

Understanding Public Sector Problems Affecting Uganda: A Depth Analysis of The Public Choice Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze the major problems affecting the Ugandan public sector through the lens of public choice theory. The research addresses the economic, political, social, and technological challenges that force government institutions to seek new ways to improve public sector performance. Despite various reforms initiated over the past 25 years, corruption, inefficiency, and inadequate service delivery remain pervasive issues. Corruption affects resource allocation and hinders development, while inefficiency is linked to a lack of skilled personnel, outdated infrastructure, and bureaucratic red tape. Shortcomings in service delivery, particularly in health and education, contribute to public dissatisfaction. Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative analysis of existing literature and government reports to assess the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, capacity-building initiatives, technology adoption, and bureaucratic streamlining. The analysis reveals that while efforts to enhance transparency through digital platforms and establish anti-corruption units have been made, the impact of these reforms has been limited. This limitation is attributed to implementation challenges and resistance to the application of private sector techniques in the public sector. The study concludes that sustained progress in the Ugandan public sector requires ongoing commitment, comprehensive institutional reforms, and active community engagement to ensure effective governance and improved service provision.

Keynotes: Corruption, Transparency, Public Sector, Reforms

INTRODUCTION

The public sector is a crucial component of the economy, encompassing all organizations owned and operated by the government, including schools, hospitals, roads, and bridges (Van Opstal & Smeets, 2022). Its primary purpose is to provide essential services to society, often free of charge or at subsidized rates (Beniušis, 2023). Unlike the private sector, the public sector does not aim to generate profits but focuses on public welfare (Admolekun, 2011). Following the independence of most African countries in the late 1950s and 1960s, the public sector was viewed as the key driver for socioeconomic development (Andersson Nystedt et al., 2023). It was tasked with providing goods and services based on the realization and representation of public interests, embodying unique public qualities compared to business management (Haque, 2001).

However, the public sector has often struggled to perform effectively due to issues such as excessive power accumulation, lack of accountability (Goswami et al., 2020), indifference towards public needs, official secrecy, and the depoliticization of the public sphere. These inefficiencies, The combination of economic crises in the late 1970s and 1980s, along with insights gained from successful market-oriented economies, has prompted a demand for reevaluating the role of the state (Nguyễn & Miyazaki, 2023). In the late 1990s, Africa saw a widespread acceptance of a market-friendly strategy, which advocated for a diminished role of the state in economic management and emphasized the importance of creating a conducive climate for private sector activity (Georgios & Nikolaos, 2021). Notwithstanding numerous

reforms, the public sector in Africa, especially Uganda, encounters substantial obstacles. These factors encompass corruption, political meddling, and inefficiency.

Corruption, which refers to the exploitation of entrusted authority for personal benefit, erodes public confidence, distorts the formulation of policies, and obstructs the achievement of development objectives (Johnson & Sharma, 2004). Political intervention in administrative affairs exacerbates the challenges of efficient public sector governance. The citation for this source is Manfredi-Sánchez and Smith (2023). These obstacles impede the efficiency of public services and have a negative impact on vulnerable populations. In the absence of hypothesis testing, this qualitative research was conducted to address the following research question: What are the primary issues that impact the performance of the public sector in Uganda, and how can the principles of public choice theory be effectively utilized to tackle these challenges?

Public choice theory offers a robust framework for understanding and addressing the myriad issues that plague governmental institutions. At its core, this theory recognizes that individuals within these institutions often act in their own self-interest rather than in the public's interest. This perspective challenges the traditional view of public officials as purely altruistic actors and instead emphasizes the importance of designing institutional frameworks that can align personal incentives with public welfare. By acknowledging that self-interest can drive behavior, public choice theory highlights the need for mechanisms that ensure individual actions contribute to the collective good. This involves creating systems that reduce opportunities for self-serving behavior and encourage decisions that benefit the broader society.

