and service delivery within the legislative environment (Folarin, 2023).

However, the effectiveness of NPM in Nigeria has been hindered by structural and political factors. While reform policies may be formally adopted, their implementation is often constrained by resource limitations, institutional resistance, and weak accountability cultures (Polidano, 2001). Thus, the NPM model complements Weberian theory by providing a contemporary framework for understanding reform efforts within the National Assembly bureaucracy, while also highlighting the challenges of applying managerial-based approaches in politicised administrative settings.

3.3 Integrative Value of Dual Framework

The incorporation of both Weberian and NPM theories in this study enables a holistic interrogation of Nigeria's legislative bureaucracy. Weberian theory offers insight into the foundational principles and formal expectations of bureaucratic administration within the National Assembly, while NPM provides a lens for evaluating reform dynamics, modernisation efforts, and performance-based outcomes. This dual framework is particularly useful in analysing hybrid bureaucratic environments where traditional administrative

structures coexist with contemporary reform practices. By examining the National Assembly bureaucracy through both theoretical lenses, the study provides a nuanced analysis of its structural evolution, operational challenges, reform successes, and prospects within the broader context of Nigeria's democratic development.

4.0 Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative research design centred on historical-institutional analysis and secondary data review to examine Nigeria's National Assembly bureaucracy in the Fourth Republic. Emphasising institutional processes and administrative reforms over quantitative hypothesis testing, the research adopts descriptive and explanatory approaches.

Data selection and inclusioncriteria: a systematic approach was employed to identify and select secondary sources. The inlusion criteria for documents were as follows:

1. Temporal scope: materias published between 1999 and 2024, corresponding with the period of the fourth Republic.
2. Thematic relevance: documents directly addressing the structure, management, reforms, and challenges of national assembly bureaucracy, legislative administration, and parliamentary support services in Nigeria.
3. Source type and rigor: peer-review academic journals, official publications from the national assembly (e.g NASC reports, NILDS publications), relevant legistion (e.g, NASC Act, 2014), and policy documents from credible governance institutions (e.g, World Bank,UNDP). Government reports and statistical digests from the national assembly were prioritized for official data.

Exclusion criteria: sources were excluded based on the following:

1. ***Irrelevance:*** documents focusing solely on the political activities of lawmakers without addressing the administrative bureaucracy were excluded.
2. ***Non-academic/commentary:*** newspaper articles, unsubstantiated blogs posts, and opinion pieces were excluded unless they provided a verifiable account of a specific event relevant to the analysis.
3. ***Lack of rigor:*** non peer-reviewed working papers or reports from non transparent organizations were excluded to maintain academic rigor.

Analytical process: present factual accounts and interpretative analysis of legislative bureaucracy management. Materials were sourced from diverse secondary sources such as legislative reports, academic journals, official publications, and policy documents, with document analysis serving as the primary method for identifying key challenges, achievements, and prospects. Analytical coding was guided by Weberian and New Public Management (NPM) theories, and qualitative thematic analysis was employed to synthesise findings and compare them with theoretical frameworks. While the study does not include primary methods like interviews due to limited access and sensitivity of reforms, its reliance on robust secondary sources compensates for this limitation. The absence of real-time performance data curtails empirical measurement of some reform outcomes, but the research provides a richly contextualised account of legislative bureaucracy and offers a foundation for future empirical studies involving legislative staff and stakeholders.

5. Discussion

This section addresses each of the research questions in turn, drawing on the institutional analysis of the National Assembly bureaucracy.

5.1 Structural Changes, Reforms, and their Mixed Impact since 1999

Since 1999, the National Assembly bureaucracy has undergone significant structural reforms aimed at establishing its autonomy and modernizing its functions. The establishment of the

NASC was a foundational change, granting the legislature formal administrative independence concerning staffing, discipline, and remuneration. This shift aligns with Weberian ideals of a distinct, rule-bound bureaucratic entity. The subsequent creation of NILDS in 2011 institutionalized a mandate for research and training, reflecting NPM principles of continuous capacity building.

However, an institutional analysis reveals that the impact of these reforms has been mixed, and evidence of their transformative effectiveness is limited. While the bureaucratic structure may now "conform to international parliamentary benchmarks" (Adegboro, 2022), this conformity is often more formal than functional.

· ***Impact of NASC:*** The autonomy granted by NASC has not fully insulated the bureaucracy from political influence, as seen in the contentious appointments of senior officials, which undermines the very meritocratic principles it was designed to uphold (Nwagwu & Oshewolo, 2021). The reform delivered structural autonomy on paper, but its impact on daily operational independence remains questionable.

· ***Impact of NILDS:*** The impact of NILDS on enhancing the research capacity of the bureaucracy is difficult to substantiate. While it has undoubtedly increased the volume of training workshops and publications, there is scant empirical evidence linking its activities to a measurable improvement in the quality of legislative drafting, fiscal analysis, or committee reports produced by the bureaucracy. Its establishment is a positive step, but its role has been more symbolic of an intent to build capacity rather than a demonstrable driver of a research-oriented administration.

· ***Impact of Digital Reforms:*** The implementation of various digital reforms (e.g., e-chamber operations, document tracking) remains partial and uneven. The adoption of IPPIS and TSA, while improving payroll management at a macro level, has not necessarily translated into a seamless, digitized workflow within the Assembly itself. Folarin (2023) notes that these NPM-inspired innovations often face institutional resistance and workflow disruption, limiting their positive impact on legislative efficiency.

