

Political Patronage and the State Economic Performance in Africa: Evidence from South Africa

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(Abstract): *Political patronage via state jobs is global phenomenon dispensed by governing political party or parties but this phenomenon in Africa lead to poor institutional quality or performance of the state. The study used empirical dataset from a series of roundtable meetings and a conference held by the Public Service Commission, South Africa. It also explored the existing theories of political patronage. In South Africa, political patronage leads to bureaucratic frustrations in recruitments and irregular appointments evident in high turnover of staff and increased suspension rates. It further leads to difficulties in ensuring effective retention strategies. In addition, the study finds that the state has only at the local government level enacted a law that promotes meritocratic recruitment patterns in order to professionalise municipalities. The study concludes that strong and powerful institutions of regulations and oversight are desirable in Africa to enforce the true meritocratic culture that promotes excellence in the civil service.*

Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s many African states adopted a multiparty democracy based on two distinct systems of governance. Countries such as Mozambique, Gabon, Ghana, among others, adopted a presidential system of governance based on the US philosophy while countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, etc., adopted a parliamentary system based on the Westminster governance tradition. Other states such as Senegal, Cape Verde and Namibia adopted a combination of the two systems of governance (Nijzink *et al*, 2006; Kopecky, 2011). These political changes were brought up by the political parties, which were seen then as liberation movements. However, soon after this democratization process, many African states were bedevilled by many problems such as poor institutional quality or poor economic performance, unconstitutional change of government, political violence and so forth. Poor quality or performance of the state, which is the main focus of this paper, is blamed on political patronage, among others. It is worth noting that political party structures undoubtedly can either limit or enhance the powers and operations of the state institutions including the legislature. The ensuing debate in the public administration or political science scholarship is whether political patronage promotes or hinders institutional performance or quality.

Therefore, this paper addresses the following questions: does political patronage via state jobs improve or hinder the quality or performance of the state institutions? Is it possible for

political parties to do away with political patronage in the state institutions? Rival theoretical explanations are advanced by different scholars on the relationship between political patronage and state economic performance. Exploring these theories and also using empirical primary dataset from a series of the Public Service Commission's roundtable discussions held across South Africa, this paper attempts to answer these research questions to understand why the governing political party or parties dispense political patronage via state jobs during its or their political term in government. The empirical data from the roundtable meetings by the Public Service Commission was drawn largely from all the nine provinces including the centre. Approximately, a total of three hundred and thirteen senior officials from national and provincial state institutions attended the roundtable meetings. Most of these senior state officials were drawn largely from human resources management and labour relations directorates. These roundtable discussions took place between October and November 2012 at different venues and dates.¹ This was followed by international developmental state conference organised by the South African Public Service Commission in November 2014.

It is not surprising that much of the writings about political patronage in the political science or public administration literature focused more on developing nations, Africa in particular. This is because many post-colonial African states were castigated as predatory, patrimonial, choiceless democracies, kleptocracy, rent-seeking, etc. As a result, political patronage, which is associated with names like political appointment system or cadre deployment in South African context is seen as immoral and a democratic pathology, which is associated with malfunctioning of the governance systems. Therefore, political patronage is conceptualised as an exchange relationship in which a variety of goods and services are traded between the principal and the agent. Usually these varieties of goods and services are not traded within the confines of the law and or regulations. This simply means that the way in which these goods and services are traded between the principal and the agent does not follow any legal prescripts. In order words, political patronage or simply cadre deployment is not a legislated policy of government thus often leading non-compliance with recruitment or rather human resource management laws and regulations. Many scholars (e.g. Kopecky, 2011, etc.) agree with the conceptualisation of this concept.

From a principal-agent perspective or what Max Weber (1948, p.196) calls 'super' and 'subordinate' relationship in a political setting, the principal simply refers to a politician as an elected public representative who is not purely a administrative figure, whereas the agent refers to the state official who is appointed presumably on the basis of qualifications to occupy specialised office either on contractual basis or permanent basis. The principle of 'super-subordinate' relations in the institutions means there is a regulated supervision of the

¹ See the PSC Report titled "*Report on the Roundtable Discussions on the State of Human Resource, Grievance and Discipline Management in the Public Service*", December 2013.

lower office by the higher ones and this principle is found in all institutional structures of the economy. Politics is about power relations between the principal and the agent. The agent is hired and rewarded to implement policy preferences of the principal. The political principal, on the other hand, has the leverage to offer legislation, access to state structures and or job opportunities in exchange for various benefits such as electoral support, campaign contributions, party loyalty, exclusive information and expertise available from the agent.

