

# Exploring the relationship between politics and administration: Understanding the dichotomy

<sup>a</sup>Salisu Usman, <sup>b</sup>Oaikhena, I. Marvellous, <sup>c</sup>Anas Abdul <sup>d</sup>Akongbowa, B. Amadasun,

<sup>a</sup> Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

<sup>b</sup> Department of Public Administration, College of Management and Social Sciences, Glorious Vision, University, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria,

<sup>c</sup> Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

<sup>d</sup> Department of Public Administration, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

<sup>b</sup> Correspondance Email: prince\_marv12@yahoo.ca

## ABSTRACT

In an attempt to evaluate the discourse on the dichotomy with regards to politics-administration and determine its' implications in the theory and practice of public administration. This study looks into the background of the public administration model, how it evolves, and its ground supporters' views and critiques, and raises some questions by looking at the politics-administration dichotomy in a practical sense to explore more insight. Questions include: What is the Wilsonian's position? How do politicians decide policy? Do all politicians know or have all the details of what the government does? Are administrators really free from politics and as neutral as they say? What is the Nigerian politics-administration dichotomy (peculiarity) regarding the constituency project? What is the implication of the politics-administration dichotomy model on theory, practice, and public administration? In that manner, insight is given into dichotomies as a view, counterview, and review, each involving thinkers and practitioners/scholarly submissions. The study finds that the politics-administration relationship is illuminable and intelligible; this is to say, the appointed administrators should illuminate the path for the elected politicians in matters of the policy cycle, most especially in problem identification, policy initiation, formulation, and proper implementation. In conclusion, this study serves as a panacea for politicians' capability to comprehend and intelligibly adhere to the democratic principles and values to be imbued with honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness in their conduct.

## Keywords:

Politics-administration dichotomy, relationship, policy initiation, accountability.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The politics-administrative dichotomy is a debate of the century, and discourse on it has been on board between scholars since the birth of Public Administration as a field of intellectualism after Woodrow Wilson's essay, who is described as the "Father of Public Administration". The view of separating politics from administration, the tremendous contributions of articles from Goodnow 1900, LD White 1926, Willoughby 1927, Urwick, and 37 others, coupled with classical thinkers' theories, directing administration on how efficiency, productivity and accountability could be achieved in every organization, including the State (Fayol, Taylor and Max Webber); and the aim of the dichotomy in the backdrop of spoil system in the United State. This also include separation between the two organs of government which resulted in three divisional schools of thought (separation, politics, and interaction) that were allied by thinkers in the field. While some scholars supported the separation view others countered. This could also be the reason why Oaikhena (2016) posit that "government do not act as neutral arbiters instead they exercise agenda which carries along the public service of a state, as various governmental institutions and structures are developed". Literature has shown that controversy over the proper role of public administration in the political process is just too far from being resolved. As such, this study tries to evaluate the discourse on the Politics-administrative dichotomy and determine its implication on the theory and practice of Public Administration. In an attempt to do this, an overview of major scholars' submissions was looked into, as their objectives/concerns towards developing the discipline to reinvent the relationship between politics and administration in the context of Nigerian peculiarities using relational content analysis. Relational content analysis is a qualitative analysis of secondary data that looks at the meaning and use of words and phrases. The meaning is derived by looking at relationships between various words and phrases that go around them. The focus is on implicit data or the information interpretations, looking at how certain words are used concerning others through implicit interpretations and focus on meaning. The following discerning questions were used to explore more meanings and interpretations of the politics-administration dichotomy. What is the Wilsonian's position? How do politicians decide policy? Do all politicians know or have all the details of what the government does? Are administrators free from politics and neutral, as they say? What is the Nigerian politics-administration dichotomy (peculiarity) regarding the constituency project? What is the implication of

the politics-administration dichotomy model on the theory and practice of public administration?

