



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CIVIL - MILITARY POWER TUSSE AND SHOW FOR SUPERIORITY: A STUDY OF RECKLESSNESS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

Civil-military relations in Nigeria have historically oscillated between cooperation and confrontation, often producing tension in public administration and governance. This paper examines the civil-military power tussle and the quest for supremacy in Nigerian public administration, highlighting how competition for authority has sometimes manifested as reckless decision-making and policy instability. Anchored in Bureaucratic Theory and Civil-Military Relations Theory, the study conceptualizes the military and civilian institutions as distinct centers of power whose interactions shape governance outcomes, institutional accountability, and state effectiveness. Using qualitative approach, including documentary analysis, government reports, media accounts, and expert interviews, the study argues that episodes of recklessness in administration often emerge when either civil or military actors attempt to assert dominance over policy processes, resource allocation, or institutional oversight. Findings reveal that such struggles result in weakened bureaucratic efficiency, politicization of administrative structures, erosion of public trust, and ad hoc policy implementation. The study further indicates that the lack of clear constitutional enforcement, inadequate institutional checks, and historical legacies of military intervention perpetuate cycles of conflict and governance unpredictability. The paper recommends establishing clearly codified boundaries of authority, institutionalized civilian oversight mechanisms, and professional capacity-building for both civil and military administrators to foster mutual respect and reduce recklessness. Strengthening inter-institutional communication, adherence to rule-based administrative procedures, and legal enforcement of civil supremacy are critical for ensuring stability, accountability, and sustainable governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Civil-military relations, Public administration, Bureaucratic theory, Governance stability.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between civilian authorities and the military has remained one of the most significant issues in political development and public administration, particularly in developing democracies. Civil-military relations refer to the interactions, power dynamics, and institutional arrangements that define the roles of civilian political leaders and military institutions within a state. In democratic systems, the military is expected to remain subordinate to elected civilian authorities, while civilians exercise control over defense and security policies (Alli, 2026). However, in many post-colonial states, including Nigeria, the struggle for political dominance and institutional relevance has often generated tensions between civilian governments and Military establishments, resulting in persistent power tussles and contests for superiority.

Nigeria's experience with civil-military relations has been shaped largely by its prolonged history of military intervention in politics. Between 1966 and 1999, the country experienced several military coups and extended periods of military rule, during which the armed forces occupied the apex of political authority and exercised considerable influence over public administration and governance structures (Osabiya, 2015). The legacy of military dominance created institutional cultures characterized by centralized authority, command structures, and limited accountability, many of which continue to influence contemporary governance practices.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has made significant progress toward institutionalizing civilian control over the military. Constitutional provisions place the armed forces under the authority of elected civilian leaders, particularly the President as Commander-in-Chief. Nevertheless, the relationship between civilian authorities and military institutions has not been entirely free from tensions. Scholars argue that while military coups have largely disappeared from Nigeria's political landscape, struggles over influence, control, accountability, security management, and resource allocation continue to shape civil-military interactions (Ayoko, 2025).

The phenomenon of civil-military power tussle often manifests through conflicts over decision-making authority, policy implementation, security operations, and institutional autonomy. In many instances, civilian political leaders seek to assert their supremacy through appointments, dismissals, and restructuring of military leadership, while military actors may attempt to preserve their institutional interests and operational independence. Such contests for superiority can undermine effective governance, weaken democratic institutions, and encourage administrative recklessness within public organizations. Administrative recklessness, in this context, refers to actions characterized by abuse of authority, disregard for due process, institutional conflicts, policy inconsistency, and the erosion of accountability mechanisms within the public sector.

The Nigerian public administration system has frequently been criticized for inefficiency, excessive politicization, bureaucratic instability, and weak institutional coordination. These challenges are often exacerbated when political actors and security institutions engage in rivalry rather than cooperation. According to recent studies, weaknesses in oversight mechanisms, politicized appointments, elite bargaining, and institutional fragmentation have continued to affect accountability and governance outcomes in Nigeria's democratic environment (Alli, 2026).

Furthermore, recurring security challenges such as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and separatist agitations have increased the prominence of the military in national affairs. As a result, the boundaries between civilian governance and military responsibilities have become increasingly complex. While the military remains a critical institution for national security, concerns have emerged regarding its involvement in internal security operations, political influence, and interactions with civilian authorities. Scholars contend that these developments have implications for democratic governance, public accountability, and administrative effectiveness (Elechi & Ohazuruike, 2024).