Coalition Theory

This theory focuses on government formation, which simply means on how governing political party or parties enter and construct and consolidate their own government identity (Wood, 1998; Furlong, 1989; Brehn & Scott, 1997). According to this theory, one way to do exactly that is through dispensing patronage politics via state jobs whereby political principals distribute and manage state institutions' jobs in order to bargain over policy output. For this school of thought, political patronage or rather political appointment system is an 'inherent' feature of all governing political parties in government worldwide and there is no problem in dispensing the system at all. However, there are variations between countries on the quality and integrity of bureaucrats appointed based on political patronage rather than merit. It is argued that all governing political parties widely apply this political tool to tame, control and regulate the behaviour of the state agents as they may not be entirely trusted, especially as they deal daily with public monies and other state resources. Even countries castigated as developmental states such as Malaysia, Brazil, China, Japan, South Korea, etc., apply the system at varying degree.

In similar tone, Du Gay (2000, p.115) argues that political principals dispense political patronage via state jobs to tame the power of agency officials and to enhance their (politicians) own positions within government. According to this theory, political patronage via state jobs is not only about controlling but also about ensuring that the state agents achieve the principals' policy objectives particularly given the danger of the opposition political parties' agents to derail and sabotage the governing political party's policy vision and objectives. That said, political patronage is therefore necessary, according to this theory at least formally, to be widely used in state institutions for the following reasons;

- The system provides the governing political party or parties' leaders with the incentives to maintain party organisations by distributing selective incentives to party activists and elites in exchange for organisational loyalty.
- The system helps political parties to develop 'clientelistic' networks to maintain party electoral support. This claim is corroborated by other studies that political patronage helps to buy support from party activists thus mitigating the risk of intra-party

rebellion in the face of electoral defeat or unpopular decisions made by the governing political party or parties in government.

- Patronage appointees serve as an eye and ear of the political principals always monitoring the level of support for the principal's policy goal within the state institutions.
- Patronage politics provides synergy between political principals and state agents.

Party System Theory

The party system theory also agrees that the conduct of political parties influences the performance of the state institutions including the legislatures since government is constructed by political parties. They can either limit or enhance the powers and operations of the state institutions. According to this theory, certain party systems are able to limit the extent or level of political principals or political parties dispensing political patronage. This theory distinguishes between 'fragile party system' and 'competitive party system'. One basic difference is on the level of competitiveness, meaning the likelihood that the incumbent governing political party or parties can be defeated. GrzymanA-Busse (2003) argues that lack of robust competition between programmatic political parties in the state results into ineffective and inefficient state institutions evident in poor institutional quality or performance thus allowing a governing party or parties to dispense political patronage via state jobs. This in turn leads to corruption and poor governance, which are used widely by the World Bank, Transparency International, etc., as indices for measuring the quality or performance of the state institutions worldwide. In such situation where the state is inefficient due to poor governance systems and or corruption, the governing political party or parties legitimises itself or themselves based on their ability to reward supporters through selective incentives rather than their ability to generate the kinds of public goods necessary for human and economic development as well as growth. Empirical evidence suggests that the African continent depicts both stable or competitive and fragile political party systems.

As noted by O'Dywer (2006 in Kopecky, 2011, p. 715), patronage politics or behaviour should be expected in fragmented political party systems but our analysis points to the contrary. In a fragmented party system, normally a single political party dominates either the Executive branch or the Legislative branch of government or both. Although, this does not suggest that post-apartheid South Africa has a fragile party system, the reality in the new South Africa is that the governing African National Congress (ANC) has dominated both the Executive and the Legislature both at the centre and the periphery, except in the Western Cape Province. This dominance by a single political party has practically led to politicisation of the public service in South Africa. Johnson (cited in Mail & Guardian, 2014, p. 5) said "the reality is that the public service is politicised at least three or four layers down and often

further.” A single dominant party normally monopolises access to the state resources, which sometimes results into state resource exploitation through corruption by both the political principals and the state agents. In addition, Anne Pitcher argues that fragile political party system may be competitive owing to the increased number of opposition parties, which frequently rise and decline or merge (Pitcher, 2012, p. 80).

