

Who Wants To Be A Minister? A Proposal for the Incoming Administration

April 14, 2015 | Patrick O. Okigbo III

The ability of the incoming administration to deliver on its #Change agenda will depend, in part, on the candidates selected as chief executives for the various ministries, departments and agencies¹. This document outlines an effective process for selecting top talents for ministerial positions. The process ensures competence, reduces “godfatherism”, ensures transparency, reduces opportunities for lobbying, and provides the opportunity for Nigerians to track the progress of the ministerial appointees towards achieving the goals for the various ministries. It is a significant departure from the current process and is likely to be met with resistance from the political class; yet, it is an opportunity for the Buhari-Osinbajo administration to signal to Nigerians (and the world) that it is committed to the #Change Agenda.

ISSUE STATEMENT

What is the most effective process to ensure the best candidates are selected as chief executives for the federal ministries?

CURRENT SELECTION PROCESS

The current process for selecting chief executives for federal ministries is imbued with significant challenges that predispose successive governments to sub-optimal performance. The process is opaque, breeds lobbying and manipulation, and typically generates unsuitable candidates who ill-prepared and lack the competence to deliver results from Day One.

The current selection process is as follows:

- **The states nominate ministerial candidates.**

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) invites the state governments to nominate candidates for ministerial positions. The states consult amongst the political elite and submit names to the Presidency. Typically, selection is based more on political capital

Issue Statement: What is the best process for selecting chief executives of Federal Ministries?

Current Process: The current process for selecting Ministers is opaque, ineffective, and results in the paradox of “square pegs in round holes”.

Proposal: The idea is to make the process more transparent and use public pressure to make the position less attractive to the unqualified and more attractive to technocrats who are ready and able to deliver results.

Conclusion: This is a bold and avant-garde approach that if effectively implemented can change the calibre of the people at the helm of affairs in Nigeria and can deliver #Change for Nigerians.

¹ It would depend to a large extent on the much-needed reform of the public and civil service. See “**Change through a Reinvigorated Civil Service Reform Programme**” for Nextier’s suggestions on how to reform Nigeria’s Civil Service. Click on the link below to access our proposal to the incoming administration:
<http://www.nextierlimited.com/?wpdmact=process&did=NjEuaG90bGluaw==>

and access than on technical competence.

Issues

- *The selection criteria presented by the FGN to the state governments are not focused or detailed enough to ensure rigorous selection and presentation of the best candidates.*
- *The FGN does not specify the ministerial portfolio assigned to each state; therefore, candidates are not nominated because of their proven expertise in any particular sector.*

- **A presidential selection committee interviews the nominated candidates.**

The President constitutes a team of trusted aides and party stalwarts to interview the ministerial nominees.

Issues

- *Typically, there is no transparency on the members of the selection committee, their terms of reference, or selection methodology.*
- *The opacity of the process creates room for political lobbying and abuse of the process.*

- **The presidency assigns ministerial portfolios to the candidates.**

The committee submits the list of selected candidates to the president. Political lobbying from various constituencies continues until the president decides on the names to send to the Nigeria Senate for approval. At this point, ministerial portfolios are assigned to each of the nominees. The decision on portfolio assignment is mainly driven by political (rather than technical) considerations.

Issues

- *In most cases, Nigeria ends up with square pegs in round holes. These are candidates who may have subject matter expertise in a particular area but are assigned portfolios where they know little or nothing. Such candidates spend the early months of their appointment learning about the sector instead of delivering results. This is not the most effective strategy for a nation striving for social, political and economic development.*
- *The chief executive of a public sector institution, like the private sector contemporary, should have the requisite technical skills and experience coupled with political prowess. Yet, the current selection process results in CEOs with more political aptitude and insufficient technical competence because the selection process is based mostly on political horse-trading between the party stalwarts and the political elite.*

- **The Nigeria Senate conducts the confirmation process.**

As provided in the Constitution, the presidency sends its list of shortlisted candidates to the National Assembly (Senate) for confirmation.

Issues

- *Although the Senate ministerial confirmation process is a public event, sometimes it does not deliver the rigorous scrutiny required to select top candidates. In some cases, candidates with the right political leverage are asked to “take a bow”.²*
- *The political leadership of the Nigeria Senate, in some instances, approves a ministerial candidate despite public outcry. A recent example is ministerial confirmation of Senator Musiliu Obanikoro despite allegations of his involvement in election malpractices.*
- *The voice-votes (ayes and nays) at ministerial confirmation provide a cover for the senators and eliminate the opportunity for individual consequence for poor judgment on the candidates.*

The current ministerial selection process is opaque and prone to lobbying. As a result, it does not ensure the best candidate is selected for the ministerial position. In fact, no organization can become successful by employing such a process to select its CEO.

² This is a practice in the National Assembly where a ministerial candidate is asked to bow to the Senators and exit without being cross-examined. It is typically reserved for former senators who are appointed to a ministerial position or for candidates who have lobbied for a hitch-free Senate confirmation process.

THE PROPOSAL

The incoming administration is invited to implement a ministerial selection process that resolves the critical challenges with the current process and delivers the right candidates for the various positions. Below is an outline of a transparent selection process that ensures the identification and selection of the best candidates for the right positions.



Figure 1: Proposed Ministerial selection process | Source: Nextier Advisory

- **Assign specific ministerial positions to the states**

The incoming administration should allocate ministerial positions to the states prior to requesting for ministerial nominees. The allocation process will be by luck of the draw and conducted live on television. This process will signal to Nigerians that the incoming administration does not have any covert or overt sectional or ethnic agenda in the allocation of political positions.