The quest for superiority between civilian political elites and military institutions has significant consequences for public administration. When institutional actors prioritize power struggles over service delivery, governance objectives may be compromised. Resources may be diverted, policy implementation may become inconsistent, and public confidence in government institutions may decline. Such conditions can foster recklessness in decision-making processes and weaken the principles of transparency, accountability, and efficiency that are fundamental to effective public administration.

Against this backdrop, there is a growing need to critically examine the dynamics of civil-military power tussles and their implications for governance in Nigeria. Understanding how struggles for institutional superiority contribute to recklessness within the public administration system is essential for strengthening democratic governance, promoting accountability, and enhancing institutional effectiveness. It is therefore within this context that this study seeks to examine civil-military power tussles and the show for superiority as manifestations of recklessness in Nigerian public administration.

Civil-military relations constitute a critical component of democratic governance and effective public administration. In constitutional democracies, the military is expected to operate under civilian authority, while elected political leaders are required to exercise control over security institutions in accordance with the principles of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. However, in many developing democracies, including Nigeria, the relationship between civilian authorities and military institutions has often been characterized by mutual suspicion, institutional rivalry, and recurring struggles over influence and control. Although Nigeria has sustained democratic rule since 1999, concerns persist regarding the nature of civil-military interactions and their implications for public administration and governance.

The transition from prolonged military rule to democratic governance was expected to institutionalize civilian supremacy and establish clear boundaries between political and military responsibilities. Nevertheless, available literature suggests that the legacy of military dominance continues to shape governance structures, administrative culture, and decision-making processes in Nigeria (Osabiya, 2015; Elaigwu, 2011). Scholars have argued that the military remains a highly influential institution whose involvement in internal security operations, national policy implementation, and strategic decision-making has expanded considerably due to persistent security challenges such as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts. This development has generated debates regarding the appropriate balance between civilian authority and military influence within the Nigerian state.

Furthermore, existing studies on civil-military relations in Nigeria have largely concentrated on military intervention in politics, democratic consolidation, national security, and civilian control of the armed forces (Ojo, 2006; Adebayo, 2005). While these studies provide valuable insights into the evolution of civil-military relations, relatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how persistent struggles for institutional relevance, influence, and superiority between civilian authorities and military establishments contribute to recklessness within the public administration system. Consequently, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the administrative implications of civil-military power contests and the extent to which such struggles undermine governance effectiveness, accountability, and institutional performance.

In recent years, instances of disagreements between political office holders and military authorities, controversies surrounding security management, allegations of political interference in military affairs, and accusations of military overreach have continued to raise concerns among scholars and policy analysts. These developments suggest the existence of underlying tensions that may encourage administrative recklessness, policy inconsistencies, abuse of authority, institutional conflicts, and disregard for established bureaucratic procedures. When state institutions become preoccupied with demonstrating superiority rather than fulfilling



their constitutional responsibilities, public resources may be mismanaged, decision-making processes may become politicized, and the quality of governance may deteriorate.

Despite the significance of these concerns, there is insufficient empirical and theoretical understanding of how civil-military power tussles shape administrative behaviour and governance outcomes in Nigeria. The persistence of institutional rivalries raises fundamental questions regarding the extent to which struggles for supremacy between civilian political actors and military authorities contribute to recklessness in public administration. It also raises concerns about the implications of such conflicts for democratic governance, institutional accountability, policy implementation, and public trust in government institutions.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to assess the phenomenon of civil-military power tussle and the show for superiority in Nigeria and examine how these dynamics contribute to recklessness in public administration. The study is therefore motivated by the need to bridge the existing gap in the literature and provide a deeper understanding of the governance challenges associated with civil-military relations in contemporary Nigeria.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. Examine the nature and dimensions of civil-military power tussles in Nigeria's democratic governance system.
2. Assess the extent to which the struggle for superiority between civilian authorities and military institutions contributes to recklessness in Nigerian public administration.
3. Evaluate the implications of civil-military power tussles on administrative efficiency, accountability, and effective governance in Nigeria.
4. Recommend viable ways of addressing the power tussle among civilians and the military to ensure reducing administrative recklessness in Nigerian public administration.

2.0. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Conceptual Review

Concept of Civilian

A civilian is a person who is not a member of the armed forces, police, or other military organization, and is not actively participating in military operations. In the context of this study, civilians refer to elected political leaders, public office holders, and government officials who exercise legitimate authority over the affairs of the state through constitutional and democratic processes. Civilians are distinct from military personnel because they derive their authority from popular mandate, legal frameworks, and political institutions rather than from the use or control of armed force. In democratic societies, civilians occupy strategic positions within government and are responsible for policy formulation, governance, public administration, and oversight of national institutions, including the military (Huntington, 1957).