South Africa has competitive party system, which suggests that there is political stability, but there may not be less exploitation of state resources and less application of political patronage. Proponents of party system theory argue that competitive party systems, as in South Africa and Ghana, for example, constrain political principals from exploiting state resources and also dispensing patronage via state jobs. These scholars argue that party competition assists to moderate the behaviour of not only agency officials but also the behaviour of the governing political party or parties that fear punishment from voters in the next elections and from strong opposition party or parties.

Undoubtedly, competitive party system persuades the incumbent governing party or parties to establish institutions of regulations and oversight that would limit and penalise any activities of corruption and other forms of state resource exploitation. These institutions of regulations and oversight are the national and sub-national legislatures, which deserve a little debate here. Anticipating electoral defeat under the conditions of fierce political competition, the incumbent governing party or parties create ‘independent institutions’ of regulations and oversight such as the legislatures as an insurance against permanent exclusion when they may find itself or themselves in the opposition in the future (Kopecky, 2011, p.714). Nevertheless and regarding the institutional capacity of these regulatory institutions, several studies have found huge variations in terms of the independence and institutional capacity or quality of many African legislatures. Many African legislatures, for example, with few exceptions of Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana have been found to be characterised by very weak and vulnerable national legislatures and fragile party politics (Barkan, 2009; Johnson, 2011; Barkan, Mattes, Mozaffar & Smiddy, 2010). But these exceptional institutions of regulations and oversight have not been practically able to curb exploitation of state resources by either the state agents or political principals. More so, they have not been able to deal decisively with political patronage via state jobs in any country.

In South African context, for example, other institutions of oversight that support democracy and also enhance the work of the legislatures include the Office of the Auditor-General, Office of the Public Protector, and Office of the Public Service Commission. These institutions often produce oversight reports that reveal the level of financial waste (irregular expenditure, unauthorised expenditure, fruitless and wasteful expenditure) and level of non-compliance with laws and regulations. They further reveal the level of corruption and

impropriety in the civil service as well as the level of irregular appointments, among others. It is worth noting that several studies on the performance of African legislatures had focused on national level. But our analysis backed up by practical experience reveals that there are both commonalities and variations between the legislatures at the centre and the periphery in terms of institutional performance or quality and this also varies between political terms of incumbent political party or parties.

As said earlier, the liberal South Africa is considered as having the 'least' competitive party system as compared to its democratic African counterpart-Ghana. Ghana's political party system is considered one of the best examples of 'highly' competitive two party systems in sub-Saharan Africa (Morrison, 2004; Morrison & Hong, 2006). It is true that competitive politics increase the incentives for the opposition parties to uncover and expose political corrupt behaviour of the political principals and agents. But is not true that, as argued by party system theory, fearing the opposition party or parties and the voters, the governing political party or parties through their elites are more likely to abstain from exploiting the state and its resources as well as controlling executive political corruption (Della Porta, 2004; Kopecky, 2011; Carbone, 2007; and GrzymanA-Busse, 2003; 2007). The media in South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Nigeria have in the past reported about many examples of political patronage and political corruption. The resultant outcome has been poor institutional performance or quality of the state in relations to economic growth and state financial management, as evident in growing spike of community service delivery related protests and high rates of unsatisfactory audit outcomes as well as high profile political corruption investigations.

Our analysis however shows that despite being considered the best liberal nation and having competitive party systems in Africa, patronage politics via state jobs to party loyalists and supporters were common practices in both South Africa and Ghana. For instance, Kopecky (2011) found that there is a very small area in the state on Ghana and South Africa that is not reached by governing political party or parties at all but certain policy areas are given more prominence than others when the political principals consider dispensing patronage politics and exploiting state resources. According to Kopecky (ibid, p.725), Mbeki's presidency was marked by far more aggressive and overtly political patterns of political patronage via state jobs and appointments. That said and despite having least competitive party system, the governing political party (ANC) in South Africa faces relatively weak and fragmented opposition parties both at the centre and at the sub-national levels. This finding suggests that there is very little difference in the depth and level of patronage politics in developing countries whereby party systems are considered either fragile or stable. Our claim is in consistent with the claim made by other scholars (e.g. Pitcher, 2012; Kopecky, 2011; GrzymanA-Busse, 2003; Carbone, 2007).