Transparent systems and robust checks and balances are crucial to mitigating self-interested behavior within government institutions. Transparency in governmental processes, such as open data policies and public access to information, helps to hold officials accountable and reduces the likelihood of corruption. Robust checks and balances, including independent oversight bodies and effective regulatory frameworks, ensure that power is not concentrated in a few hands and that there is regular scrutiny of public officials' actions. Additionally, policies that incentivize decision-making in the public's best interest can significantly reshape governance in Uganda. For instance, linking performance indicators to service delivery outcomes ensures that public officials are rewarded for tangible improvements in public services. This not only aligns their personal goals with public welfare but also fosters a culture of accountability and efficiency. Implementing such policies can transform governance structures, making them more responsive, transparent, and effective in serving the needs of the populace.

Accountability and Transparency

Accountability and transparency are critical components of effective governance and are integral to the application of public choice theory in reforming governmental institutions. Accountability ensures that public officials are answerable for their actions and decisions, fostering a sense of responsibility and integrity in public service. Transparency, on the other hand, involves making governmental processes open and accessible to the public, thereby reducing opportunities for corruption and enhancing trust in public institutions. Implementing measures such as open data policies can significantly enhance transparency. These policies mandate that government data, including budgets, expenditures, and project outcomes, be made available to the public in an accessible format. Such openness allows citizens to scrutinize government actions and hold officials accountable for mismanagement or malfeasance.

Citizen engagement platforms are another vital tool for promoting accountability and transparency. These platforms facilitate direct interaction between the government and the public, allowing citizens to voice their concerns, provide feedback, and participate in decision-making processes. This engagement not only empowers citizens but also ensures that government actions reflect the needs and preferences of the populace. Independent oversight bodies, such as anti-corruption commissions and ombudsman offices, play a crucial role in monitoring government activities and investigating instances of misconduct. Understanding trade-offs in policymaking is essential for making informed decisions that balance competing priorities. By carefully considering the implications of different policy options, governments can prioritize resource allocation, improve service delivery, and optimize public spending. These components are essential in aligning individual actions with collective welfare, thereby enhancing overall governance and ensuring that public institutions effectively serve the needs of the community.

Bureaucratic Corruption

Bureaucratic corruption is a widespread problem in Uganda's governmental sector, greatly diminishing effectiveness and eroding public confidence. Uganda's poor score on the Transparency International Corruption Index provides evidence of corruption inside the country's public institutions. Corruption in Uganda takes in diverse manifestations, such as the misappropriation of public funds, bribery, nepotism, and favoritism. These behaviors not only redirect money from necessary public services but also foster an atmosphere of inequity and unfairness. Bureaucratic corruption has wide-ranging implications, including the disruption of public service delivery, impeding economic progress, and reducing the overall quality of governance.

Organizations like the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) are at the forefront of efforts to combat corruption in the public sector. Through advocacy and awareness campaigns, ACCU works to educate the public about the detrimental effects of corruption and mobilize support for anti-corruption initiatives. These efforts are complemented by empirical data, which shows a gradual improvement in corruption perception as a result of increased efforts from both civil society organizations and government initiatives. Government initiatives aimed at reducing corruption include the establishment of anti-corruption bodies, the implementation of stringent legal frameworks, and the promotion of ethical standards within public institutions. However, the effectiveness of these measures is often hampered by challenges such as limited resources, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and a lack of sustained political will.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress. Empirical data indicates that with continued efforts from organizations like ACCU and government initiatives, there is a gradual improvement in the perception and reality of corruption in Uganda. This progress underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach that combines advocacy, legal reforms, and institutional strengthening to effectively tackle bureaucratic corruption. By addressing the root causes of corruption and promoting a culture of integrity and accountability, Uganda can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its public sector, thereby fostering sustainable development and improving the well-being of its citizens.

Bottom of Form

Key factors contributing to bureaucratic corruption in Uganda include weak institutional frameworks, low salaries for public officials, lack of transparency, and a culture of impunity. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has consistently shown Uganda facing challenges in controlling corruption. The lack of proper checks and balances, coupled with a history of political instability, has created an environment conducive to corrupt practices. These factors

collectively undermine the effective functioning of public institutions and hinder socio-economic development, Uganda has implemented various anti-corruption initiatives to combat corruption in the public sector. The Inspectorate of Government is responsible for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases. Additionally, Uganda has ratified international conventions and implemented legal frameworks, such as the Anti-Corruption Act. Efforts to strengthen institutions and promote transparency are ongoing. However, these measures' effectiveness is often hindered by challenges like inadequate resources, limited enforcement, and the need for sustained political will.