### 1.1 Statement of problem

Evidence revealed that developing nations are faced with a series of challenges in one form or another, ranging from governmental corruption, soaring debt, export marginalization, energy poverty, and climate vulnerability, which are mostly necessitated due to the fusion of politics and administration. Without clearly defined relationships, exceptional and clear demonstrations of integrity by the leadership and obeying the law, these actions result in a decline in trust from the followers of the state. More so, in Nigeria, the fusion of these two organs of government is clear, as seen in constituency projects and the actions of officers in the process, in addition to other great evils of the spoils system and patronage. An earlier crisis of this nature sparked the spirit of a reform movement under the American administration. Her future president, a unique academician, proposed a model of separating administration from politics to have an accountable and efficient government. Despite bringing benefits at that time, it was contested by some scholars because, in the long run, it undermined the value of democracy for efficiency and the spirit of ethical public service that will be rendered dependent on highly political and partisan chief executives Turner (1956) and other scholars observe this, which is imperative to note. Based on this scholarly argument, this study intends to reactivate the relationship between politics and administration to clarify how the relationship ought to flow between them, based on an interaction school of thought, guided by democratic principles and good governance. Impliedly due to the crushing amount of "selfish, ignorant, timid, stubborn, or foolish" persons whom the "bulk of can vote," this model ought to provide a solution that would counteract the majority of the incumbent voters as opined by Wilson" engaging all parties (elected and appointed) to be imbued with honesty, truthfulness and trustworthiness in their conduct.

## 2. POLITICS / ADMINISTRATION / DICHOTOMY CONCEPTS OPERATIONALISED

Politics entails the activities that relate to influencing the actions and policies of government. This is seen as getting hold of governmental powers within one's position. Administration can be seen as the act or process of administering or executing public affairs outside of policymaking while on the other hand, a dichotomy is a division between two or more entities that

are represented entirely differently. The basis for the proclamation of this model by Woodrow Wilson was that there should be a clear separation between politics and administration, as politicians should determine what the government needs to do and ministries (administrators) should determine how to accomplish that action with whatever means. This will ease the difficulty faced by government agencies due to corrupt politicians. In his words, 'administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the task for administration, it should not suffer to manipulate its offices.'

The politics-administration dichotomy rests on a functional-structural view of government, dividing governmental authority between elected and administrative officials along functional lines. As such, the government is conceptualised as though it has two discrete domains in politics and administration, with each one occupied separately by elected and administrative officials who are appointed. Although US government has tried to put this theory into practice as they tried to clean up government to make it more responsible by-passing laws against patronage, and nepotism, appointing professional city council managers in local government to implement policies, imbibing clear budgeting and auditing, all these efforts were aimed at achieving an effective and efficient government that is accountable. This was done by appointing city council managers who are professionals to implement the policies made by the politicians. According to Oaikhena (2021), he said that "policy recognizes the role of social protection in enabling individuals to face risks and to guarantee them a minimum income, allowing their integration into society". Public managers are not politicians concerned with staking out positions or posturing for the next election. Instead, their leadership is focused on solving difficult problems in practical and pragmatic ways that further the public interest. These public sector leaders are charged with tasks of governance framed by various philosophies of public administration, regime values, structures, processes, and public values (Larsen, 2011). Public administration scholars have proposed numerous explanations and theoretical models in their attempts to understand the role of public administration in the political process. These scholarly efforts fall under three schools of thought, which are called separation, political, and interaction schools. The two of them, the separation and the integration schools, appear to stand as polar extremes, representing fundamental differences among scholars concerning public administrators' political roles. In the middle of the two schools lies what we call the interaction school, which carries some features of both extremes yet offers a unique understanding of how public administration does and should relate to politics. Each school has strong advocates who undertake historical, conceptual, and empirical approaches to their study and come up with propositions to support the schools with which they feel affiliated.

### 3. THE WILSON POLITICS-ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY: VIEW, COUNTERVIEW, AND REVIEW BY SCHOLARS/THINKERS

#### 3.1 The era of dichotomy 1887-1940

During this era, after Wilson presented his model, it was further propagated and supported by F.J. Goodnow through his book 'Politics and Administration' where he suggests that in line with Wilson the politicians should be concerned with the function of articulating the will of the state while the administrators should execute such will. This simply means politicians make policies out of the yearning and expression of the mass citizens and administrators should execute the policies. In the same vein, L.D White's book "The Study of Administration" expresses the progressive value of public administrators and opines concerned on the separation of politics from administration, for the area to develop fully as a science. This will ensure the honest and efficient implementation of the public will for public interest, leading to effectiveness and efficiency of government. In addition, the work of Willoughby concerned with the development of "the science of administration" centered on the separation of politics from administration, to make administration more efficient just as it is clear in his text that, the legislature is linked to the board of directors of a company and the executives as well as it's general manager. This urged administrators to learn and apply scientific principles of administration. However, since public administration is not an exception as reflected in the book of Willoughby due to intellectual trends that diffuse the whole management theories, this grounded support of classical thinker's contribution towards the field including Taylor, Fayol, Gullick, and Max Weber; these contributed in their write up which focus on the formal aspects of the organization, and value-free approach that supports Wilson idea. This is very clear in the view of Max Webber as he emphasizes more on neutrality and impartiality. At this point, the dichotomy brought about efficiency as seen in 1929 after the great depression struck. The actions of the administrators in the implementation of policies made by elected officials in a bland, bloodless, apolitical, and clerical manner pave the way for them. These brought the field to a reputational zenith (as government