- **Provide specific job descriptions for the assigned ministerial positions**

Each state will receive a specific Job Description for the allocated ministerial positions. The Job Description will specify the requisite academic qualifications, professional accomplishments, managerial experience, terms of reference for the job, etc. The states will be requested to use the Job Description criteria to select their best candidates for the assigned ministerial position. The FGN will reject any nominee who does not meet any of the selection criteria.

The Buhari/Osinbajo administration needs to signal to Nigerians that it is committed to a new, transparent process for selecting the best CEOs to manage Nigeria's federal ministries. It will need the goodwill to drive the #Change agenda.

There is a potential risk that the political class will oppose this proposed process and argue that Ministers should be individuals with "electoral value". The government should resist this opposition by communicating to Nigerians that the role of a Minister is similar to that of a Chief Executive Officer of a Fortune 500 company. As such, the ideal candidate must have the requisite technical capabilities to run an enterprise. As a compromise, FGN should create other channels of patronage for the political elite; however, these channels should be in areas that would not impact the administration's ability to deliver on the #Change agenda.

- **Nominees should submit their vision and work plan for the allocated ministries to the selection committee.**

Each of the nominees is expected to submit their vision for the ministry. The candidates must be ready to present and defend the vision to Nigerians. The vision document must provide clarity on how the candidate intends to implement the plan. This process will ensure that only individuals who possess a deep understanding of the sectors would be selected as ministers.

Successful candidates will be expected to present, within their first 100-days in office, a detailed work plan with timelines.

- **Conduct a public ministerial selection process of shortlisted candidates on Live TV**

The FGN should set up a ministerial selection committee consisting of the Managing Partners of the five global consulting firms with operations in Nigeria: Accenture, Bain & Co., KPMG, McKinsey & Co., PriceWaterhouse Coopers. These are individuals with expertise recruiting CEOs. Working with this team of professionals will facilitate the integrity of the process as they manage global franchises that have strict compliance and ethics codes. It is important to note that this is not foolproof, as corporate malpractice within the consulting profession has been known, however, this process is sure to mitigate that possibility.

The Selection Committee Team will be responsible for reviewing the nomination submission forms of the various candidates for each of the ministerial positions to ensure they meet all the stipulations in the Job Description. The team will invite the nominees to present a summary of their proposed work plan (or Vision) before a studio and national television audience. Each member of the Selection Committee Team will question the nominee on aspects of their experience, qualification and proposed work plan. After the session, each of the judges will award a score from 0 to 10 to each of the nominees. The scores would be visible to all Nigerians. The nominee with the highest score will be recommended for the position.

This process is a strong and effective signal to Nigerians that the new government is committed to changing the status quo and to implementing processes that will project the best-qualified candidates for political positions. The added advantage of this process is that over time, only candidates who are really technically prepared for the roles will put themselves forward for consideration.

- **Presidential review and final selection**

The results, which are already public, will be presented to the president for his review. The president reserves the right to accept or reject the suggested candidates. The advantage of accepting the candidates who emerged from this process is that it signals to Nigerians that this government does not have any ulterior motive other than the development of Nigeria and is willing to work with whomever is the best qualified for this role. The risk of rejecting a candidate that emerged from this process is that the president would have to assume part of the responsibility for the outcome. Also, it would be a negative signal to Nigerians.

The proposed selection process would streamline the calibre and number of candidates jostling for appointment as ministers. The risk of public scrutiny would encourage only those who are prepared for the roles to present themselves for public service.

- **Confirmation by the Nigeria Senate**

The President will submit the list of successful nominees to the Nigeria Senate for confirmation. It is expected that any candidates who emerged from the rigorous selection process should pass the Senate confirmation. However, there is a risk that the Senate may not confirm some of the nominees. The onus would be on the Senate to explain to Nigerians why they consider such a candidate unsuitable for the role.

- **Execute Performance Contract**

The FGN will organise a public event where successful candidates would publicly sign a performance contract that stipulates their key deliverables and the timelines as well as an Asset Declaration Form. The details of the performance contracts will be published in both the traditional and social media as a way to incentivize candidates to perform.

Similar to the recent elections, Nigerians are sure to be encouraged to track the performance of each of the candidates. The presidency will evaluate their performance in three-month cycles. Non-performing Ministers should be promptly relieved of their responsibilities. Such action would be a strong signal to Nigerians that only delivery of stipulated results can safeguard one's job. Furthermore, it will streamline the calibre and number of candidates jostling for appointment as ministers. The risk of public condemnation will encourage only those who are prepared for the roles to present themselves for public service.

CONCLUSION

The main risk to this proposal is that the political elite and conservatives may view the proposal as too innovative, radical, or much of a leap-forward from how the country currently operates. The fact is that Nigeria is in dire straits and requires bold (not incremental) change. This will signal to Nigerians that the Buhari-Osinbajo administration is fully committed to the #Change agenda even if it means rocking the proverbial political boat.

Extrapolating from the recent election results, Nigerians believe in the character and integrity of General Mohammadu Buhari and Professor (Pastor) Yemi Osinbajo. However, there is palpable fear that the government may be drowned out by entrenched political machinery peopled by the same characters that have been at the helm of affairs in Nigeria for the last few decades. As a result, it is important to establish a process that will result in the desired #Change outcomes.

Why should the incoming administration adopt this process?

- Ensures competence
- Reduces Godfatherism
- Reduces corruption
- Minimises tribalism
- Ensures transparency

More importantly, the administration is in its "honeymoon" period with the electorate and this is the time to make the difficult changes while ensuring that it continues to sustain the hope and trust of the electorate. This is a bold and different approach which holds a lot of promise to change the colouration of the people at the helm of affairs in Nigeria and deliver #Change for Nigerians. The real question is does the Buhari-Osinbajo team have the political will to implement it?

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