

Reforming Policy Making Processes in Educational System in Nigeria

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Abstract

Acknowledging that the quality of education received in a given learning environment can be significantly parlayed by the quality of the policy that shapes and informs it, this paper discusses the processes of educational policy formulation in Nigeria. It observes that many of the selected approaches to educational policy formulation and reform hardly fit well with the specific policy instruments they were employed to evolve. It notes that for their incongruence they fail to capture and engage all the factors, influences and environmental nuances that converge to shape the policy instruments that emerge. In view of this, the paper proposes a new approach to evolving effective educational policy for meaningful educational reform in Nigeria. This approach, the paper contends must transcend the linear model of cause and effect or place and replace interventions. It then makes the proposal for the adoption of an approach to policy formulation wherein all intervening variables of policy determination are not merely observed but carefully and systematically engaged and appropriately integrated. In this way, the paper submits that an extensive elicitation of resources and an eclectic use of approaches should be the new pathway to policy formation in the Nigerian educational system.

Key Words: Educational Reforms, Educational Policy, Nigerian Educational Policy

Introduction

In the world over, policy instrument generally exists as a vital tool for effective organizational coordination. When policies are well envisioned, accurately articulated and

appropriately applied, they are a potent resource for actualizing and maintaining organizational cohesion. In this way quality policy instrument stands as a critical tool for organizational success and exists as a crucial factor to organizational virility and resilience. No wonder then policy instrument is widely considered as a critical factor in the whole framework of organizational life.

As a vital tool to the quality and value of the overall life of an organization quality policy instrument can help to effectively bestir organizational players to reach for those helpful resources and tools that are essential for the evolvement of a meaningful venture. This is why it can be safely argued that the role of policy instrument to organizational health and competitiveness cannot be overemphasized. In fact, the role of policy instrument in the life and health of the organizational is nonnegotiable (Stone, 2011). For its critical importance to organizational success and sustained competitiveness, proper policy instrument is to the organization what grease is to the joints of the connecting rods of a machine. It provides that organizing wheel to coordinate and position the organization for effective and purposeful pursuit and attainment of set organizational goals.

The policy framework of an organization amongst other things, then, occupies the heart of organization's reach and contributes maximally to the maintenance of organizational cohesion. In education, policy instrument particularly in the district and state levels serves as a very important and critical tool to achieving direction on educational issues and reaching success. As a critical tool for organizational system's coordination, it must be introduced to every segment or department of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). That is why it should be allowed to inform and form the organizing nucleus for the cohesion and coordination of constituting units of the organization. An effective policy instrument for the most times serves to provide the rudder, that galvanizing glue or at best that pot of convergence for meaningful engagement of collective organizational task or project.

As such, it offers a reliable handle and a reference resource for effective management of peoples on the one hand, and aids the discovery of relevant resources, on the other, for the achievement of robust organizational outcomes (Stone, 2011). Systems then that exist without policies or which do with weak or bad policies stand the risk of losing that organizing wand to rallying effective engagement and reengagement of the project of organizational value or purpose. Hence, policies, particularly good ones, are essential to systems' or organizational success (Russo, 2015).

In Nigeria for instance, policy instrument particularly in education has existed as a regular referent for many interventions in educational programs and processes. Right from the colonial era till date policy has often been sought to either address or point a pathway for style and quality of education to be pursued or offered (Fabunmi, 2005). It remained an instrument of choice in the strategic plan of education in this country. With the spate of use; allusion and evocation to policy instrument in the country it can be safely suggested that the history of education in Nigeria right from the colonial days is almost equidistant with the history of policy use in Nigeria's educational sector (Ogunu, 2000). In various instances policy instrument has been sought and applied to provide the channel for desired standards in the educational sector to be properly articulated, well crystalized and resolutely pursued. It has for the most part employed to serve as a navigating compass for determining and charting the course of action and maneuvering emerging and daunting challenges. In its application, policy instrument has recurrently been resorted to for normative guide (Osokoya, 2002).