Political leaders, as representatives of civilian authority, include the President, Vice President, Governors, Ministers, Commissioners, Legislators, and other elected or appointed public officials who are entrusted with the responsibility of managing state affairs. They serve as the link between the government and the citizens and are expected to formulate policies that promote national development, security, and public welfare. According to Janowitz (1960), civilian leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that military institutions remain subordinate to democratic authority and operate within constitutional boundaries.



The concept of civilian leadership is founded on the principle of civilian supremacy, which holds that elected political authorities should exercise ultimate control over the military and other security agencies. This principle is regarded as a fundamental requirement of democratic governance because it prevents the concentration of power in military institutions and ensures accountability to the people through their elected representatives (Finer, 1962). Civilian supremacy therefore establishes the military as an instrument of the state that operates under the direction and control of constitutionally recognized political authorities.

In Nigeria, civilian political leadership gained renewed prominence following the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 after decades of military governance. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria vests executive authority in elected political leaders and designates the President as the civilian Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. This constitutional arrangement reinforces the principle that military institutions must remain accountable to civilian authorities and operate within the framework of democratic governance (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, the relationship between civilian politicians and military institutions has often been characterized by tensions arising from competition for influence, control, and authority. While political leaders seek to assert their constitutional supremacy over security institutions, military authorities sometimes seek greater operational autonomy in matters relating to national security. These interactions have significant implications for governance, public administration, and democratic consolidation.

Therefore, within the context of this study, civilians refer specifically to political leaders and elected government officials who exercise constitutional authority over state affairs and are responsible for directing, supervising, and controlling military institutions within the framework of democratic governance. Their role is central to maintaining effective civil-military relations, promoting accountability, and ensuring the proper functioning of public administration.

The Military

The military refers to the organized armed forces of a state that are established, trained, and equipped to defend the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and national interests of a country against both external and internal threats. It is a specialized institution of the state entrusted with the legitimate use of force for the maintenance of national security and the protection of citizens. The military typically comprises the Army, Navy, and Air Force, operating under a hierarchical command structure and guided by principles of discipline, professionalism, loyalty, and obedience to lawful authority (Huntington, 1957).

The military is regarded as one of the most important institutions of the modern state because of its responsibility for safeguarding national security and preserving state sovereignty. According to Janowitz (1960), the military is a professional institution whose primary function is the management and application of organized violence in the defense of the state. As a professional body, it possesses specialized knowledge, skills, and expertise in warfare, strategic planning, intelligence gathering, and security operations that distinguish it from other public institutions.

In democratic societies, the military operates under the principle of civilian control, whereby elected political leaders exercise authority over military institutions. This arrangement is intended to prevent military domination of political processes and ensure that the armed forces remain accountable to constitutionally established civilian authorities (Finer, 1962). The military is therefore expected to remain politically neutral and focus primarily on its constitutional responsibilities of defending the state and maintaining national security.



In Nigeria, the military has played a significant role in the country's political and administrative development. Beyond its constitutional responsibility of defending the nation, the military was actively involved in governance for several decades through a series of military coups and administrations between 1966 and 1999. During this period, military leaders exercised executive, legislative, and administrative powers, thereby shaping many aspects of Nigeria's political and public administrative structures (Elaigwu, 2011). Although democratic governance was restored in 1999, the legacy of military rule continues to influence civil-military relations and governance practices in the country.

The contemporary Nigerian military is constitutionally mandated to defend the nation against external aggression, maintain territorial integrity, suppress insurrection, and assist civil authorities in restoring order when called upon to do so (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In recent years, the military has been increasingly involved in combating insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and other internal security challenges. This expanded role has elevated its visibility and influence in national affairs, often placing it at the center of interactions with civilian authorities and public institutions.

However, scholars have argued that the military's growing involvement in internal security operations and governance-related activities has sometimes generated tensions with civilian authorities, leading to debates over institutional boundaries, accountability, and authority (Adebayo, 2005). Such tensions may contribute to power struggles and contests for superiority between civilian political leaders and military officials, thereby affecting the effectiveness of public administration and democratic governance. Therefore, within the context of this study, the military is conceptualized as a constitutionally established security institution vested with the responsibility of protecting national sovereignty, maintaining security, and supporting the state in the discharge of its functions. It is a key actor in civil-military relations whose interactions with civilian political leaders have significant implications for governance, accountability, and administrative effectiveness in Nigeria.

Civil- Military Power Tussle

Civil-military power tussle refers to the persistent struggle, competition, or contest for authority, influence, control, and dominance between civilian political leaders and military institutions within a state. It arises when both actors seek to assert their relevance, autonomy, and superiority in matters relating to governance, security management, policy formulation, and national decision-making. The concept is rooted in the broader discourse of civil-military relations, which examines the balance of power between elected civilian authorities and the armed forces in democratic and non-democratic societies (Feaver, 2003).

