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Original Research Article

Political Influence and Public Procurement Governance in Nigeria: Implications for Transparency, Accountability, and Service Delivery Across the Three Tiers of Government

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Abstract: Public procurement is an integral part of public financial management and plays a pivotal role in achieving socio-economic development, better service delivery and infrastructure development. It is a process in which government bodies contract for goods, works and services needed to implement public policies and development programmes. Public procurement is one of the most significant functions of government administration in Nigeria, representing a significant amount of public funds spent at the federal, state and local levels across all spheres. Procurement systems are expected to be transparent, accountable, competitive, fair, efficient and value for money in such a huge financial transaction. In Nigeria, the fight against political interference, which has been an anathema to the success and integrity of the procurement process, is still ongoing despite all the procurement reforms that have taken place and the passage of the Public Procurement Act 2007. In this paper, the effect of political involvement in public procurement at the three tiers of government in Nigeria is discussed. Specifically, it looks at the degree to which the political dimension affects the procurement planning and budgeting, tendering, bid evaluation, contract award, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The study builds on the basis that public utility and developmental priorities are not necessarily the criteria that are considered in the procurement decision and that it is not always based on the political interests, the so-called "patronage" or election calculations. The study adopted a qualitative research method, which relies on the review of literature, government reports, procurement regulations, policy documents and empirical evidence from procurement practices in the public sector in Nigeria. The results show that political interference can take many forms, such as political patronage, favoritism in contract awarding, politicizing procurement committees, preferential tendering of contracts, contract inflation, and public contracts as political instruments of reward and campaign financing. The federal level often has a strong influence on procurement processes through political agendas and elite networks, which lead to high costs of projects, low accountability and poor project results. The dominance of the executive at the national level often influences procurement priorities

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and contracts awarded, and at the local government level, poor institutional capacity and political control allow for nepotism, favouritism, and financial mismanagement. Such practices lead to a lack of competitiveness, transparency, defective qualified contractors and an impact on the trust in government institutions. The research also finds that there is a significant link between politicization of procurement and corruption, drop-out of projects, poor quality infrastructure, delayed project delivery, and inefficient use of public resources. This not only undermines economic growth but also hampers the government's ability to deliver basic services and to meet sustainable development goals. Political influence in procurement has thus emerged as a significant governance issue, with consequences for both accountability and institutional effectiveness and the trust of the public. The paper concludes that while procurement reforms have enhanced the legal and institutional framework of public procurement in Nigeria, the effectiveness of the reforms is limited by the political influence and poor enforcement of the laws. The study suggests to address these challenges, there is a need to strengthen the independence of procurement regulatory institutions, broaden the use of e-procurement systems, implement stringent penalties for procurement abuses, improve the capacities of procurement professionals and increase the involvement of civil society organizations, the media and citizens in monitoring procurement processes. These are critical to ensure better procurement governance, value for money with public expenditure, and better public procurement's contribution to sustainable economic growth and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Public Procurement, Political Interference, Political Patronage, Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Corruption, Public Expenditure, Federal Government, State Government, Local Government, Nigeria.

Introduction

Public procurement is regarded as one of the most significant activities of the government administration and public financial management. It describes the process by which government institutions purchase goods, works and services that are needed to implement government policies, to undertake development projects and to provide public services. They include the purchase of office equipment and consultancy services, as well as major infrastructure developments like roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, power stations and water systems. Therefore, public procurement is an important tool for converting financial resources into concrete developmental results that impact citizens' welfare.

The volume of public procurement in the world is substantial both in terms of government spending and economic activity. Public procurement represents one of the largest shares of public expenditure in many countries, and is responsible for 10-20% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The economic importance of procurement has made the procurement process a strategic instrument for the pursuit of other policy goals, including social inclusion, environmental sustainability, industrial development, employment creation, poverty reduction, and economic growth. An effective procurement system allows governments to acquire quality goods, works and services competitively, in a transparent, accountable and value for money way. On the other hand, in the absence of a robust procurement system, there is a risk of corruption, waste of the public purse, inadequate infrastructure, and bad service delivery.