For the importance and criticality of policy instruments to organizational life and successful pursuit of set organizational goals, this paper takes a careful look at the processes and factors that come together to inform and shape the formation and formulation of these policy instruments. It examines how these processes and factors affect and define the quality and efficacy of the policies that eventually emerge to shape and inform educational endeavors in the world with specific reference to the Nigerian case. It questions how much effort is being made to know apart the role and extent these factors intervene and sometimes significantly intrude to determine the content of these policies and their effectiveness in shaping educational practices. In this way, it argues for a more holistic and careful approach to the consideration of policy formulation and calibration especially in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

It is also a commonplace knowledge that reaching a consensus among policymakers and people in government (often times politicians) on the need to reform and improve the educational sector employing policy change or policy adjustment is hardly an issue (Ravitch, 2016). However, the convergence of thought on the need to reform the educational system for more effective education of the learner has not always produced the desired outcome; namely effective and productive turnaround in the educational sector.

In the face of this fact, stakeholders do not seem to immediately decipher where the snag in their effort to effectively reform the educational system through policymaking and adjustment lies. What seems to have readily eluded consensual agreement among players in the act of reforming the educational system of the country has been and remains identifying, involving and paying particular attentions to all the interests and tools that often converge to shape the tone and focus of the policies that emerge for the pursuit of these intended reforms. It is obvious that efforts directed at evolving an effective policy for an enduring and meaningful educational reform are, more often than not, met by politically informed interests, personal gains, sometimes misguided emphasis, restricted scope or even inappropriate application that are mostly glossed over in the whole policy making processes. The preponderance of these in the processes of policy evolution, change or adjustment, in some instances, result in policy somersault that do the growth and progress of the learning process and invariably the learner no good. The Nigerian situation is an apt example.

The reality of this development, therefore, prompts the need for a review of the methods and processes that are employed in engaging and pursuing proper educational reforms in our system through policymaking and adjustment. It certainly calls for reappraisal and re-conception of the policymaking processes; one that is directed at discovering a new understanding of the policymaking process. That is an understanding that includes not just the expansion of the scope for making policies but also one that incorporates the identification and effective consideration of the role and impact of apparently remote variables on the policymaking process and the eventual policies.

Thus, this paper sets out to discuss and attempt to respond to the following ensuing questions:

- a) What are the existing processes for the formation and formulation of educational policies in Nigeria?
- b) How have factors sometimes remote to the educational practices and processes intruded to organize and shape the eventual policies that are relied upon for direction in educational endeavor?
- c) In what ways may the impact of these factors and sometimes processes be curtailed such that the policies that emerge in the policymaking rooms do not have the dent of the intrusiveness of these factors?

Approaches to the Formulation of Educational Reforms

Ordinarily, it would be expected that a well articulated vision for engaging the issue of educational policy reform should be broad-based and expansive enough to stir an inclusive effort and offer a wide ranging scope. It would readily be conceived that every policy reform effort intentioned for evolving a solid, time relevant and effective instrument to productively address the challenges in the educational system should be elastic enough to accommodate and effectively engage all the factors that agglomerate to inform the final quality of the policy frame that emerges.

In which case, such effort would have to be broad based, widely inclusive, strategically adaptive and multidisciplinary in frame. Now, for the fact that educational issues or at best challenges in the education of the learner are for most times hydra-headed and for some other times multifaceted in nature (Fullan 2015; Friedman, 2007), the quality and value of the content of the policy instruments evolved to address these issues cannot be seen to be less enriched to effectively respond to these challenges if not surmount them. In a word then, evolving an effective policy instrument expected to achieve the desired results must include a structural design for an applicative engagement of eclectic resources relevant to the issues at cause and offering the right and solid frame and guide or lead to decisively confront and address them.

These resources, as it were, would have to be such that they are not only needful and helpful but also adaptive or pliable for the cause for which they are sought and deployed. This would mean then that efforts to reform the system of education for improved outcomes would deliberately be tended to seek out those resources that are useful, effective and relevant for the evolvement of suitable policy instruments that address the issues or challenges that confront the educational system at a given time. This pattern or posture to the formulation or formation of policy frames for educational improvement and transformation would appear to be a given in any given system and for anyone who sincerely wants a true and effective reform of the system. But this, unfortunately, is rarely the case in many educational systems. Rather what we regularly find is a wide range of policy instruments formulated with the most restrictive scope delineations introduced from time to time, expected to magically address the issues and challenges confronting the educational system and surmount them.