Civil-military power tussle often emerges when there is ambiguity regarding the boundaries of authority between civilian leaders and military officials. According to Huntington (1957), stable civil-military relations require a clear distinction between military professionalism and civilian political authority. However, where such distinctions become blurred, conflicts may arise over issues such as security policy, military appointments, operational autonomy, resource allocation, and institutional accountability.

The highlighted conflicts in the preceding may manifest openly through public disagreements or indirectly through bureaucratic resistance, political maneuvering, and struggles for institutional influence. Schiff (1995) argues that civil-military tensions are inevitable in societies where political institutions and military establishments possess competing perceptions of their roles in governance. While civilian leaders often seek to consolidate democratic control over state institutions, military authorities may view themselves as custodians of national security and stability, thereby demanding greater influence in public affairs. Such competing interests frequently generate contests for supremacy, especially in states with histories of military intervention in politics.



In many developing countries, civil-military power tussles have been associated with the military's attempts to influence political processes and civilian efforts to maintain constitutional control over the armed forces. Nordlinger (1977) observes that the military may become politically assertive when it perceives civilian governments as ineffective, corrupt, or incapable of managing national crises. Conversely, civilian authorities may adopt measures aimed at limiting military influence through institutional reforms, leadership changes, and enhanced civilian oversight. These actions often intensify struggles over power and authority within the state.

The Nigerian experience provides a significant illustration of civil-military power tussles. Following decades of military rule, democratic governance since 1999 has sought to institutionalize civilian supremacy over the armed forces. Nevertheless, tensions continue to arise over issues such as military involvement in internal security operations, appointment and removal of service chiefs, security policy implementation, and the management of national crises (Elaigwu, 2011). The military's historical dominance in governance has often shaped its interactions with civilian authorities, creating conditions for occasional contests over institutional relevance and authority. Furthermore, Croissant, Kuehn, Chambers, and Wolf (2010) contend that civil-military power struggles are often characterized by efforts by both actors to expand their spheres of influence beyond constitutionally defined limits. In such situations, governance may become affected by institutional rivalry, policy inconsistencies, lack of coordination, and weakened accountability mechanisms. Consequently, public administration may suffer from inefficiency, administrative recklessness, and poor service delivery as state institutions become preoccupied with asserting dominance rather than fulfilling their statutory responsibilities.

Within the context of Nigerian public administration, civil-military power tussle can therefore be understood as the competition for authority, influence, and institutional superiority between civilian political leaders and military establishments. This struggle often affects governance processes, decision-making structures, accountability systems, and administrative effectiveness. Where not properly managed, it can undermine democratic consolidation, weaken public institutions, and contribute to recklessness in the administration of public affairs.

Administrative Recklessness

Administrative recklessness refers to the irresponsible, careless, arbitrary, or unprofessional exercise of authority by public officials and institutions in the management of public affairs. It involves actions, decisions, or omissions that disregard established rules, procedures, ethical standards, and principles of accountability in public administration. Administrative recklessness often manifests through abuse of power, policy inconsistency, poor decision-making, disregard for due process, misuse of public resources, institutional conflicts, and failure to uphold the public interest (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2022). The concept is closely associated with deviations from the fundamental principles of public administration, including efficiency, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and the rule of law. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), public administrators are expected to act responsibly and ensure that governmental actions serve the collective interests of citizens. When officials or institutions act without regard for legal procedures, ethical considerations, or administrative consequences, governance outcomes are often undermined, resulting in administrative recklessness.

Administrative recklessness may arise from several factors, including excessive politicization of public institutions, weak accountability mechanisms, corruption, institutional rivalries, inadequate oversight, and poor leadership. Caiden (2009) argues that administrative systems become reckless when officials prioritize personal, political, or institutional interests above public service objectives. Such conditions often encourage arbitrary decision-making, bureaucratic inefficiency, and disregard for professional standards.



In democratic governance, administrative recklessness poses a significant threat to effective public administration because it weakens institutional credibility and reduces public confidence in government. Peters (2018) notes that public institutions function optimally when decisions are guided by clearly defined procedures, accountability structures, and professional ethics. However, where administrative recklessness prevails, policy implementation becomes inconsistent, organizational effectiveness declines, and governance objectives are compromised. Furthermore, administrative recklessness may be reflected in the unnecessary duplication of responsibilities, conflicts among government agencies, disregard for constitutional provisions, and excessive interference in institutional operations. According to Farazmand (2012), effective public administration requires coordination and cooperation among state institutions. When institutions engage in rivalry and power contests, administrative efficiency is often replaced by disorder, confusion, and policy failures.