Nigeria is faced with numerous developmental challenges, and public procurement plays a unique role in governance in the nation. The federal, state and local governments all pay out trillions of naira for procurement activities, to provide infrastructure, healthcare, education, transportation, security, agriculture and housing, among other public services. The significant monetary investments that accompany procurement decisions have broad economic, fiscal, institutional and citizen impacts. Good procurement processes are thus an important part of using limited public funds effectively to realize development goals.

Public procurement has traditionally been poorly regulated, lacked transparency, had high discretion, and had been subject to much corruption in Nigeria. Before the implementation of comprehensive procurement reforms, the government often did not put out to tender for contracts, thereby leading to exorbitant prices of contracts, cancellation of projects, substandard infrastructure, and huge losses of public money. There was no uniformity regarding procurement procedures that opened opportunities for misuses of office, favoritism, nepotism and political manipulation. Public procurement was therefore widely seen as one of the main avenues for bribery and mismanagement in the Nigerian public sector.

Having realised that governance and public financial management needed a boost, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked on a programme of procurement reforms which sought to promote transparency, accountability and efficiency. These efforts were culminated by the enactment of the Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2007, and creating the regulatory framework of the Bureau of Public Procurement to oversee the Federal procurement activities. The Act was the first to implement uniform procurement procedures and principles designed to promote openness, competitiveness, fairness, professionalism, and value for money in public spending. In the wake of the federal reform initiative, some state governments had introduced procurement legislation and setup procurement agencies to improve procurement governance at the subnational level.

Regardless of these reforms, public procurement in Nigeria is still beset by several problems, most of which is political interference. Government contracts are sources of economic opportunities and financial benefits, and thus can be influenced by politics. Political officeholders, party leaders, influential public officials, and other political actors frequently try to sway procurement decisions to benefit their supporters, political interests, party interests, and/or interests in maintaining patronage networks and to fund election campaigns. This means that procurement decisions are often made on political rather than objective grounds of public needs, technical ability and economic efficiency.

Political interference can manifest itself at any point in the procurement process. Political leaders can sometimes give priority to projects for political rather than developmental reasons during project identification and planning. Political considerations can be factored into budget distributions and can lead to a focus on projects in politically strategic areas or constituencies. The public sector can influence the tendering and evaluation process to give preferential treatment to pre-selected contractors who have political connections. Partisan interest, ethnic affiliation, personal relationships, and campaign contributions are potential factors that can affect the awarding of a contract. Likewise, the project implementation and monitoring processes can be compromised when contractors, politically connected with the government, are not subject to sanctions even if they fall short of the required performance or do not meet the contractual obligations.

Politics has a negative impact at every level of government in Nigeria. At the federal level, the procurement decisions may be for large-scale projects that have far reaching and significant monetary effects and are therefore attractive to political influencing and elite interests. Federal procurement contracts can be awarded to political supporters, to address regional needs or to serve political ends. This often leads to contract inflation, project delays, low quality execution and low value for money.

Governors and political appointees can have a great deal of influence over procurement processes at the state government level. In numerous instances, political interests, partisan politics and political pull affect the procurement process. Projects can be focused on areas deemed politically significant with less influential communities getting somewhat less attention. This inequitable allocation of public resources may increase the regional imbalance and weaken the equitable delivery of public services.

At the local government level, political manipulation is sometimes exacerbated by low institutional capacity, lack of oversight and high leverage of state governments, and local political leaders and elites. Personal links and friendships, or political allegiances, may influence the choice of contractor rather than their ability to meet standards and value for money. This makes local government procurement systems especially susceptible to favoritism, nepotism, mismanagement of finances and project abandonment.

The ramifications of political pressure on public procurement are far-reaching and complex. Political interference is detrimental for transparency and accountability, and may lead to circumvention of procurement rules and procedures. It reduces competition by dissuading qualified contractors from bidding in an unfair or set process. It is also a source of corruption via bribery, kick-backs, and overuse of office. In addition, political procurement decisions can lead to high costs of the contract, shoddy infrastructure, delay in project completion, and wasteful use of public resources.