In most instances, we were presented with policy statements that for most times did not reflect their supposedly adaptive quality and suitability to the needs of the educational system

(Fabunmi, 2005). The policy instruments sometimes would seem to be addressing issues and demands that are either nonexistent or not immediately an issue of concern to the system. In fact, what often is apparently embedded in the reform statements that we had is quick direct fix it model with limited scope delineation. That is a product that does not present an in-depth capture of the issues involved and one that does not clearly spell out the guidelines for efforts to be employed to effectively nip the perceived problem in the bud. This unfortunately presents the not too recommending outlook of the approaches to educational reforms in the recent times. We opine that to some extent constituted the bane of the effectiveness of meaningful educational reform efforts in Nigeria. Hence, one is stirred to ask why this trend and, why has it for the most part shaped the history of educational reform in our country.

The response to this wonder is not farfetched. Over the decades, we have experienced for the most times, two basic approaches to addressing the issue of educational reform in Nigeria. First, the one of cut and fix interventions and secondly, the unreflective use of policy instrument from elsewhere. The cut and fix interventions as an approach to educational reform simply has to do with the perception of identified or experienced issues and challenges in the system of education as arising from linear frames of interaction and connectedness. In this frame, problems are viewed and engaged as emanating from a singular causes that demand single direct solution. In this approach, educational issues or challenges are sought, solutions in reform efforts proffered with an understanding of direct concrete causes and effects relationships. In this manner, the identified possible trigger of the challenge or issue is taken as the main motivation for the crafting of the policy instrument or other related measures.

But it must be state that educational issues are not typically linear either in nature or in presentation. They do not come in the guise of direct simple causes and effects eliciting quick direct and simple application of remedies that ignore the interconnectedness of factors that inform the presentation of the issues. Rather, issues in education and in the education of the learner emerge as more of intertwined systemic puzzles that demand systemic handle of engagement and approaches (Senge, P. M., Cambron-McCabe, N. Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., 2012). They often come as multipronged and multifaceted challenges that very often defy quick fix interventions but careful and extensively rigorous study and painstaking engagement. Thus, engaging the issue of policy instrument use to effectively address educational challenges invariably calls for much more than direct employment of cut and fixes interventions (Imhangbe,

2014). This is an interventionist approach informed by belief in linear links of direct cause and effect in educational issues. This is why educational issues, for the most times, necessarily demand eclectic synergies of ideas and approaches. They require the consideration and inclusion of all factors; intervening, dependent and independent, both immediate and remote, in crafting and evolving the tools and measures that would effectively address and resolve these issues (Stone, 2011).

To this extent then, the posture of seeing educational issues in the light of direct cause and effect relationship or correlation is a mismatched model of engagement, for educational issues, as earlier observed, do not exist nor present as linear vessel of challenges. This is why it is curious to see that one way directional approach or the application of streamlined ideas was repeatedly adopted to attempt resolution and stemming of educational issues in our educational sector. Since seeing educational issues in direct cause and effect relationship is a mismatched model of engagement, attempting to engage educational issue in this stead would lead to products and outcomes that are below par or rarely desired. No wonder then the outcomes of these policies and policy reforms that were evolved out of restricted vision, undue accentuation of direct cause and effect relationships in educational issues and paying blind eyes to potent impact of intervening variables in the provocation of educational issues have continued to leave more issues to be grappled with than they have stemmed. This may explain the reason why many of the prescriptions, often hurriedly done, offered for the resolution of educational issues have failed to stand the test of time and consistently incited the need for their rarefication, review and adjustment to address the educational issues that have unfortunately continued to haunt and linger.

Besides, another snag to the effective use of policy reform instrument to attempt to address issues in education is the wholly, unreflective introduction, application or indulgence of conceptualization or reform instrument used elsewhere. It is obvious that many of the reform policies employed and adopted for the most times in Nigeria have been reform instruments either conceived, envisioned or used elsewhere. While this practice may not be totally unacceptable, it is, however, worrisome to find that the application of these reform instruments is done wholly without much reflective engagement and analysis for appropriateness, suitability and effectiveness in the face of prevailing environmental and cultural nuances and adaptations. In this way we have had an educational system framework that is well thought out and well-

articulated but which failed to yield the desired outcomes. Since the desired outcomes were not forthcoming as envisaged and expected, the development that followed, as it were, was high policy attrition rate. All in the bid to set the standards right and achieve the desired quality.