Impact of Corruption

Corruption in Uganda is the root cause of inequality, inadequate social services, the paradox of abundance, and the decrease in foreign investments and socio-economic growth. Transparency International's 'Corruption Perception Index 2016' reveals that more than two-thirds of the 176 nations and territories assessed scored below the midpoint. Corruption takes on various forms, such as misappropriation of public resources, bribery, favoritism, blackmail, bribery, manipulation, and narrow-mindedness. The prevalence of corruption in the public sector is a chronic issue caused by the presence of weak institutions that are resistant to change and have exploitable vulnerabilities. There is an urgent requirement to overhaul public administration, and efforts to reform public sectors are widespread throughout Africa. The study seeks to conduct a thorough analysis of the key issues impacting the public sector in Uganda and suggest practical solutions rooted in the principles of public choice theory. The objective is to improve efficiency, accountability, and transparency in order to achieve microeconomic stability and enhance public trust.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is essential for gaining in-depth insights into the implementation techniques for public policies in Uganda. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex issues like governance and poverty, allowing for a detailed examination of existing theories, concepts, and findings.

The primary method used for data collection in this research was document analysis, focusing on secondary sources available through Scopus. This platform provided a wide range of scholarly articles, books, government reports, and reputable online publications relevant to the study. First-hand information and data gathered from these sources were manually analyzed to extract key themes, patterns, and insights. The VosViewer application was also utilized to collect bibliometric data, aiding in the visualization and analysis of publication patterns, citation networks, and keyword co-occurrences.

The types of data collected for this study included qualitative data and bibliometric data. Qualitative data encompassed detailed narratives, descriptions, and analyses from the existing literature on public policy implementation and poverty in Uganda. Bibliometric data, gathered through the VosViewer application, included information on publication trends, citation networks, and the co-occurrence of keywords. This data helped identify influential studies, emerging trends, and key themes in the research area.

Data analysis involved several techniques to ensure a thorough examination of the collected data. Manual analysis was performed on the first-hand information and data from Scopus, involving a detailed review and coding of documents to extract relevant information. The VosViewer application facilitated bibliometric analysis, allowing for the visualization and interpretation of relationships between different research publications, authors, and keywords. This technique identified influential studies, emerging trends, and gaps in the existing literature.

Additionally, thematic analysis was employed to categorize and interpret the data, focusing on recurring themes and patterns to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the data, specific criteria were applied for inclusions and exclusions during the data collection process. Inclusions consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and government reports related to public policy implementation, governance, and poverty in Uganda. Scholarly articles indexed in Scopus that provided relevant theories, concepts, and empirical findings, as well as publications focusing on public choice theory, accountability, transparency, and bureaucratic corruption, were included. Exclusions comprised articles and documents not specifically addressing the context of Uganda, non-peer-reviewed sources, opinion pieces, and articles lacking empirical evidence. Publications outside the scope of public policy and governance issues were also excluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Examining the public sector problems in Uganda through the lens of Public Choice Theory provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges at hand. This theoretical framework reveals that decision-makers within governmental institutions often prioritize their self-interest over broader public welfare goals. This self-interest can manifest in various forms such as rent-seeking behaviors, where officials seek to maximize personal gain through control over public resources or regulatory capture, where regulatory agencies are influenced or controlled by the industries they are meant to regulate. These behaviors lead to suboptimal policy outcomes, inefficient resource allocation, and a lack of responsiveness to public needs.