As said that patronage politics and or corruption is a global phenomenon GrzymanA-Busse (2007) gives an example of East Europe. GrzymanA-Busse observes examples of massive and rampant political corruption despite well established institutions of regulations and oversight such as the legislatures. Similarly in Africa, Reinikka and Svensson (2004) show how the bulk of the education grant meant for the schools in Uganda was 'captured' by the local state officials and politicians. Political corruption is defined as embezzlement of state resources by high-level political principals mainly in the Executive such as the state Presidents and Ministers and in extreme case it may also involve even the entire political class in the Legislature (Chang & Golden, 2001).

Therefore, it could be argued that although competitive party system encourages effective monitoring and an oversight of the governing party by the opposition parties and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. civil society, the legislature, business sector, the judiciary), in practice it does not inhibit the abuse or exploitation of the state resources by political parties, political principals and state agents. However, existence of political patronage or corruption by high-level politicians in the Executive branch of government does not necessarily mean that there is inadequate and ineffective oversight by independent legislatures. Instead, it does simply show where the political power in practice at a particular time in point lie between the Executive and the Legislature since power is not static as it works like a pendulum. For instance, several studies of African politics have since suggested that the Executive branch of government is more powerful than the legislative branch.

Regarding the 'executive-legislative' relationship, which works like a pendulum, Johnson, for example, gives an example of a magnate in his analysis of the triangle. Johnson argues that the magnet rests in each corner of the triangle and varies in size. The larger the magnet, the greater its pull effects on the metal ball thus its influence over the decision (Johnson, 2011, p.18-19). He further suggests that the corner of the triangle exercising the greater influence has the strongest magnet and is able to pull the metal ball further in its direction. Johnson's analysis is practically applicable to the power relations between the Executive and the Legislature in South Africa in the sense that political power does not always rest in one place but decisions emanating from the Legislature, for instance, had to be negotiated. That is because the legislature at the centre is considered a strong and powerful institution of regulation and oversight but this varies between the political terms of the current governing political party. In addition, what is unknown at the local level is the capacity of this institution at the sub-national level since South Africa has nine sub-national legislatures. Therefore, further research is needed to comparatively analyse the performance and independence of sub-national legislatures in South Africa.

For example, the legislature at the centre generally during Mbeki's era, for example, was perceived to be weak and vulnerable. This is because members of the national legislature often behaved in a conformist manner in order to retain their favour with high-level politicians in the executive such as the President. According to Malesky *et al* (2012, p.767) and Johnson (2011, p.86), conformist behaviour means that individual members of the legislature often do not ask any question(s) that might criticise or embarrass the high-level politicians in the executive or even in the political party. Paul Holden observed members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in South Africa then buckling up under intense political pressure from the executive as well as the governing political party during the Arms Deal scandal hearings. "Who do you think you are, questioning the integrity of the... Ministers and the President" (Holden, 2012, p.117)

Elsewhere in Africa, empirical evidence suggests that the conduct of political parties directly influence executive-legislative relationship, apparently in favour of the executive. In such situations, the legislature becomes incapable to limit the powers of the executive to dispense political patronage and exploitation of state resources. Therefore, it can be inferred that competitive party system neither limit political patronage nor enhance the quality or performance of the state institutions.

Meritocratic Theory

This theory literally rejects political patronage via state jobs as enhancing the performance or quality of state institutions. Proponents of this theory (e.g. Weber, 1948; 1968; Evans & Rauch, 1999; Henderson *et al*, 2007, Miller, 2000; Ritzer, 1975; Dahlstrom, Lapuente & Teorell, 2011; Andreski, 1983, Johnson & Libecap, 1994) argue that political patronage leads to politicisation rather than professionalization of state institutions. Politicisation of the state institutions eventually culminates into poor institutional capacity and lack of accountability on public goods provision as the system is immoral and a democratic pathology. Dahlstrom *et al* (2012, p.656) give an example of the mayor of Spain between 2001 and 2003 who replaced 'merit-recruited' state agents with political appointees. According to these scholars, the Spanish mayor was able to coordinate his corruption intentions with appointees he had himself selected based on political patronage. Conspicuously, the theory of meritocracy argues that poor performance by state agents appointed on political patronage is often blamed on others or covered up by their political principals. Empirical evidence indicates that officials appointed based on political patronage may be recalled at any time once they have lost favour with their political principals. As noted by Kanyane (2006, p.117), with a culture of patronage politics an atmosphere of playing safe is often created, which is not conducive for responsible and accountable bureaucratic institutions. Similarly, Ramphela (2012) agrees that South Africa has not instituted true meritocratic culture that promotes excellence and equality in the entire civil service. Proponents of this theory strongly maintain that people in the state should be appointed on merit because such officials see office holding as a vocation.