But this in turn did not engender the denouement that was sought. Rather it gave rise to a system that for the most times became the domain of varied strands or pieces of reform instruments or policy statements that hardly cohered and rarely offered the elusive pathway to the desired goal. In some cases, the newer interventions, in terms of policy introduction, to stem the potentially ugly tide in the system did little or nothing to either curtail or curb the instability and the poor standard of education that the system came to be regularly associated with. What it did, rather, in many instances was to repeatedly differ the rainy days. In this way, current issues and challenges were either practically carried over to the future or met with quick fix interventions or crash remedy applications. But these interventions measures neither proffered better solution nor construe well with the structures and frames already in place to spur meaningful outcomes. What apparently occurred, however, was an unfortunate blend of diverse and sometimes seemingly uncomplimentary reform instruments and policy statements that are either contradictory or not just in proper alliance. Hence, they would neither offer the right direction nor spur the desired outcome.

The preponderance of this practice, therefore, resulted in some instances, policy somersault. The current UTME and Post UTME screening exercise jostle between the regulatory body and universities offers a ready example. These developments in the system would later translate into high policy turnover rate. Others include the drastic transition from the 6, 5, 4 system to the 6,3,3,4, the wholesome introduction of the vocational and technical school systems and the like. As expected, this did the learner little or no good in terms of the quality of education he/she received. In the face of these occurrences one fact resonated. That is that, these policy instruments were either poorly thought through or hurriedly adopted. As a result, they failed to capture all of the real issues and specific needs of the effective education of the people in our terrain. They were basically an insertion that barely fit. In the bid to close this gap between what was obtainable and what exactly was needed regular introduction and reintroduction of systems, syllabus and curriculum formats, new educational structures and duration of study became the preferred alternative.

But studies (House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, & Gupta, V., 2004) have shown that no one remedy or solution enjoys universal application and efficacy. This means that no one approach, principle, a reform instrument crafted with specific purposes and motivations possesses the magic wand to be relevant, effective and adaptive to all situations and circumstances. There can hardly be, therefore, any one particular policy frame articulated and crafted somewhere in the world that reserves the universal application; one that can be held to defy and surmount all peculiarity snags and situational definitions and odds or limitations irrespective of its potent content and paradigmatic attractiveness. Remedies and solutions to challenges and issues are more often than not moderated by environmental, cultural and personality nuances and exigencies.

This is what the Education Policy in British Tropical Africa (1925) foresaw when it stipulated that, “education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life, adopting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas as an agent of growth and evolution” (p.4). This fact has been reechoed by Fafunwa (1974), Uwakweh (2000) and many others who further substantiating the truism in the fact, advocated for a uniquely Nigerian policy system for education that would not only be relevant and adaptive but also culturally endearing enough to spur the required growth and development both in human capital development and technological advancement (Ayisi & Ayisi, 2014).

However, it is curious to find that despite these instructive guide better part of our educational policy thrust, even after the colonial era, has been informed by this belief that a given policy frame that worked creditably well in different clime must work in Nigeria’s with little or no reflective engagement or adaptation. Consequently, we have had to live with the experience of direct and unreflective introduction and application of policy frames and instruments in our system with the least adaptive analysis and alignment for suitability, effectiveness and practicability.

This is why it can be confidently suggested that the way policy and reforms efforts have been engaged and approached needs review and rerouting. It needs a rethink, an expanded approach and invariably a re-envisioning. Our educational system deserves much more than it has been offered. The approaches adopted have neither worked nor produced the goods. It is

obvious that we cannot continue on this pathway of wholesome and rather unreflective adoption of pieces of policy instrument that originate elsewhere without the right rigorous applicability and suitability assessment for relevance and effectiveness. It is apparent that the time is here now more than ever before when all stakeholders in the business of formulation and design of our policy instrument must expand and broaden their scope of engagement in the policymaking processes to incorporate and include the consideration of all factors that converge to inform and influence the value and quality of our policy statements (Friedman, 2007 & Fullan, 2015).