In the Nigerian context, administrative recklessness has been linked to challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, abuse of office, weak institutional accountability, and political interference in administrative processes. Scholars have observed that governance outcomes are frequently undermined when public officials act outside established legal and administrative frameworks or when state institutions prioritize power struggles over service delivery (Adebayo, 2005; Ojo, 2006). Such practices negatively affect policy implementation, public trust, and the overall effectiveness of government institutions. Within the framework of civil-military relations, administrative recklessness may occur when civilian authorities and military institutions become engaged in struggles for superiority and influence rather than focusing on their constitutional responsibilities. These contests can lead to policy inconsistencies, institutional friction, disregard for due process, and ineffective governance. As a result, public administration becomes characterized by inefficiency, lack of coordination, and weakened accountability mechanisms.

Therefore, administrative recklessness can be conceptualized as the irresponsible and improper exercise of administrative authority that undermines efficiency, accountability, transparency, and effective governance. It represents a departure from the ideals of good governance and poses serious challenges to public sector performance, democratic consolidation, and national development.

Public Administration

Public administration is a branch of government concerned with the implementation of public policies, the management of public institutions, and the efficient delivery of services to citizens. It encompasses the activities, processes, structures, and personnel involved in translating governmental decisions into concrete actions aimed at promoting public welfare and achieving national development objectives. As both an academic discipline and a practical field of governance, public administration focuses on the organization, coordination, and management of public resources to ensure effective and efficient service delivery (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2022).

The concept of public administration has attracted diverse interpretations among scholars. According to Wilson (1887), who is widely regarded as the father of public administration, public administration is the detailed and systematic execution of public law. Wilson emphasized that while politics is concerned with policy formulation, public administration is responsible for policy implementation. This perspective established public administration as an essential instrument for translating governmental intentions into practical outcomes that benefit society. Similarly, White (1926) defined public administration as all operations having the purpose of fulfilling or enforcing public policy. This definition highlights the administrative machinery through which government programmes and policies are executed. Public administration therefore serves as the operational arm of government responsible for ensuring that public policies are effectively implemented and that public services reach the intended beneficiaries.



From a managerial perspective, Gulick and Urwick (1937) viewed public administration as the process of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting governmental activities. Their famous POSDCORB framework underscores the importance of administrative functions in achieving organizational goals. This perspective portrays public administration as a systematic process aimed at enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability within public institutions. Modern scholars have expanded the scope of public administration beyond policy implementation to include governance, public accountability, citizen participation, and institutional development. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), contemporary public administration is concerned with serving citizens, promoting democratic values, and ensuring that government institutions operate in a transparent and responsive manner. This broader view recognizes the increasing complexity of governance and the need for public institutions to adapt to changing societal demands.

Public administration performs several important functions within the state. These include policy implementation, public service delivery, resource management, regulatory enforcement, maintenance of law and order, and promotion of socioeconomic development. Through these functions, public administration acts as the machinery through which government pursues national goals and addresses societal needs (Peters, 2018). The effectiveness of public administration therefore has significant implications for governance, development, and public trust in government institutions.

In Nigeria, public administration plays a central role in the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at promoting national development, maintaining security, and providing essential services to citizens. The Nigerian public administration system comprises ministries, departments, agencies, and other governmental institutions operating at the federal, state, and local government levels. Since independence, the system has undergone several reforms intended to improve efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. However, challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and poor coordination continue to affect its performance (Adamolekun, 2002).

Within the context of this study, public administration refers to the structures, institutions, processes, and personnel involved in the management of public affairs and implementation of government policies in Nigeria. It represents the machinery through which governmental decisions are executed and public services are delivered. Consequently, any form of civil-military rivalry, institutional conflict, or struggle for superiority that undermines efficiency, accountability, and coordination may adversely affect the effectiveness of public administration and the attainment of governance objectives.

Civil- Military Power Tussle and Show for Superiority in Nigeria: A Review of the FCT Minister and Naval Officer at Abuja, November, 2025.

The history of civil-military relations in Nigeria has been characterized by recurring struggles for power, influence, and institutional dominance between civilian political authorities and military establishments. These struggles have their roots in Nigeria's prolonged experience with military rule between 1966 and 1999, during which the military occupied the apex of political authority and directly controlled the machinery of government. Although democratic rule was restored in 1999, the legacy of military dominance has continued to shape interactions between civilian leaders and military institutions, often resulting in subtle and overt contests for superiority (Elaigwu, 2011).