For this theory, office holding is not considered a source to be exploited for rents or emoluments nor is considered a usual exchange of services for equivalents (Weber, 1948, p.198-199).

In the study of bureaucracy, Max Weber, for example, advocated for ‘career personnel’ with specialised training and expertise, among others, as the prerequisite for employment in any bureaucratic institutions. Of course, Weber’s work on bureaucracy has a profound impact on our theoretical understanding of how principal-agent relationship within institutions plays out and how the bureaucratic institution developed. Therefore, the theory of meritocracy has intellectual roots from the Max Weber’s study of a bureaucracy.

Moreover, Woodrow Wilsons (1887 in Rosenbloom, 2008, p.57) in his study of a administration also argued for a administration apparatus that is devoid of politics and meddling after he was concerned about the bureaucratic system in America that operated as a bastion for political patronage.² Proponents of this theory suggest that democratic states all over the world should shun away from political patronage via state jobs and embrace a culture of meritocratic recruitment and promotion. They argue that access to institutions of government as an employee should be conditioned on the bases of possession of relevant knowledge, skills and qualification credentials, what Max Weber (1968) refers to as ‘*expert-officialdom*’. This is due to the fact that partly qualified officials in terms of specialised training and examination always enter the state as employees with an understanding that office holding is a vocation. The executive office is separated from the households much as business assets are separated from private fortunes. Proponents of this school of thought give examples of some countries such as Australia, Brazil, Malaysia, China, Japan, UK, etc., that have also introduced a system of tough public civil service examination to select the best potential candidates for the state institutions as agents. The civil service examination system in China, for example, has a created a unique class of ‘*scholar-bureaucrats*’ irrespective of family or party pedigree (Fukai & Fukui, 1992) even if cadre deployment is applied.

Appointments and Promotion Practices in the South African Civil Service

The recruitment practices take a hybrid form meaning that there is no specific recruitment approach being used in the civil service. Political patronage via state jobs or simply cadre deployment is one form of recruitment often used in the civil service but mainly by the political parties through their political principals. This means that there is huge political influence in appointments of state agents and this experience is however similar to other countries such as China, Malaysia, Brazil and so forth. Although, in China’s civil service

² Also see Nelson, 1982; and Skowronek, 1982.

membership and loyalty to the party influence appointments and promotions in the state, there are variations between South Africa and these other countries. Burns (2007 cited in Poocharoen and Brillantes, 2013) argues that although party members in China make up 5% of the total population, they however hold up 80% of the civil service posts. In these other countries educational qualification is a crucial factor for entrance into the state bureaucracy. With China's political patronage system, only the well qualified bureaucrats are deployed to the state institutions as agents while South Africa's cadre deployment system, as suggested by media reports, seems often to deploy the less qualified and or less competent candidates to the state as agents. As Zhang (2014) posits, China's public service has embraced the basic value of '*Confucianism*', which suggests that the first educated bureaucracy is chosen fundamentally on the basis of merit and further based on meritocratic public examination. Even though, state agents are expected to respect discipline, the law and support socialism, only the learned person through university education can be qualified as state agents (*Confucius*).

The PSC Report (2014, p.22) concurs that higher qualifications like Masters Degrees are even more imperative for top-ranking positions in these countries that are considered as developmental states. By 1987 in Thailand, for example, 61% of civil servants from C9 through C11 had Master's degrees or higher while one-fourth of the serving permanent secretaries had Doctoral degrees in their fields of service (Christensen, 1992). Though, South Africa has not yet introduced the tough civil service examination system to select and appoint the best candidates to the state bureaucracy, the country has good policies that promote meritocratic recruitment practices. In other words, the application of political patronage occurs despite the existence of good human resource policies that promote meritocracy. Many policy commentators argue that the problem is not the absence of legislative framework but rather the implementation of these good policies. There was resounding proposal at the PSC Developmental Conference that there is strong need for South Africa to introduce public examination system similar to Brazil, Mauritius, China, Malaysia, etc., to select the best candidates (2014, November 11th).