Besides, it is pertinent to note that educational policies evolved in these past few decades have largely been given and applied as abstractions with contents and designs presented to be free from human influences and interests. Often, they are touted as having the magic wand to tackle the problems in the education sector in a head-on or fix it manner; sold with the posture, that in an overarching way, these policies, howbeit their origin and composition processes, would decisively subdue and submerge all identified perceptible educational problems there are at a given time. But the stark truth is that they do not, as they have not. They are just as a human creation as sometimes the problems they are created to address, having the shortcomings and intrusions that could impede and impair.

Influences of the Policy Making Process

Educational policies are no doubt products of human activity. If educational policies at whatever level of learning process are human invention and not some abstracted infusion, independent of human influence and construction, then, they are necessarily the handiwork of human beings with their baggage of presentation. It is a truism that these human beings who become policymakers or opinion leaders in the policy articulation and evolvement process cannot be fully conceived aside their biases, environmental and social conditioning, historical and cultural influences, personal and political agenda and differing affiliations (Stone, 2011). Being human beings, therefore, with these ideas and influences, they operate with different idiosyncrasies, theories of action and ideological/philosophical worldviews that shape their opinions and choices of actions. They view life and issues sometimes almost differently and variedly.

These human beings become policymakers. They come into the policymaking room with this baggage called the self that cannot articulate and create policies completely stripped or devoid of the influences and loyalties that they bring to the room. So, what you find most of the

time emerging from the policy making rooms is either the opinion of the ruling elites, the dominant, more influential group or a combination and articulation of the influences of that which the policymakers bring into the policy making room. The end product in presentation is often what is good for the people. This comes through as very interesting.

Besides, the theory or theories of action that the policymakers bring into the room to create policies are not also devoid of biases and influences. These biases and influences can range from political, social, historical, environmental, cultural, to dominating school of thought. In most cases, in the policymaking process, the theory or theories of action policymakers bring to the room are allowed to significantly configure the policies there from often serving as a delimiting frame and package for the policies they shape. At some other times, the emerging policies are culled *line-hook-and-sinker*. In many instances, policies are made with the carvings and shaping of the influences, not excluding theoretical frames, with little or no much reflection.

While these may not be a cause of major concern as these are almost a given, there is, however, a caveat to it that certainly is. This is in the reality that while policymakers are informed by individual and collective influences, the influences that inform their line of reasoning and action are in turn informed by other influences that may be quite removed from the milieu for which the intended policy is designed to impact. This raises a question. The question that it invariably generates is; how often or to what extent is the issue of secondary influences of educational policy considered in the review and evaluation of policies that are made or that have come to be obsolete or out-rightly unhelpful?

Choice of Educational Reform Policy Contents

Once intended policies are articulated or conceived, the next thing that policy sponsors do is to persuade its acceptance and implementation (Ravitch, 2016). This persuasion process is often times nothing other than political negotiations between parties and opinion groups. As such, policies become the vehicles by which proposed political ideas or the opinions of the dominant group, the more effective negotiators or lobbyists are sold and subsequently adopted and implemented (Stone, 2011). This appears to be most recurrently employed approach if it has not become the norm. So, it seems almost inconceivable to see this expunged from the modus operandi of policymaking process or it coming to an end soon. It is basically obvious that formal and informal negotiations are as an integral part of the policymaking creation and adoption

process as the ensuing policies themselves. But does this mean a nonnegotiable case is being made for the maintenance and entrenchment of the status quo, certainly not.

For every political input in policy formulation and implementation in the society we live in today there are always the influence and moderation effects of the ruling elites. This is the truism that Mills (1958, 1967) makes the case for. He argues that every society in the contemporary world is either blessed or bedeviled by a group of ruling elites. These, according to him, have greater access to the means of power with accompanying persuasive wheel, and as a result, their preferences or leanings often prevail. Even though the argument provided by Mills (1958, 1967) for espousing this idea of the ruling elites may have some logical weaknesses as identified by Dahl (1958, 2013), the point, however, that Mills tries to make of the existence and the influence of the ruling elites in the society is realistically persuasive.

There exists in most societies today, a collect few who having greater access to the means of power, be it political, economic and military, often have their preferences prevail in the choices that the societies they live in, make. One thing needs to be observed here, nonetheless, the policy making and implementation processes that we have attempted to review here provide for public consumption, no doubt. But if the educational policies that have emerged in these decades are carefully examined, the likelihood is to find that most of these policies were reflections of the views and opinions of some select few who at specific times wielded political wheel, economic power and social influence to persuade others to accept their ideas.