Public Choice Theory's insights underscore the critical need for addressing institutional shortcomings and enhancing transparency and accountability within Uganda's governance structure. Transparent systems and robust checks and balances are essential to mitigate the adverse effects of self-interested behavior among public officials. Policies that align personal incentives with public welfare goals, such as performance-based indicators and anti-corruption measures, are crucial steps towards improving governance effectiveness. By understanding the incentives driving decision-making processes, policymakers can implement targeted reforms aimed at reducing corruption, improving service delivery, and optimizing public spending.

Moving forward, future research and policy initiatives should focus on empirically evaluating the effectiveness of these reforms in the Ugandan context. This includes studying how institutional reforms impact decision-making processes, the role of transparency in enhancing public trust, and the long-term implications of regulatory reforms on economic development and social welfare. By continuously refining governance structures to align with principles of Public Choice Theory, Uganda can move towards a more accountable and responsive public sector that better serves the needs of its citizens.

Table 1: Public Sector Problems in Uganda and Public Choice Theory Analysis

Variables	Indicators	Explanation/Empirical Data	Analysis
Bureaucratic Corruption	Transparency International Corruption Index	Low score indicating perceived corruption; ACCU advocates against corruption	Bureaucratic corruption undermines public trust, impacts efficiency, and requires continuous monitoring and advocacy for improvement.
Budget Mismanagement	Deviation from Planned Expenditure	Uganda Debt Network monitors budget; instances of misuse and delays	Mismanagement leads to resource wastage, delayed projects, and necessitates transparent budgeting processes and accountability mechanisms.
Regulatory Capture	Instances of Regulatory Bias	UCC scrutiny for favouritism in telecommunications; impacts market competition	Regulatory capture affects fair competition and requires strict oversight to ensure regulatory decisions align with the public interest.
Rent-Seeking Behaviour	Increase in Licensing Fees	URA faces challenges with arbitrary fee hikes; hinder business growth	Rent-seeking behaviour impedes economic development, necessitating fair and transparent licensing practices for sustainable growth.

BUDGET MISMANAGEMENT

Public choice theory posits that government officials may prioritize their interests over the public's. In Uganda, instances of budget mismanagement are reflected in significant deviations from planned expenditure (Witter et al., 2017). This mismanagement can be measured by comparing initial budget allocations to actual spending. Organizations like the Uganda Debt Network monitor and advocate for transparent budgeting processes. Corruption Challenges: Uganda has faced challenges related to corruption in its public sector, leading to concerns about budget mismanagement. Corruption can manifest through embezzlement, bribery, and other illicit activities, diverting funds from their intended purposes. Empirical data reveals instances where budget allocations have been misused, leading to suboptimal resource allocation and delayed public projects. Lack of political will and commitment is a major setback

to public sector reform efforts. The political cost that comes with reforms and upsetting the status-quo usually prompts some elements in government to pull in the different direction and marshal necessary support to derail the reform process (Newman et al., 2021). Fundamental changes in public institutions can take decades to take shape and come into effect. Political will plays a vital role in expediting reform process (Jiang, 2022).

REGULATORY CAPTURE

In Uganda, empirical data reveal that challenges in regulatory frameworks that support the public sector. Instances of regulatory capture may compromise the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, as regulatory bodies may become susceptible to external influences. This can result in inadequate oversight of budget allocation and utilization, potentially leading to mismanagement of public funds. Addressing regulatory capture through enhanced transparency, accountability mechanisms, and institutional reforms is crucial for fostering a regulatory environment that genuinely supports the fight against corruption and ensures responsible budget management in Uganda. Regulatory capture occurs when regulatory agencies act in favour of the industries they are supposed to regulate. Indicators include instances of regulatory bias, where regulations disproportionately favour certain businesses or industries. In Uganda (Carlton & Vallance, 2023), the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has faced scrutiny for alleged regulatory capture in the telecommunications sector. Empirical data highlights cases where regulatory decisions may not align with the broader public interest, impacting market competition and consumer welfare. Limited development and implementation of Citizen Client Charters. The client charter aims at promoting compliance with policies, standards, rules, regulations and procedures in order to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the MDAs and LGs. Client charters promote the demand side of accountability. A simple definition of client charters is indicated as a social contract between an MDA or LG and the service recipients. The objective is to inform clients and stakeholders the services the MDAs and DLGs provide. Despite the capacity building initiatives implemented by MoPS in the public sector, the implementation and involvement of the citizens in the client charter is limited in Agencies, Central Government and DLGs. This is because of the limited prioritization of the development and implementation of client charters within the annual work plans and budgets of MDAs and LGs; poor dissemination of client charters to service recipients; limited use of feedback information; and most client charters are written in English. All these limitations affect demand for accountability and quality of service (Jin, 2021).