Furthermore, data from the Public Service Commission's roundtable meetings held throughout South Africa indicates that patronage politics creates bureaucratic frustrations pertaining to recruitment practices in state institutions (PSC Reports, 2013; 2014). It further leads to tension between political principals and the state agents as they sometimes fight about who should be hired or not hired at the institutional level. State agents are often subjected to victimisation and possible suspensions if they fail to comply with the principal's directives on human resources related matters pertaining to recruitments and promotions. As said, the roundtable meetings suggest that there is often political meddling in the administrative functions of the agent.

Political meddling in administrative recruitment process of the agents often leads to inappropriate or irregular appointments. Irregular appoint simply means that laws and regulations governing the recruitment process were not followed and this often revealed by candidates challenging the appointments or promotions or by the external audit process. It simply signifies non-compliance with recruitment laws and regulations in order to favour certain individuals at the expense of the appropriate candidates. There was general consensus during the meetings agree that political meddling is due to lack of trust, suspicion and abuse of power by the political principals, executive authorities in particular (PSC Report, 2013, p. 12). This finding is consistent with media reports that new executive authorities often do not trust public servants, especially more senior state officials like heads of departments who came before them (Mail & Guardian Newspaper, 2014, p.5). The practice of political patronage does not help the South Africa to develop and build a capable, career-oriented and professional civil service.

Undoubtedly, recruitment and promotion processes are the core competencies of the state agents but it is acknowledged that there are few exceptions. For instance, high political principals like the state Presidents have powers of appointing state agents such as judges to the bench of the high Court's (i.e. Constitutional Court and Supreme Court of Appeals) and this is a practice in many countries worldwide. However, the appointment of judicial officials by the President is often based upon the Judicial Service Commission's recommendations. As noted by Max Weber, 'the superior qualification and integrity of federal judges in the United States appointed by the state President is well known, although these judicial officials have been selected primarily in terms of party considerations' (Weber, 1948, p. 201).

Retention strategies in the state are negatively affected by political meddling onto the functions of the agents or rather the administration. Since the retention strategies in South African civil service are limited to the 'counter offer system', it was argued that state institutions are restricted to finding other viable options to retain qualified and competent agents. It was mentioned that many state agents are not always keen to accept the counter offers since the salary grading system only addresses the grading of higher salary notches as a means to retain state agents and excludes the movement between post levels (PSC Report, 2013, p.12). One respondent during the meeting acclaimed "how do you retain an employee whom, you know very well as a manager that, does not add value to the institution?" (30th October 2012).³ This question suggests that there is a problem with state agents appointed primarily on patronage politics without the required and generally prescribed and special examinations, which are prerequisite for employment in modern state institutions. This is because they often lack the capacity to optimally perform the required specialised job since

³ The PSC Roundtable meeting on the 30th October 2012 was held in Limpopo Province.

the official activity demands the full working capacity of the expert official. Another respondent said;

“As a newly appointed Head of Department, you find this person occupying this senior position within the department and you do not even know who and how this person was appointed. You are stuck with this person for ever and you cannot just fire” (PSC Roundtable Meeting, 2012, October 30th).

The paper further reveals that South African public service is characterised by too many ‘on-going acting roles’, especially at the senior management echelon due to high turnover of staff and suspension of some top state agents. The increased on-going acting roles simply suggest leadership instability at the administrative level in the civil service. The absence of sustained administrative leadership in state institutions threatens the build up of institutional memory. As noted by Mail and Guardian Newspaper (2014, p.4), government departments such as Public Works, Basic Education and Local Government at the centre often borne the brunt of the administrative instability at the leadership level. The same holds for some executive departments in the periphery. High staff turnover, particular at more senior management level like heads of departments and other senior state agents, is blamed on lack of trust and suspicion by the political principals. This finding is in consistent with media reports that approximately twenty eight heads of departments at the centre between 2009 and 2014 did not complete their full employment terms of five years. Public Service Commission Report, (2013) correctly argues that stability at the top of state institutions is vital for the effective functioning and performance of the South African civil service.

Although, meritocracy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the state to be developmental (see Rauch & Evans, 2000), it is strongly needed to build a capable, career-oriented and professional civil service in South Africa. The importance of this recruitment path was recognised early in 2000s when the developmental state rhetoric re-surfaced in South African politics. A series of seminars and conferences hence the recent one by the PSC were organised around this issue. A policy discussion document or proposal was produced in 2014 by the state. The concept of meritocracy is based on the foundation that it promises equal opportunities to all job candidates both in the private business and the public sector irrespective of political affiliation and political activism, race, gender, class, etc.