Political involvement in procurement deals not only has financial costs and benefits for the country, but it can also present serious challenges to national development. Public procurement is increasingly acknowledged as a strategic instrument to achieve sustainable development goals, inclusive economic growth, support and stimulate local industries and enhance public welfare. But, when the procurement systems are turned into political interests, their contribution to these goals is seriously reduced. Funds that might otherwise be used for education, healthcare, infrastructure and combating poverty are channeled into "patronage networks" and into political goals.

As public procurement is a key component of governance and development, it is important to grasp the links between politics and procurement in order to enhance the performance of the public sector and the strength of democratic institutions. In spite of the introduction of important legal and institutional safeguards in the procurement process, political interference has continued to create an environment that is hostile to the implementation of procurement reforms. A thorough investigation of the extent, nature and effects of political influence on procurement practices throughout the federal, state and local government levels is therefore required.

This paper looks at how political factors influence public procurement in the three tiers of government in Nigeria. It looks at the different types of political interference in procurement, their impact on transparency, accountability, efficiency and value for money, and their impact on governance and national development. The paper also suggests practical policy recommendations for improving the strength of procurement institutions, compliance with the rules, citizen participation, and political manipulation. The study aims to make a contribution to the ongoing efforts of good governance, fight against corruption and strengthen public procurement as a medium for sustainable development in Nigeria through this analysis.

Public procurement involves the procurement of goods, works and services needed by government institutions and public sector bodies for the execution of their statutory tasks and other public services. It involves a wide variety of activities from identifying needs to planning, tendering, contract award, contract management, project evaluation and much more. Public procurement is an important tool that helps governments put public policies into practice, carry out development projects and deliver services to citizens.

Worldwide, public procurement is regarded as one of the largest sectors of public spending. It makes a significant contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and public expenditures in many countries. This means that the efficiency and integrity of procurement systems has a direct influence on citizens' welfare, infrastructure development, the performance of the public sector and economic growth. A good procurement system would allow for the efficient use of public resources, timely delivery of projects and quality public services. However, poor procurement practices may foster corruption, public funds mismanagement, project shortfalls, and public institutions' loss of trust.

The public procurement process in Nigeria thus has a critical role in government administration due to the significant amount of government funds being channeled into public procurement projects and public service delivery every year. Federal, state, and local government procurement activities include transportation, education, healthcare, agriculture, energy, housing, security, and water resources. The Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2007 was a major step in the procurement reform with a legal framework which was designed to promote transparency, competition, accountability and value for money in public spending.

Public procurement is the process through which the government institutions and public sector organisations, having as their functional goal the performance of statutory duties and the provision of public services, obtain goods, works and services needed for these activities. It involves various activities such as identifying needs, planning, budgeting, tendering, contract award, contract management and project evaluation. Public procurement is an important tool in the implementation of public policies, the execution of development projects and delivery of public services to citizens.

In the world, public procurement is considered one of the most prominent sectors of the government spending. It is a significant share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and public expenditures in many countries. As a result, the effectiveness and reliability of the public procurement process ultimately affects citizens' welfare, infrastructure development, public sector effectiveness and economic growth. Procurement system is effective when it's used to ensure efficient use of public resources, on-time delivery of projects, and quality assurance of public services. Lack of governance in the procurement process, on the other hand, can result in corruption, loss of public funds, project failure, and loss of public confidence in government institutions.

Public procurement in Nigeria has a critical role in government administration given the huge amount of money spent on developmental projects and delivery of public services every year. Activities in procurement span all levels of the federal, state and local government and include areas of transportation, education, healthcare, agriculture, energy, housing, security and water resources. The Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2007 is an important landmark in the area of Public procurement reform, which aims to foster transparency, competition, accountability and value for money in public procurement.

2.1 The Public Procurement Cycle

The public procurement process is a sequence of activities which are commonly referred to as the procurement cycle. At each step of the cycle, it is essential that it is performed in a way that ensures that procurement goals are met effectively and openness.