and professional bodies call for advice from administrators on administrative problems, the Rockefeller projects and its interest in the field due to the success of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research is another support). The city managers improve and the professional public administration improves governing in the municipals, most especially those mayors that are educated with Master in Public Administration (MPA). There is more teamwork, less conflict, and more cooperation between elected officials and appointed administrators. The field recorded much and it refers to a golden era of public admin, more universities offer it as a course (Nicholas, 2009).

#### 3.2 The era of rejection and political school of thought 1940-1960

This era witnessed the behavioral era, where the public policy approach, public choice approach, and new public management all reject the dichotomy implying that there is no separation. Although, scholars did not explain why their rejection does not merge politics with administration unlike the political school proponents consider public administration as an inseparable part of the political process (Long, 1954; Bosworth, 1958; Pfiffner, 1985; Miller, 1993) and whose rationale of public administrators role were reasoned, as vague and ambiguous legislations for the politics, lack of technical knowledge and resources available to elected officials, difficulties in monitoring and controlling bureaucratic behavior are a few used to signify the critical role of public administrators in the policy process. However, the earlier rejection will indicate the discipline as irrelevant if we look at it in a different manner, but do we accept that the discipline is irrelevant? Nevertheless, this counter view relies on the fact that politics and administration could never be separated in any remotely sensible fashion. The principles of administration were something less than the final expression of managerial rationality as opined by (Simon 1947). Another reason for the rejection includes the notion that public administration scholars around the 1930s shyly noted that making public policy is a function of statesmen, but administrators influence and mold public policies too (Herring 1936), followed by what was meant by the concept public/administration dichotomy. Politics was also initially seen as partisan, which often means corrupt, but around 1930s its meaning had been expanded scholarly to mean public policymaking and public administration coupled with the book of readings written in 1947 by fourteen (14) scholars who were mostly professional and experience administrators, who forcefully questioned the assumption that politics and administration could be cleanly sundered (Max, 1946). Finally, the neglect of politics/administration dichotomy culminated in 1950, when a leading scholar wrote, in the field of leading journal that, "A theory of public administration means in our time a theory of politics also" (Gaus, 1950). With this declaration, the dichotomy died. A dead dichotomy means a dead discipline and can only stand as the area of interest. By mid-century, the wreckage had been wrought. The two defining pillars of public administration, the politics/administration dichotomy and the principles of public administration had been neglected by creative intellects in the field, leaving it bereft of a distinct intellectual identity. But we should not forget how the pioneers with a sense of mission, leadership, superiority, and élan were largely lost when public administration became as "common" as politics. With time, the revisionist ideology that politics and administration were inseparable indeed, indistinguishable took root and rigidified (Henry 1946).

#### 3.3 The era of resurgence and interactions school of thought 1960- date

In this era, we were guided by reevaluation because, first, the dichotomy was a view at the first era, counterviewed in the second era by the behavioral, public policy, and public choice NPA and NPM. However, scholars such as Nicholas Henry, Lynn, David Rosenbloom, J.H. Svar, and Mortin among others, reviewed everything by started thinking what is the exact relationship between politics and administration. Why did Wilson think about separation? What did Wilson mean by separation? Or whether Wilson has reviewed his dichotomy? Or whether he means the administration should behave politically and nonpartisan? And other reasonable, discerning thoughts through questions. They came up with various answers such as the complementarity model by Svara, the twilight zone by David Rosenbloom, and diffusion of relationship by Mortin. Their view was aimed at reinventing Wilson's concept of dichotomy. It is clear in the view of D. Rosenbloom that the real meaning of dichotomy by Wilson is impassioned and non-partisan in the backdrop of the spoil system in the United States relationship is complementarity; there is separation, but a twilight zone accordingly. The two models are further looked into for clarification.