It has been said that South African civil service is characterised by ‘mixed’ recruitment patterns. It has been emphasised by the PSC meetings that political appointees without the necessary qualifications often fail to differentiate between administrative activities of the institution and party activities. The reason may not be that South Africa does not have a law, which prohibit state agents from engaging in party politics or activity while on official duty

and using the state resources. A culture of impunity has emerged in the civil service where state agents simply ignore the existing laws, especially during the elections times and this is not unique to South Africa. Despite the existence of ‘The Hatch Act of 1939’ in the US, for example, the Bush administration in 2006 was found to have violated this Act that prohibits ‘political appointees’ from engaging in political activity while on official state duty and at the federal workplaces.⁴

In 2011 the South African state introduced a law aimed at depoliticising the local government by amending the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act of 2000. This simply suggests that the state started to recognise the benefits commensurate with the notion of meritocracy than political patronage via state jobs. The amendments in the Municipal Systems Act provide that professional qualifications and experience become the criteria to govern the recruitment processes, especially for senior state officials. The Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act of 2011 further provides that senior politicians at any level of the political party or parties’ structures are not to be appointed to the apex of the institutional structure of municipalities as agents. However, the Act made an exemption for state agents, especially political principals, who were already in the state institutions as agents in the sense that the provisions did not apply to them when the Act took effect. This is similar challenge that would face the state when the proposal to introduce public service examination system in South Africa is passed by the Parliament. What would happen to the millions of public servants already in the system as civil servants?

Nevertheless, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act harshly disciplines the state agents at the local level who are deemed corrupt by declaring that re-employment of any dismissed state agent, especially on grounds of financial misconduct, is unlawful for a period of ten years. This legal provision simply suggests that once an agent is dismissed from work on grounds of financial misconduct, such a person will not be appointed in the state at any sphere of government for a period of ten years. The paper argues that, at least formally, this was an important step by the state at the local government level where patronage politics seems to be popularly rife to limit its wide application. Unfortunately, this Act’s application (i.e. the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act, 2011) does not extend to the two other spheres of government (national and provincial). Section 41 (1) (g) of the Constitution of South Africa provides that all spheres of government must “exercise their powers and perform their functions in a manner that does not encroach on the geographic, functional or institutional integrity of government in another sphere” (Constitution, 1996, p. 25).

⁴ The US government during G.W. Bush released a report titled “*Investigation of Political Activities by White House and Federal Agency Officials during the 2006 Midterm Elections*”. US Office of Special Council Report, 2011.

Conclusion

The recruitment and appointment of state agents based on political patronage than meritocracy creates problems of poor strategic planning outputs and capacity deficit at the bureaucratic level pertaining to fiscal management and public goods provision. It also creates institutional instability and loss of institutional memory as evident in increased number of prolonged acting roles as a result of suspensions of more senior state agents by their political principals and high staff turnover. Various successive reports of the Auditor-General South Africa indicate the performance of many state institutions in the country is increasingly regressing 20 after democracy due to lack of capacity, lack of consequences for poor performance, etc. Although, political patronage via state jobs is global phenomenon, the paper acknowledges the variations that exist between South Africa and China, Brazil, Malaysia, Mauritius and so forth. Although the all candidates in China are also expected to be supporting socialism, for instance, political patronage system has created what Fukai and Fukui (1992) calls “*scholar-bureaucrats*” because of the state agents are selected through competitive civil service examination system. This means that educational qualification is a crucial factor for entrance into the state bureaucracy.

Similarly, South Africa has a huge pool of ‘expertly’ trained and qualified labour force to draw from but political meddling during recruitment and promotion processes pose a threat to building a capable, career-oriented and professional civil service. Empirically, the study has found that state officials who deal with human resource issues like recruitment in South Africa want less political meddling in administration. The paper then suggests that where the governing political parties or the political principals see a need to dispense patronage via state jobs, considerations should be given to the ‘cadre’s qualification credentials and integrity. This simply suggests that it is important for politics to justify why a particular chosen candidate has the qualification credentials, competencies, and abilities to meet the job requirements and how the appointment qualifies as an exception to the competitive recruitment practices. The study concludes that stronger and more powerful institutions of regulations and oversight like legislatures are needed to enforce the true meritocratic culture that promotes excellence in the civil service.

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