In democratic theory, the military is expected to remain subordinate to elected civilian authorities. However, the Nigerian experience demonstrates that the relationship is often more complex. Civilian leaders frequently seek to assert constitutional supremacy over military institutions, while military actors sometimes attempt to preserve their institutional autonomy and influence, particularly in matters relating to national security, intelligence



operations, and strategic decision-making (Feaver, 2003). These competing interests have generated recurring tensions that affect governance and public administration.

One notable manifestation of civil-military power tussle in contemporary Nigeria occurred in November 2025 when the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, engaged in a heated confrontation with Lieutenant A.M. Yerima of the Nigerian Navy over a disputed parcel of land in Abuja's Gaduwa District. Reports indicated that military personnel prevented officials of the FCT Administration from accessing the disputed property, leading to a public altercation between the Minister and military officers. The incident reportedly involved land linked to a former Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Awwal Gambo (Rtd.), and generated widespread public debate concerning the limits of military involvement in civil matters and the authority of civilian officials in the administration of public resources.

The Wike–Yerima confrontation represents a significant example of institutional rivalry and a public display of competing authority between civilian and military actors. While the FCT Minister relied on his constitutional authority to enforce land administration regulations, the military officers justified their actions on the basis of superior orders and the protection of interests connected to the disputed property. Scholars analyzing the incident argued that it reflected deeper structural tensions regarding the boundaries between military influence and civilian authority in Nigeria's democratic system.

Beyond the Abuja land dispute, several other incidents have reflected elements of civil-military superiority contests in Nigeria. During the Fourth Republic, there have been repeated allegations of military resistance to civilian oversight, particularly concerning internal security operations, procurement decisions, and investigations into military conduct. Tensions have occasionally emerged between military authorities and elected officials over the management of insurgency operations in the North-East, anti-banditry campaigns, and internal security deployments. In several instances, state governors and political leaders have publicly criticized military strategies, while military authorities have defended their operational independence and professional judgment.

The deployment of military personnel for internal security duties has also generated concerns regarding jurisdictional conflicts and institutional competition. As the military became increasingly involved in combating insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence, its influence within governance structures expanded considerably. This expansion has sometimes blurred the distinction between military and civilian responsibilities, creating opportunities for conflicts over authority and decision-making. Recent security crises continue to place the military at the center of national governance debates, thereby increasing the potential for friction between civilian leaders and military institutions.

Another dimension of the struggle for superiority is reflected in the use of political influence and institutional power to assert dominance over public processes. In some cases, civilian politicians have been accused of using executive authority to interfere excessively in military affairs, while military personnel have occasionally been accused of using their status, operational importance, or security responsibilities to resist civilian directives. Such actions often create an atmosphere of institutional rivalry rather than cooperation, thereby undermining effective governance.

The consequences of civil-military power tussles for Nigerian public administration are profound. When state institutions become preoccupied with demonstrating authority and superiority, administrative efficiency, accountability, and service delivery often suffer. Public resources may be diverted toward institutional conflicts, policy implementation may become inconsistent, and public confidence in government institutions may decline. The Wike–Yerima episode, for instance, exposed weaknesses in inter-institutional coordination and highlighted



how disputes involving powerful state actors can quickly escalate into public spectacles that undermine the image of government institutions.

Consequently, civil-military power tussles and the show for superiority in Nigeria remain significant governance challenges. While democratic consolidation requires strong civilian control over the military, it also requires mutual respect, professionalism, institutional cooperation, and adherence to constitutional boundaries. Without these principles, struggles for dominance between civilian political leaders and military authorities may continue to fuel administrative recklessness, weaken democratic institutions, and hinder effective public administration.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Civil-Military Relations Theory and Bureaucratic Theory

The principal theory underpinning this study is the civil-military relations theory, developed principally by Samuel P. Huntington (1957) and further expanded by Morris Janowitz (1960). The theory seeks to explain the nature of the relationship between civilian political authorities and military institutions within a state, particularly in democratic societies where civilian supremacy is expected to prevail. It examines how power, authority, influence, and responsibility are distributed between civilian governments and the armed forces and the implications of such relationships for governance and political stability.

Huntington (1957), in his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, argues that effective civil-military relations depend on the existence of a professional military establishment that remains politically neutral and subordinate to civilian authority. According to him, civilian leaders are responsible for formulating national policies, while the military is responsible for implementing defense and security policies within the framework established by elected authorities. Huntington introduced the concept of objective civilian control, which advocates a clear separation between political and military spheres to minimize conflicts and ensure democratic stability.