RENT SEEKING

Public choice theory suggests that individuals within the public sector may engage in rent-seeking behaviour, seeking personal gains at the expense of public welfare. Current analysis in Uganda indicate that in instances of rent-seeking behaviour, where individuals or entities seek to manipulate regulatory processes for personal gain. In Uganda, this could manifest as bribery, extortion (Shukla & Mathur, 2020), or other corrupt practices that undermine the integrity of regulatory institutions. To address this issue, strengthening regulatory frameworks and implementing anti-corruption measures are essential. The government should focus on promoting transparency, enhancing accountability, and fostering a culture of ethical behaviour within regulatory bodies to curb rent-seeking activities and ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources in the public sector. An indicator of this behaviour is an arbitrary increase in licensing fees without corresponding improvements in services (Amoako-Asiedu et al., 2023). The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has faced challenges

associated with rent-seeking behaviour. analysis illustrates instances where licensing fees have risen without a proportional enhancement of public services (Fevre, 2020) hindering business growth and economic development Poor Work Culture and Attitude Uganda’s public sector has been marred by incidences of lack of national values, poor The attitude towards work among public servants in Uganda reflects entrenched issues of ethics, a lack of client-centeredness in service delivery, and a resistance to embracing modern technologies such as ICT facilities. Despite ongoing capacity-building initiatives and the presence of relevant laws, there persists a prevalent inward-looking and self-centered approach within the public service. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of organizational behavior theories, particularly those that highlight the influence of organizational culture and individual motivations. According to theories of organizational culture, the prevailing norms and values within an organization, such as the tolerance or condemnation of self-centered behaviors, strongly influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Mukuru et al., 2021)

Moreover, theories of motivation suggest that employees' work attitudes and their willingness to adopt new technologies are influenced by factors such as perceived job relevance, organizational support, and intrinsic motivation. In the context of Uganda's public service, where historical and structural factors may perpetuate a bureaucratic and hierarchical culture, these theories underscore the challenges of fostering a more proactive and client-oriented workforce. Addressing these issues requires not only policy interventions and legal frameworks but also a cultural shift towards promoting ethical behavior, client-focused service delivery (Sharma et al., 2023) and a proactive stance towards adopting and leveraging ICT advancements. Future research could delve deeper into these theoretical underpinnings to explore effective strategies for organizational change and enhancing public sector effectiveness in Uganda.