### 4. TWILIGHT ZONE MODEL OF POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY NICHOLAS HENRY

According to Twilight Zone, the relationship between politics and administration stands on two far ends and there is a twilight zone where

the distinction gets blurred (hazy or indistinct). The model further explained the blurring as dim and why they are separated. Both politics and administration are separated because they are both premised on different principles. Politics is premised on democratic principles such as equality, liberty, and freedom and administration is premised on merit and efficiency principles such as merit, efficiency technical expertise, and impartiality. The field of political science is concerned with the theory of state, constitution, democracy, international relations, and elections. The field of public administration is concerned with organizational theory, bureaucracy, and personnel management. Nicholas Henry further says both do not teach or train their students on the same topics and do not have similar perspectives even after the rejection of dichotomy, hence they have distinction and at the same time they have overlapping relationships in the context of policymaking and policy implementation. This model can be considered as a very clear and comprehensive view regarding the relationship between politics and administration in the current status (N. Henry 2009). The complementarity model only explains the reciprocal relationship between politics and administration but does not explain the separation relationship. Although the twilight model explained both the relationship and separation between politics and administration why are the recent challenges facing both developed and developing worlds what is lacking in the policies despite huge budgets most especially in developing nations? This brings us to reinventing the relationship to improve efficiency through system control and structure in the context of Nigerian peculiarities to get it right. The laborious work of Svara 1999 highlighted 24 scholars view on politics-administration dichotomy starting from O'Toole 1984 and end with Newland 1989 and hopefully, our view will be 25.

## 5. RESULT FINDING AND ANALYSIS IN PRACTICAL SENSE OF APPLICATION OF THE DICHOTOMY

### 5.1 What is Wilson's position in reality?

The student poses this question, and the finding goes thus; the political process involves making policies through representatives who are elected to carry out the will of the people. Immediately after they vote them into those positions, the citizens try in any way to influence them to legislate what they want to be done by the government. In that manner, they pass laws, and that's a political process. The administrative process is supposed to come from those laws. This is done by the government through hiring of qualified professionals to do the work without policy politics, nepotism, preference, or what have you, and those people are charged with determining the most efficient and effective ways to accomplish the mission of the agencies. In that process, they applied rules and regulations to ensure that they were implemented impartially with some equity as they want all citizens to be treated equally. This is Wilson's position, which is responding to public demands from both politics and administrations alike.

### 5.2 How do politicians decide policy?

From the Wilson's position that is not really how government works because of our earlier question. Answering the second question; most politicians who win elections come from different career backgrounds. They will be required to make laws and policies, but before this, they were handicapped, some are narrow-minded on issues because they have no broad knowledge and details of how the government works or have data on previous activities. Sucu strategies and planning is geared towards saving lives, alleviating human suffering, and mitigating the economic and social impact of disasters (Oaikhena, 2021). As a result, they have to find out from various sources what people want them to do. This they can find out by listening to lobbyists, industrialist, NGOs, and civil societies, and attending town hall meetings with the mass electorate, which is usually difficult, even with the opposition's views and other kinds of organizations. In another way, they are also constrained by the economy and other limitations, even though they like to do a lot of projects to make people happy. They can do that because of the state of the economy. So, they have to engage experts who are renowned in matters of policy and government before policies are decided. In that manner, they are able to comprehend issues concerning policies all around them and apply them whenever the need arises, thereby jettison incivility. Hence, incivility does not refer to substantive disagreement or conflict between politicians on political issues but a lack of adherence to norms of social interaction (Troels & Carsten, 2024).

### 5.3 Do all politicians know or have all the details of what the government does?

Here we try again to know if all the politicians have details of what the government does. The second way the politicians make policies is the reason why we asked this question because we want to know if all the politicians have details of what the government does. The answer is NO, simply because they have to listen to professionals (the government administrative staff) about how to do what they want to do, whose part of their duty is to educate the politicians (by illuminating the path of

governance measures and means). After all, these people do not know about or how to implement those policies. This could be the reason why Idehen and Oaikhena (2021), observed that "stable policies and strong institutions are crucial elements of an enabling environment, which is necessary for thriving prosperous economy". They have to educate them because they have all the data, the technical know-how, the previous experiences on previous projects in every field of agency they found themselves in, the laws that were passed earlier, the outcome of those laws, or the reactions. The professionals again have to explain to the politicians the previous laws, existing regulations, and procedures, and how they function in every law passed. They have to decide on performance measures that will measure whether that administration is doing its job effectively or not. Having a deep thought on this, one will find out that democracy derives policy formulations. From these points, it is obvious that politicians cannot derive any policy without the professional administrators who will illuminate their path. This takes us to another question