Similarly, Janowitz (1960), in *The Professional Soldier*, emphasized the importance of cooperation and integration between civilian authorities and military institutions. He argued that modern military organizations should not be isolated from society but should operate within democratic norms and remain accountable to civilian leadership. Janowitz maintained that the military must recognize the legitimacy of civilian authority while civilians must respect the professional expertise of military personnel in security matters.

The central assumptions of Civil-Military Relations Theory include the supremacy of civilian authority over military institutions, the professionalization of the armed forces, adherence to constitutional boundaries, and the maintenance of mutual respect between civilian and military actors. The theory posits that when these principles are violated, tensions, conflicts, and struggles for institutional dominance are likely to emerge. Such conflicts may manifest through competition over decision-making authority, policy implementation, resource control, security management, and institutional influence.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its ability to explain the persistent power tussles and struggles for superiority between civilian political leaders and military institutions in Nigeria. Since the study focuses on assessing how contests for influence and authority contribute to recklessness in Nigerian public administration, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding the causes, nature, and consequences of civil-military conflicts. It helps explain incidents where civilian authorities and military actors engage in institutional rivalry, public confrontations, and contests over jurisdictional authority, thereby affecting governance and administrative efficiency. The theory therefore serves as the primary framework for analyzing the dynamics of civil-military power tussles and their implications for public administration in Nigeria.



The supporting theory for this study is the Bureaucratic Theory developed by Max Weber (1947). Bureaucratic Theory is one of the most influential theories of public administration and organizational management. Weber conceived bureaucracy as the most rational and efficient form of organization for achieving administrative objectives. According to him, effective administration is based on clearly defined rules and regulations, hierarchical authority structures, specialization of functions, merit-based appointments, discipline, accountability, and adherence to established procedures.

Weber argued that bureaucracy promotes efficiency, predictability, stability, and impartiality in organizational operations. In a bureaucratic system, authority is exercised through legally established positions rather than personal influence or arbitrary discretion. Administrative actions are expected to follow formal procedures and institutional guidelines to ensure fairness, consistency, and accountability in decision-making processes. The theory assumes that organizations function effectively when officials perform their duties within clearly defined roles and responsibilities. It further posits that adherence to established rules and administrative procedures minimizes conflicts, promotes coordination, and enhances organizational performance. Conversely, the violation of bureaucratic principles often results in inefficiency, disorder, abuse of authority, administrative irresponsibility, and poor governance outcomes.

The relevance of Bureaucratic Theory to this study derives from its focus on administrative order, institutional discipline, and procedural compliance. The study examines recklessness in Nigerian public administration as a consequence of civil-military power tussles and struggles for superiority. Such recklessness may manifest through disregard for due process, abuse of authority, policy inconsistencies, institutional conflicts, and administrative inefficiency. Bureaucratic Theory therefore provides a framework for understanding how deviations from established administrative norms and procedures contribute to governance challenges within public institutions.

Furthermore, the theory helps explain how rivalry between civilian political leaders and military authorities can undermine administrative coordination, weaken accountability mechanisms, and disrupt the orderly functioning of public institutions. When institutional actors become more concerned with demonstrating superiority than adhering to established bureaucratic procedures, the result is often administrative recklessness and poor governance. Consequently, Bureaucratic Theory complements Civil-Military Relations Theory by providing insights into the administrative consequences of civil-military conflicts within the Nigerian public sector.

The combination of Civil-Military Relations Theory and Bureaucratic Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the phenomenon under investigation. While Civil-Military Relations Theory explains the nature, causes, and dynamics of power tussles and superiority contests between civilian political leaders and military institutions, Bureaucratic Theory explains how such conflicts generate administrative recklessness by undermining procedural compliance, institutional coordination, accountability, and efficiency.

Together, the theories provide a robust analytical foundation for assessing how civil-military struggles for dominance influence governance processes and contribute to recklessness in Nigerian public administration. They therefore offer a suitable framework for examining the relationship between institutional rivalry, administrative behaviour, and governance outcomes in contemporary Nigeria.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine civil-military power tussles and the show for superiority as manifestations of recklessness in Nigerian public administration. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including textbooks, journal articles, government publications, newspaper reports, and other



relevant documents. The study relied on documentary evidence relating to civil-military relations and public administration in Nigeria. Data collected were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify, interpret, and explain emerging themes relevant to the study objectives.

4.0. DISCOURSES

4.1. Objective One: Examine the nature and dimensions of civil-military power tussles in Nigeria's democratic governance system.

The study found that civil-military power tussles in Nigeria's democratic governance system are largely characterized by intermittent but recurring struggles for authority, influence, and institutional control between civilian political leaders and military establishments. These tensions are not necessarily expressed through direct coups or overt military takeover, but through subtle institutional rivalry, jurisdictional conflicts, and competition over decision-making power in governance and security management.