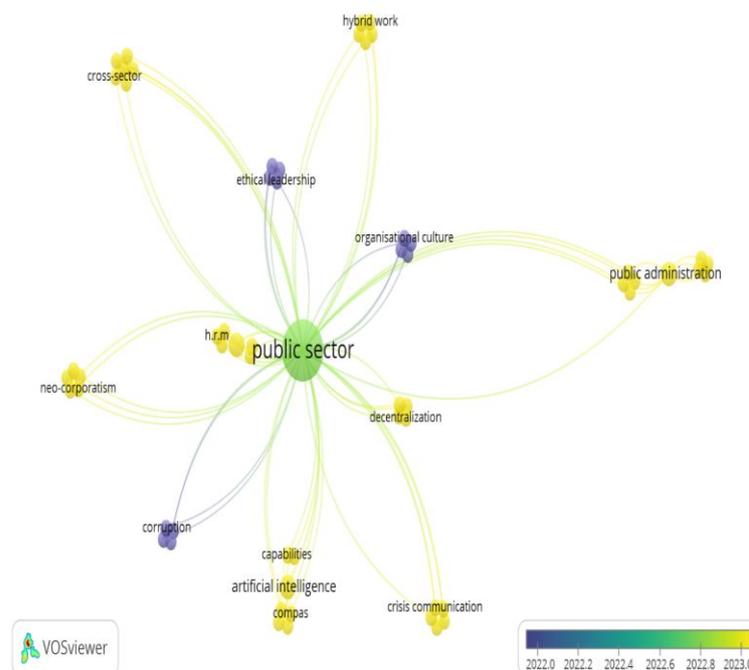


Figure 1 Over Lay Visualization For Public Sector Keywords

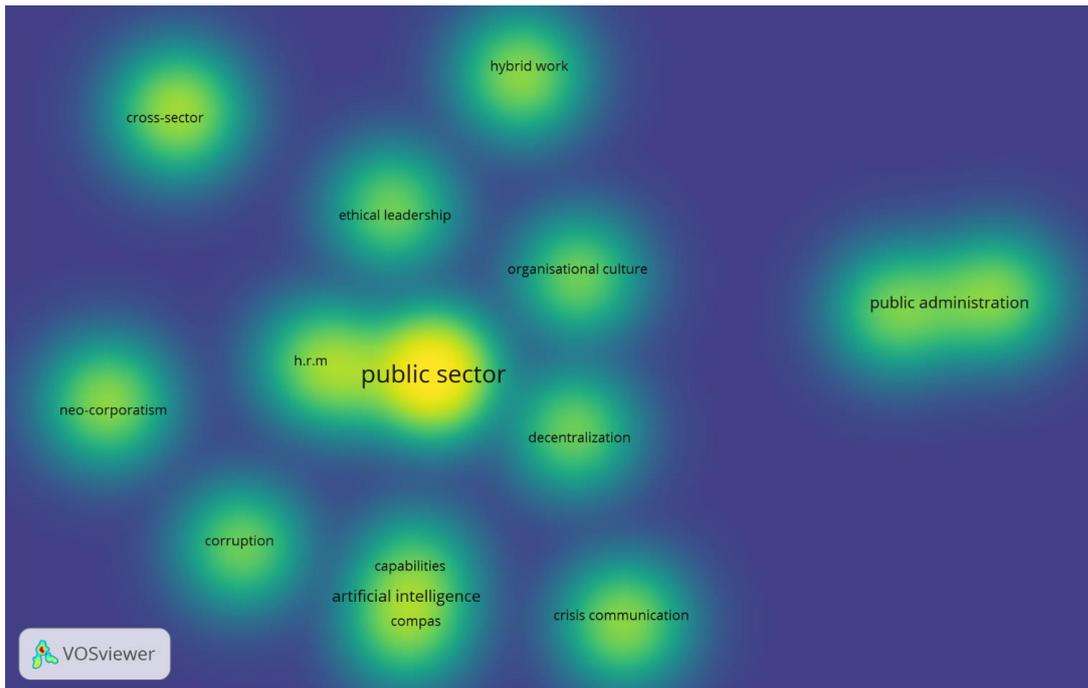


Figure 2 Over Lay Density For Public Sector Keywords

CONCLUSION

Public sector management in Uganda, and Africa more broadly, continues to face numerous challenges that hinder effective governance and service delivery. Theoretical contributions of this study emphasize the critical importance of aligning personal incentives with public welfare through frameworks such as public choice theory. This approach underscores the necessity of enhancing transparency and accountability to mitigate self-interested behavior within governmental institutions. However, the limitations of this research include a reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture the most current and nuanced aspects of public sector dynamics, and the potential lack of generalizability of findings to other contexts. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the need for more comprehensive data collection methods to provide a holistic view of the public sector's challenges and opportunities (Rossidis & Belias, 2021). Future research should focus on empirical studies that examine the direct impact of specific motivational factors and leadership reforms on public sector performance in Uganda. Additionally, there is a need to explore and document innovative practices and reforms that can be benchmarked and adapted to improve public service delivery. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide actionable insights and practical steps for transforming public sector management in Uganda and beyond, ultimately contributing to enhanced governance, increased public trust, and sustainable socio-economic development (Suri, 2022).

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