### 5.4 Are administrators free from politics and neutral as they say?

Here we try to find out if after engaging in the above endeavour on policy issues, it still exempts administrators from politics to declare them free and neutral. The answer goes thus, in reality, they are never free from politics because they influence every day the job of the politicians in many ways, which is more obvious when the newly elected officials come on board. Another thing is that every agency has some direct oversight body that's made up of people who are appointed by the politicians, and some of them are politicians too. As transparency is a yardstick that shows the cost in most agencies, the cost shows records of activities and also explains them in detail, showing accountability for money spent. Nevertheless, the oversight functions keep a close watch on the actions of the administration (bureaucrats), which they have to respond to. Another way is that every government organisation has constituents in whatever functions they are made to work on. Their constituencies also act on the administration of the organisation by influencing their jobs; some are lobbyists, and the agency has to listen to them and their influences. In addition, all administrators have to adhere to their specialty field studies, to which they belong within the function specialisations of government. Often they have to listen to those personal influences, and many times those things are political. Lastly, public administrators are guided by their ethics, and they have that spirit of service to the public, so they have all the equity issues they have to deal with in every sense, trying to provide service to people in every way they can. That itself is a political future for the public servant since many of them are drag to contest before or after their retirement from the service.

### 5.5 What is the Nigerian peculiarity concerning the constituency project?

Here we try to look at the constituency project and make sense of it by comparing the political administration dichotomy of Wilson. First, we ask: Do we have a true political-administrative dichotomy in Nigeria? Looking at this in the Nigerian context, based on the 'constituency projects' carried out by our legislators, can we say there is a clear distinction between these two functions? The reality is that if there is a true dichotomy between politics and administration, we won't have anything called constituency projects because the politicians here are the ones who conceive the projects, budget the amount for the projects, implement the projects, and carry out evaluations of the projects through their oversight functions. Although it is obvious from the recent expression of ICPC Chairman Bolaji Owasanoye on the project tracking reports as of 2019, an estimated N2 trillion had been budgeted for constituency projects since 2000. This is a whopping sum of money, which in a real sense has defeated efficiency, and effectiveness in the utilisation of public funds. Also, accountability is defeated thus, leading to a corrupt system of administration and bacterizing everything. This was what led Wilson to come up with his idea of the politics/administration dichotomy in the 18th century, but Nigeria in the 21st century is still lagging and tax payer's money siphoned through the system that condoned the so-called 'constituency projects'. These projects were claimed to be critical to national development as they are claimed to be one of how the federal government intends to take development to the nooks and crannies of the country through the active involvement of the distinguished Senators and Honorable members of the national assembly. Oaikhena & Ikhayere (2023), rightly observed that an "underdeveloped society or country is characterized by backwardness, primitiveness, tribalism, dependency, neo-colonialism, non-liberalism, exploitation, late capitalism, lack of modern differentiated industries, state of poverty in the society, the domination of foreign capital in the hands of foreign and local bourgeoisie or local comprador, low technology, low level politics, including social and cultural development". However, the question here is where the local and state government authorities and their functions towards are developing their communities. It is clean and those projects are duplications of

functions and avenues for corruption that need reexamination or restructuring.

### 5.6 Implications of the model as a field of discipline (public administration)

The theory of the political-administrative dichotomy is very elegant and the way it has been argued by scholars has been very difficult for practitioners and scholars in the field of public administration, which gave birth to it as a discipline. The question of whether to separate the two requires a serious analysis. Looking at the submissions of scholars after W. Wilson's article in 1887 encouraged them to have an interest in the field, this led to overlapping paradigms by the scholars, such as (N. Henry, 1943) which included the dichotomy era, the principle building era, the challenge era, the approaches, the crisis of identity era, full identity leading to continued paradigm. Paradigm in the development of Public Administration as a field of intellectualism is the cumulative efforts of practitioners and scholars from various fields of study required by the modern state as the core values (professionalism, democratic, ethical, and trustworthy humans) for the good of the public which these theories were based on. Another implication is that this theory laid an open way to more theories in the discipline of public administration as it triggers the development of all theorization in the discipline as it is today. In addition, the discipline is now studied and taught in all universities, polytechnics, colleges, and mono-technics in the whole wide world as a course of study that is unique and distinct from other courses in the field of social sciences.