Overall, the structural evolution shows a pattern of institutional layering and modernisation attempts consistent with NPM logic. Yet, the gap between formal reform and functional impact remains wide, characterized by what Polidano (2001) identifies as the common failure of civil service reforms in developing contexts due to weak institutional culture and political capture.

5.2 Key institutional and operational challenges undermining effectiveness

Despite these advances, persistent challenges undermine the bureaucracy's performance. Studies show that political interference in staff appointments compromises institutional stability (Nwagwu & Oshewolo, 2021; Olaogun et al., 2024). Institutional memory is weak due to staff turnover and informal role fluidity, which reduces procedural continuity. Capacity gaps are evident in research, legal drafting and committee support functions Adegboro (2022) reports training deficits and information- management problems. The adoption of digital systems is slow and patchy, limiting the potential gains from NPM reforms. Transparency is compromised by limited public access to staff data, procurement and procedural records thereby reducing accountability and inhibiting oversight. Resource constraints and infrastructure deficits remain common, reducing administrative responsiveness. Collectively, these operational challenges undermine the ability of the bureaucracy to fully support lawmakers in law-making, oversight and representation functions.

5.3 Prospects for harnessing legislative bureaucracy to strengthen democracy

Looking ahead, there are proing reform avenues which, if properly leveraged, can enhance the legislative bureaucracy's role in democratic consolidation. First, the full digital

transformation of parliamentary support services (bill tracking software, e-committee platforms, digital archiving) can significantly improve workflow, transparency and institutional memory. Second, operationalising the National Assembly Budget and Research Office (NABRO) could enhance fiscal oversight and strengthen legislative independence in budget processes. Third, continuous professional development for legislative staff (via NILDS) will build capacity for research, drafting and analysis, aligning with NPM's emphasis on performance and modernisation. Fourth, clarifying and formalising the roles and relations between elected lawmakers and career staff can reduce role ambiguity and political–bureaucratic tensions, thereby enhancing bureaucratic neutrality. Fifth, improved infrastructure, welfare systems and resource allocation for legislative support services will bolster institutional stability and staff morale. If these reforms are anchored in strong political commitment and institutional autonomy, then the legislative bureaucracy may become a robust engine of law-making, oversight and representation, thereby strengthening Nigeria's democratic governance.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the management of Nigeria's National Assembly bureaucracy through an institutional lens. The analysis, grounded in Weberian and New Public Management theories, reveals a central, defining tension: the institution is structurally modern but functionally constrained. The National Assembly has successfully established the formal scaffolding of an autonomous, modern bureaucracy—exemplified by the NASC and NILDS—yet its operational effectiveness is systematically undermined by a political culture of patronage and informal governance.

The primary theoretical contribution of this analysis is to demonstrate that in hybrid political systems like Nigeria's, institutional reforms inspired by Weberian ideals or NPM principles cannot be assessed on their formal adoption alone. Their success is contingent upon the informal institutional environment. The findings indicate that political interference acts as a fundamental veto point, negating the potential gains from reforms like digitalization and merit-based recruitment. Therefore, the core challenge is not a lack of reform blueprints, but a deficit of institutional enforcement and political will to insulate the bureaucracy from capture.

Ultimately, this study concludes that the strength of the legislative bureaucracy is a critical determinant of democratic resilience in Nigeria. A legislature cannot be a effective counterweight to executive power or a credible representative of the people if its own administrative core is weakened. The prospects for democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are, therefore, inextricably linked to the professionalization of its legislative bureaucracy. Future reform efforts must pivot from designing new structures to aggressively safeguarding the autonomy and neutrality of existing ones. The imperative for both scholars and practitioners is clear: strengthening democracy requires strengthening the bureaucratic foundations of its legislature.

Recommendations

To address the core challenges of politicised recruitment and political interference, the National Assembly should institutionalise a transparent, merit-based staffing system administered exclusively by the National Assembly Service Commission (NASC). This requires stricter enforcement of recruitment regulations, professional certification requirements for legislative staff, and regular staff audits to ensure that appointments, promotions and postings align with established administrative standards. Strengthening the independence of NASC will ensure continuity of bureaucratic development across legislative sessions, reduce political interference in administrative decisions, and align the institution with rational-legal governance principles essential for legislative stability and performance**.**

To address gaps in institutional capacity, weak information management, and underdeveloped legislative support systems, the National Assembly should implement a comprehensive digitalisation agenda that includes e-parliament platforms, electronic bill-tracking systems, digital archiving, committee-workflow automation, and staff-level ICT training. This digital transformation must be paired with sustained capacity-building programmes through NILDS, focusing on legislative drafting, research analysis, committee management, and procedural documentation. Investing in digital systems and continuous professional development will enhance bureaucratic efficiency, improve legislative responsiveness, strengthen institutional memory, and align parliamentary administration with global best practices in modern legislative governance.

To bolster legislative independence in fiscal policy analysis and improve evidence-based lawmaking, the National Assembly should expedite the enactment and full operationalisation of the National Assembly Budget and Research Office (NABRO). NABRO would provide lawmakers with non-partisan fiscal analysis, policy briefs, macroeconomic assessments, and budget-performance reviews required for effective oversight of the executive. Additionally, strengthening partnerships with universities, think tanks and civil society organisations will expand the legislature's access to multidisciplinary expertise. These measures will deepen the legislature's analytical capacity, improve the quality of deliberation, and enhance the National Assembly's contribution to democratic consolidation.

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