2.1.1 Needs Assessment and Planning

Organizations start the procurement process by identifying their needs. Government ministries, departments and agencies identify their needs for goods, works or services in order to carry out their functions and provide goods, works or services to meet their objectives. This is the stage where the project's specifications are defined, costs are estimated, funding sources are identified and procurement priorities are set.

The effective planning of procurement is critical because it enables procurement activities to be relevant to the government policies, development goals and budgetary appropriation. These resources can be used inefficiently, projects can be abandoned, cost overruns and delays occur, and poor planning occurs.

2.1.2 Budget Approval

Once the needs are identified, the projected costs are put into the government budget. The process of budget approval includes law-making and authorizing expenditure programmes. The National Assembly approves expenditure on procurement at the federal level, and the state and local government budgets at the state or local level are approved by the respective state and local government legislative bodies.

Approval of budgets helps to ensure that procurement activities have financial resources to support and comply with the fiscal policies. If there is no budgetary authorization, a procurement activity cannot be carried out legally.

2.1.3 Tender Advertisement

After the funds have been approved and procurement plans have been determined then the Procuring entity advertises the tender opportunity to potential suppliers and contractors. The purpose of tender advertisement is to ensure transparency and reach a large number of qualified bidders.

Open competitive bidding is the most favored means of procurement, as it gives equal opportunities to all eligible contractors and suppliers. The features of tender notices usually include project specifications and requirements for qualification, due dates for tenders, and assessment criteria.

2.1.4 Bid Submission and Evaluation

The rights to submit bids and evaluation of submitted bids are governed by the following rules:

Contractor and Supplier Interested Bidders submit their Bids for the advertised procurement opportunity. These bids are judged on fixed Selection criteria and Technical ability, financial capability, experience, specifications met and cost effectiveness.

The evaluation process aims to select the most favorable bid that fulfils the procurement requirements. Keeping evaluation of bids transparent and objective is key to fairness and the absence of favoritism and corruption.

2.1.5 Contract Award

After an evaluation process, the contract is going to be awarded to the successful bidder. Contract award stage contracts the formal approval, contract negotiation, if needed, and signing of legally binding contracts between the procuring entity and the contractor.

Awarding of contracts is to be based on criteria or the requirements of the procurement process and not on a party's political affiliation, personal relationships or other irrelevant factors. Clear and open contracting processes boost public trust in government procurement.

2.1.6 Contract Execution and Implementation

A contract must be executed and implemented under the following conditions:

Once the contract is awarded the contractor gets on with the project or delivery of the goods and/or services. This stage requires project implementation, supervision, quality assurance, following up agreed specifications, agreed timelines and budgets.

Contract management is vital to make sure that contractors meet their obligations and public money is saved. Inadequate supervision during the execution of the contract frequently results in low quality work, delays and high cost of the project.

2.1.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are the last steps in the procurement process. Government agencies determine the performance of projects, ensure compliance with contractual requirements, confirm project results, and assess if procurement goals are met.

Monitoring activities are useful to uncover implementation issues, hold accountable and learn from for future procurements. Evaluation also helps governments to know whether spending on procurement has been good for money and has met the goals in terms of achievements in development.

2.2 Fundamental Principles of Public Procurement

The main principles for public procurement are as follows:

The modern Public Procurement systems are based on internationally accepted principles which aim to ensure good governance, efficiency and accountability. The principles are the basis of procurement laws and regulations in many countries including Nigeria.

The sources and operating principles of public procurement. With respect to public procurement, current public procurement systems are based on the internationally recognized public procurement principles that focus on good governance, efficiency and accountability. These are the underpinning pillars of procurement laws and regulations that underpin many countries, including Nigeria.

2.2.1 Transparency

To achieve transparency, procurement processes must be transparent and accessible and must be understandable by all stakeholders. Details of procurement or tendering opportunities, assessment criteria, project awards and project implementation would be publically published.

Transparency facilitates citizens, civil society and governance oversight bodies to effectively oversee government expenditures and reduce opportunities for corruption.