The findings further revealed that one of the major dimensions of the tussle is control over internal security operations, where both civilian authorities and military institutions often contest operational leadership and strategic direction in addressing insecurity. Another dimension is the struggle over administrative authority and resource control, particularly in areas where military interests intersect with civilian governance, such as land administration, procurement processes, and emergency response operations. The study also found that public displays of disagreement between civilian officials and military personnel have become an emerging dimension of civil-military relations in Nigeria, reflecting underlying tensions in institutional hierarchy and respect for authority. Additionally, historical legacies of prolonged military rule continue to influence contemporary interactions, often creating resistance to strict civilian oversight and contributing to institutional friction.

4.2. Objective two: Assess the extent to which the struggle for superiority between civilian authorities and military institutions contributes to recklessness in Nigerian public administration.

The study found that civil-military power tussles in Nigeria's democratic system are mainly reflected in struggles over authority, control, and decision-making between civilian leaders and military institutions. These tensions are most evident in internal security management, administrative control, and resource-related issues where both actors often contest jurisdiction. The findings also show that public disagreements and institutional rivalry between civilians and the military are recurring features of Nigeria's governance system. Overall, civil-military relations are characterized by periodic conflicts that undermine coordination and effective public administration.

4.3. Objective three: Evaluate the implications of civil-military power tussles on administrative efficiency, accountability, and effective governance in Nigeria.

The study found that civil-military power tussles in Nigeria negatively affect administrative efficiency by creating delays in decision-making, institutional conflicts, and poor coordination among government agencies. It also revealed that such struggles weaken accountability, as overlapping authority between civilian and military actors often leads to confusion over responsibility and reduced transparency in governance processes. Furthermore, the findings show that effective governance is undermined by these tensions, as resources and attention are frequently diverted from service delivery to institutional rivalry and power struggles. Overall, civil-military conflicts contribute to administrative inefficiency, weakened accountability, and reduced effectiveness in public administration in Nigeria.



4.4. Objective four: Viable ways of addressing the power tussle among civilians and the military to ensure reducing administrative recklessness in Nigerian public administration.

The study found that reducing civil-military power tussles in Nigeria requires strengthening clear constitutional boundaries and reinforcing strict civilian oversight over military operations. It also revealed that improved inter-agency collaboration, regular communication, and institutional dialogue can significantly reduce misunderstandings and rivalry between civilian and military actors. The findings further show that professionalization of institutions, alongside adherence to due process and rule of law, are essential in promoting stability and accountability. Overall, effective reforms, transparency, and stronger governance structures are key strategies for minimizing administrative recklessness in Nigerian public administration.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study examined civil-military power tussles and the show for superiority as manifestations of recklessness in Nigerian public administration. It concludes that civil-military relations in Nigeria's democratic system are characterized by recurring tensions, institutional rivalry, and struggles for authority, particularly in areas of security management and administrative control. These tensions are largely influenced by historical legacies of military rule and ongoing governance challenges within the democratic system.

The study further concludes that civil-military power tussles negatively affect administrative efficiency, weaken accountability mechanisms, and undermine effective governance by creating institutional conflict, poor coordination, and policy inconsistency. Such conditions contribute to administrative recklessness, thereby reducing the overall performance of public institutions in Nigeria. However, the study also establishes that these challenges can be addressed through stronger civilian oversight, clearer institutional boundaries, improved inter-agency cooperation, adherence to the rule of law, and enhanced professionalism within both civilian and military institutions. Ultimately, effective management of civil-military relations is essential for promoting stable governance, strengthening public administration, and ensuring sustainable democratic development in Nigeria.

5.2. Recommendations

1. The study recommends that the Nigerian government should strengthen constitutional provisions and enforcement mechanisms that clearly define the roles and boundaries of civilian authorities and military institutions to reduce overlap and prevent institutional rivalry.
2. There is a need to enhance civilian oversight over the military through well-structured accountability frameworks, parliamentary monitoring systems, and security sector reforms that ensure transparency and compliance with democratic principles.
3. The study recommends improved inter-agency collaboration and regular strategic dialogue between civilian administrators and military leadership to promote mutual understanding, reduce conflicts, and enhance coordinated governance, especially in security management.
4. Both civilian and military institutions should prioritize professional ethics, discipline, and adherence to the rule of law through continuous training, capacity building, and strict enforcement of administrative procedures to reduce instances of recklessness.
5. The government should strengthen institutional reforms aimed at reducing political interference, promoting merit-based leadership appointments, and improving coordination within the public administration system to enhance efficiency and good governance.



Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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