### 6. POLICY ADMINISTRATION RELATIONSHIP REINVENTED

The policy process is a complex task requiring the effort of elected politicians and appointed administrators coupled with other agencies due to global influence and action. The outcome is meant to ensure the interest of the principle of democracy and social justice for the good of the general society. The reinvented public policy administration relationship is intended to bring together all relevant actors on their toes in an integrated and interactive relationship imbued with trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, and responsiveness. Both parties are well-trained in legal rationality, the principle of democracy, and social justice with a clear set of values system and moral accomplices of the system. Any party accomplice that violates rules will face legal consequences under strengthened jurisdiction. To this end, professional administration, well experienced and competent will illuminate part of the policy process to politicians who will intelligibly and comprehensively legitimize public law into action, authoritatively allocate resources for humanization of the society, follow up action to monitor and evaluate policy to ensure concern for accountability of administration, to achieve the goal of a democratic society.

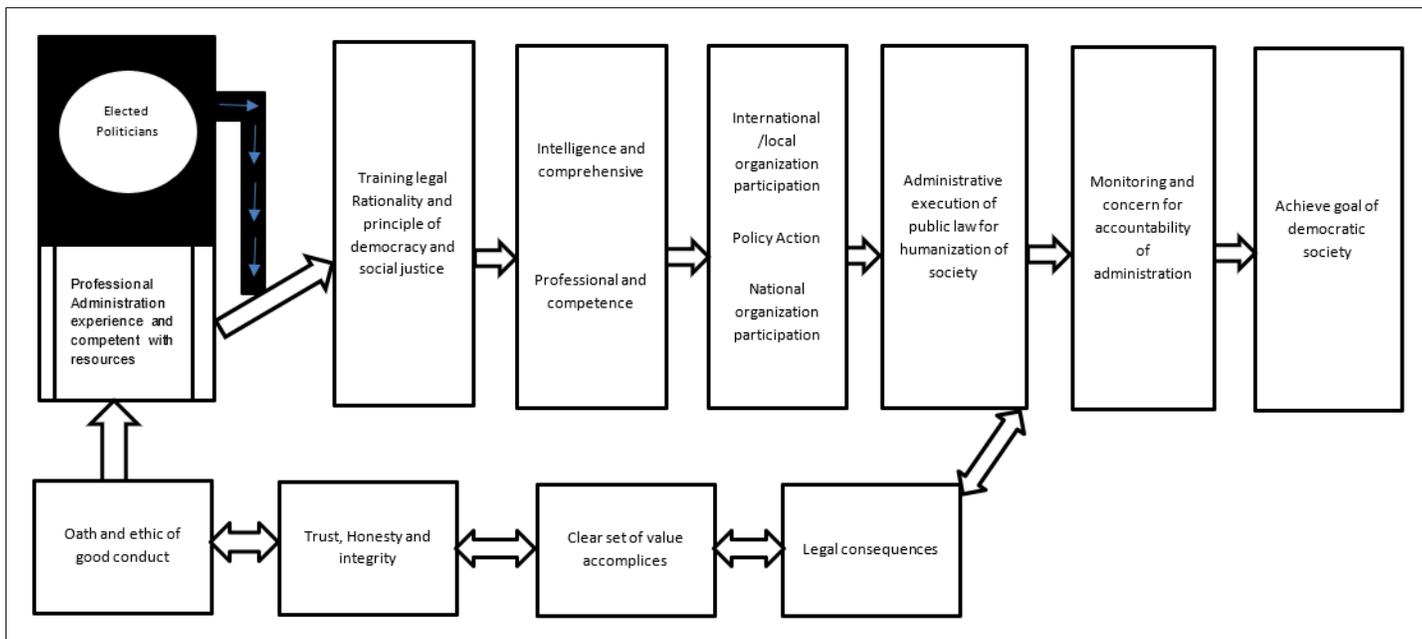
### 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Despite the long debate, it is seen that as the age of public administration has increased, its subject matter has become wider and the subject has become more prosperous. Therefore, research in public administration will continue in the days and years to come as student of public administration will continue to proffer solutions to salient areas through research and development. This is the most positive implication as a field of study making in public administrators more relevant. After examining those questions, this study finds out that the politics-administration relationship is illuminable and intelligible; this is to say the appointed administrators should illuminate paths to the elected politicians in matters of policy cycle, most especially in problem identification, policy initiation, formulation, and proper implementation. On the other hand, it is hoped that the politicians are capable of comprehending intelligibly and adhering to the democratic principles and values to be imbued with honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness in their conduct. With this action from both parties, the main aim of public administration will be enhanced and governance which is the collective way of solving societal problems will be made easy.

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**Fig. 1.** Illuminative and intelligibility Relationship between Politics and Administration