2.2.2 Accountability

Accountability is the duty of public officials to explain their procurement and to be held responsible for their actions. Every purchase officer and public institution involved in procurement must deal according to the rules of the law and ethics.

Public money is well managed and misconduct is effectively deterred; effective accountability arrangements.

2.2.3 Competition

Multiple opportunities to compete and multiple opportunities for qualified suppliers to be involved in procurement processes. The benefits of Competitive Procurement are innovation, quality, cost effectiveness and value for money.

Open competition also reduces the opportunities for favoritism and discrimination.

2.2.4 Fairness and Equity

It is fair to treat all bidders equally and to judge all of them by the same standard. Selective procurement should be free from bias, prejudice and discrimination including on political grounds, ethnicity, religion, personal relationships etc.

A fair procurement system brings in wider participation and boosts confidence in participating.

2.2.5 Economy

The economy of is the idea of using public resources wisely. Governments should buy goods, works and services at the fair cost that will achieve the required standard of quality.

Economic procurement practices help minimize waste and maximize the benefits derived from public expenditure.

2.2.6 Efficiency

Efficiency is about getting the job done in the least time and least reasonable cost. Streamlined procurement processes minimise delays, ensure optimal delivery of projects and efficient resource management.

2.2.7 Value for Money

One of the most crucial aims of public procurement is to deliver value for money. It is the best mix of quality, cost and performance throughout the life cycle of a project/service.

Value for money does not mean opting for the cheapest, but the best value to the public.

2.3 Politics and Public Procurement

While the principles of procurement would imply that the procurement systems should work this way, many countries in the developing world are faced with political influences in procurement decisions, including Nigeria. Political actors can try to influence procurement processes for a number of reasons: to reward supporters, to gain an election, to preserve patronage or to pursue their own interests.

Political interference can happen in the selection of the projects, allocation of the budget, appraisal of the bids, contract award, and project execution. This interference adds non-competitive aspects to procurement process, and undermines the integrity of procurement systems.

Where the political interests outweigh the procurement law, transparency is affected, accountability is failed, competition is decreased and value for money (VfM) is negatively influenced. The impact of these can be increased contract prices, substandard infrastructure, failed projects, project delays and higher risks for corruption.

Hence, it is important to be aware of the conceptual basis of public procurement to look into the influence of politics on public procurement in Nigeria at the federal, state, and local government levels. The implementation of a procurement system based on the 6 principles of transparency, accountability, competition, fairness, efficiency, economy and value for money is more likely to benefit the promotion of sustainable development, good governance and better public service delivery.

3. Politics and Public Procurement in Nigeria

Politics is a system of distribution of power and resources in a community. Political actors tend to manipulate procurement processes in Nigeria as procurement contracts become an opportunity for wealth creation, patronage distribution, and political financing.

Political pressure in procurement often takes the form of:

a. Patronage appointments.
    i. Contract award based on preferential treatment (favoritism).
    ii. Vendors have the power to influence the composition of procurement committees.
b. Budgetary distortions.
c. Election-related project allocations.
d. Contract inflation.
e. Selective project implementation.

This can lead to procurement decisions being made based on political considerations, rather than meeting public needs.

4. The role of politics in Federal Government procurement.

4.1 A Political Patronage in Contract Awards

Political office holders in the federal arena have great power to award tax funded contracts to those they are politically aligned with, party supporters or influential individuals. This is against competitive bidding and affects project execution quality.

4.2 Contract Inflation

Often, contracts are awarded at an inflated price, and this is due to political interference. The additional costs of projects may be added by contractors for unofficial payment, political contributions, or kickbacks.

4.3 Policy Discontinuity

Projects which have been started by another government are abandoned due to change of administration. Project continuation is not based on economic considerations but rather on political factors.

4.4 Weak Accountability

Contractors and public officials may also still receive political protection even if there are clear signs of procurement irregularities.

The ability to reduce value for money has been improved to 4.5.

Federal procurement projects that are politically influenced may fall short of citizens' needs because the contractors selected are not the most qualified and monitoring the projects is not done effectively.