Need for Broader Perspective to Educational Policymaking Processes

If this can be safely argued, then it can be held that the making of good and effective policies that would truly reform the educational system for improved learning and better performance outcomes may not lie in cause and effect approach or change and replace interventions. Rather, it is to be found in the careful review, analysis and adjustment of all the factors and players that come to shape and inform the steps, efforts, processes and actual policies that emerge to reform the educational system. These would include looking at and determining how much and in what ways political ideologies, theoretical framers, preferences of ruling elites, agendas of policymakers, economic gains of book publishers and curriculum designers and bureaucratic structures and processes would be allowed to shape educational policies, interventions and efforts to reform the educational system.

Conclusion

No policy statement or instrument is devoid or immune to the influences and moderations that shape and configure them. These influences; whether human, cultural or environmental, can have overbearing influence. Hence the impact of their influence cannot be safely ignored or excluded. They agglomerate to constitute part of the essential intervening variables that actively converge to define the potency and quality of the policy statement. The proper placement then of the quality of the policies that emerge in the final analysis cannot be effectively accomplished without recourse to the moderations and influences of these intervening variables. This is because they exist as inalienable factors in the overall processes and patterns for the formulation of the policies that come to be.

Since the strength, quality and relevance of policy statements to an existing educational cause can be actively parlayed by factors that are sometimes remote to the focus and circumscription of the policy effort, the need for an all-inclusive, broad based and strategically extensive considerations and admissions in policy making processes cannot be overemphasized. Policy statements are believed to have wide ranging applications. Their effects also could be ripple. So, persons who may not immediately be related or connected to the cause/purpose of the statements could get very interested and invested in what finally becomes the content of the policy statements. This development is what could contribute to making the policy making process to be an all-comers affair where everyone who senses that what would be the content of final policy document could affect his/her interests gets involved in the process directly or indirectly to influence it for his/her cause or interest.

Until the stakeholders in the policymaking process take this development into serious consideration, the policy instruments of our educational system may continue to grapple with the snags arising from these variables that have bedeviled them (policy instruments) over the years. These variables no doubt; whether remote or immediate, must be viewed as important players in the processes that shape the articulation of the policies that eventually emerge. It is, in so doing, we can suggest, that the invisible but potent impact of these variables can be brought to the fore, identified, analyzed and carefully addressed. This would mean exposing the hidden influences of these variables and ensuring that they are carefully considered, evaluated and effectively isolated if need be.

That is that they would be considered to the extent that they can be accommodated in view of the strength, relevance and quality that the intended policy is desired to have. They would also be carefully examined to the extent of determining how much of their influences can be minimized or completely removed from the entire policy frame. Also they are to be examined to the extent that their attendant influences in between and how much of their intrusions can be effectively stemmed from interfering with the value and quality of the policy statement are desired. Where these are well worked out and the known influences and intrusions of the snag variables are well streamlined, it would then be expected that the policy that emerges would have all the ingredients of persuasion to not just address issues in focus but also to fend-off and resist the unhelpful influences of intrusive and enervating variables that could undermine them.

Recommendations

- 1) Since no policy statement or instrument is devoid of or immune to the influences and moderations that shape and configure them there is the need to always opt for an all-inclusive, broad based and strategically extensive considerations and admissions in policy making processes.
- 2) It is important to guide against unreflective application or adoption of strands of policy instruments raised elsewhere in order to avoid mismatch pieces of policy statements that hardly cohere and unlikely to offer the frames for the attainment of desired educational outcomes
- 3) There is the urgent need to admit and engage those apparently remote and seemingly innocuous variables that do often converge to potently influence both the policy making process and the instrument that eventually emerges.

It is important to appreciate that, educational issues and challenges are hardly linear either in presentations or in their true nature. So, the effort to address these issues using direct cause and effect model of approach needs to be reviewed.

- 4) It is expected that those directly involved in the policy making process do honest self-examination to ascertain what truly motivates their option for a particular policy frame and to see how much of public good than personal interests and/or political pressure play a significant role in this.

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