5. Impact of Politics on State Government Procurement

5.1 Executive Dominance

Governors level of influence over procurement can often be considerable. Procurement decisions might be political choices and not developmental.

5.2 Political Reward Systems

State contracts often are employed to award campaign sponsors, political allies and party supporters. This undermines the contractor selection process based on merit.

5.3 Regional and Ethnic Considerations.

There is a possibility of uneven distribution of projects in some states based on ethnic, regional or political backgrounds.

5.4 Budget Manipulation

Political interests can also be reflected in budget decisions, leading to procurement projects that benefit electoral goals and not public good.

5.5 Procurement Delays

There may be conflicts between the states' legislature and its executive branches which may cause delays in budgeting or procurement work, impacting project implementation.

How Politics Affects Local Government Purchasing. The Effect of Politics on Local Government Purchasing.

6.2 Political Disability of State Governments

Local governments are constitutionally defined as a tier, but state governments may be able to have a great deal to say about how they spend and what they buy.

6.2 Limited Transparency

Local government procurement processes, particularly regarding transparency mechanisms, often lack means for exercising strong oversight, allowing for political manipulation.

6.3 Nepotism and Favoritism

Local political leaders can give contracts to relatives, friends or political supporters without regard to capabilities.

6.4 Abandoned Community Projects

Unfortunately, political considerations regarding procurement can lead to poorly planned projects, insufficient budgeting and/or projects failing after the contracts are issued.

6.5 Weak Oversight Mechanisms

There is some capacity constraints in the institutions and poor monitoring that allows political influence to thrive in local government procurement.

7. Consequences of Political Influence on Public Procurement

Political interference in procurement has a number of negative repercussions:

7.1 Increased Corruption

Corruption in the form of bribes, kickbacks and mismanagement can occur because of political influence.

7.2 Poor Infrastructure Development

When contracts can be given to those who they have political interests in their businesses, you get sub-par roads.When the commissioners are given jobs on the basis of politics and not skill, they deliver poor quality infrastructure.

7.3 Wild waste of public resources is being minimised

Overbill and unrealized projects result in significant economic loss.

7.4 Reduced Public Trust

When a government's procurement systems are seen as corrupt and are a victim of political manipulation, citizens lose faith in trust-based government institutions.

7.5 Slower Economic Development

The inefficiency in procurement leads to low efficient investment and weak national development goals.

8. Reforms and Challenges on procurement

The Nigerian Government has introduced a number of measures to reform its procurement systems, such as:

The Public Procurement Act 2007.

Formation of the Bureau of Public Procurement.

Incorporation of e-procurement programmes.

- Establishment of procurement guidelines / standards.

Procurement officers' capacity building programme(s).

Despite these reforms, weak enforcement and political interference, institutional independence, and public participation are all challenges.

9. Recommendations

To minimize the role of politics in public purchasing, the following actions are suggested:

9.1 Strengthen Institutional Independence

Procurement regulatory bodies should be independent entities without political influence.

9.2 Enhance Transparency

Any procurement data and documents should be made widely available on e-procurement platforms.

9.3 Strengthen Enforcement

No exceptions should be made for the enforcement of procurement law.

9.4 Improve Professional Capacity

Opeaks should be regularly trained and certified in procurement.

9.5 Promote Citizen Participation

The participation of CSO/s, professional associations and citizens in procurement monitoring should be the case.

9.6 Expand E-Procurement Systems

The technology used to carry out procurement systems will help eliminate discretion and opportunities for political manipulation.

10. Conclusion

Public procurement is still one of the most impactful tools in attaining socio-economic development in Nigeria. Political leverage is still poking holes in the federal, state and local procurement processes. Corruption, project failures and service delivery failures have been caused by political patronage, favoritism and high contract costs as well as low accountability mechanisms. Improvements in the regulatory framework through procurement reforms are not enough to protect procurement processes from political influence; better implementation and institutional protection measures are needed. Increasing the transparency, the accountability and citizen involvement in public procurement will be instrumental to achieving sustainable development and good governance of Nigeria's public procurement process.

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