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Pragmatic Approaches to Patronage

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Pragmatic approaches to patronage

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During 1999–2001, some 7,011 public officials in 16 countries were surveyed to map the strengths and weaknesses of the public sector and to model the potential benefits from reform interventions.¹ The surveys and analyses were undertaken by the World Bank and financed under the Bank-Netherlands Partnership Program (BNPP). BNPP-funded surveys of public officials have been completed in Albania, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bulgaria, six East Caribbean states, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Macedonia and Moldova. Surveys are in preparation for Russia. The programme also provided funds for data analysis of a separate survey of public officials in Armenia.

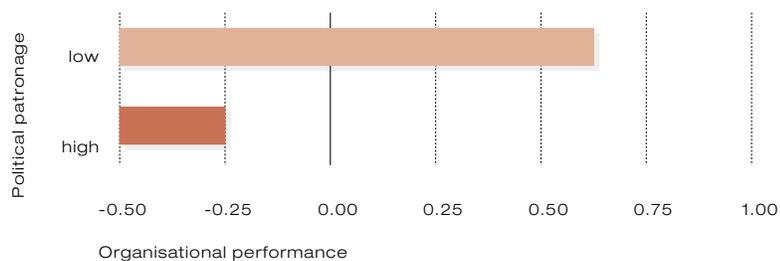
Local researchers using an agreed methodology surveyed public officials at all levels and in a range of government agencies. The surveys were based on a model designed in collaboration with Professor Bert Rockman of the University of Pittsburgh. World Bank staff working on a particular country tailored the approach to the country-specific background and issues in public sector reform.

The surveys offer insights for reform interventions in many areas. The framework used for analysing the survey data offers an approach for understanding how accountability is linked with both bad performance and good, and for presenting the results to policy-makers in a format that leads to more informed choices about public sector reform. The reforms discussed include: strengthening the credibility of rules for evaluation, record management, training and recruitment; ensuring that staff support government policy; preventing political interference or micro-management; and making government policies consistent.

Patronage is common in many developing country public sectors, violating principles of merit and competition in civil service recruitment and promotion. A small number of patronage appointments are justified as a means for political leaders to fashion a circle of government policy-makers and managers who share a common agenda. Patronage is clearly a problem when such appointments pervade the public administration. On a large scale, it is associated with poor performance and other forms of corruption. Patronage itself can be a form of corruption to the extent that it entails selling positions that are formally merit-based.

Patronage can vary significantly between agencies within the same country. The surveys indicated unambiguously that performance deteriorates in agencies with high levels of patronage. Political patronage and organisational performance indicators can be constructed for each agency. Figure 1 shows agencies divided into two groups on the basis of their degree of political patronage relative to the country's average.² Organisational performance is expressed as standard deviations from the country's average.

Figure 1: **Political patronage and organisational performance**

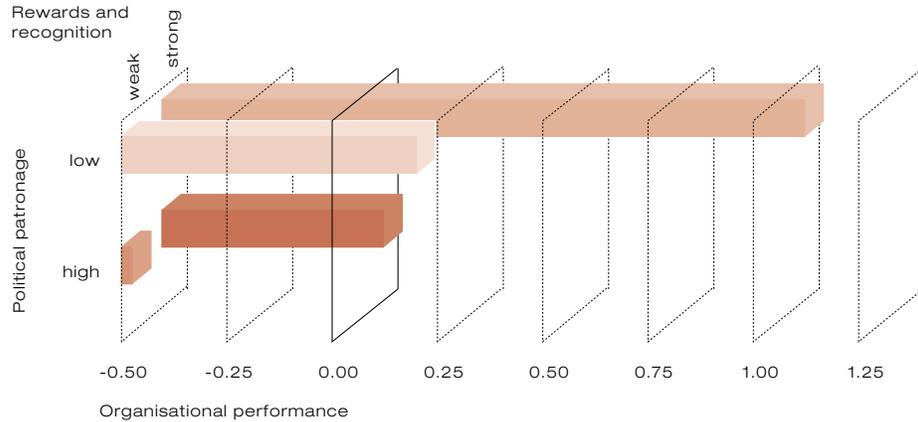


Patronage is a peculiarly well-entrenched institutional phenomenon. It responds to the demand-side pressures of politicians and others looking to recruit officials who will owe them trust and loyalty. It also provides protection for public officials who fear – often with justification – that without it, arbitrarily applied rules will be used to prevent their career advancing. If patronage is hard to remove, it is also hard to live with. There are difficulties in enforcing disciplinary rules in high-patronage environments because of resistance from complicit and occasionally corrupt public sector unions and other bodies.

The research findings suggest that local managers can take actions that mitigate the impact of patronage. Recognising that the larger problem cannot be easily resolved, even in high-patronage countries, agency managers who take action to improve rewards and recognition get better results from their staff. Such action could take the form of an out-of-turn promotion or an award or other recognition, publicised in the official's local area.

In a high-patronage environment, managers who publicly recognise their staff are likely to see a distinct improvement in performance, perhaps even more than in low-patronage environments. This is seen in figure 2, where public sector organisations have been divided into two groups on the basis of average level of political patronage, and both low and high-patronage groups have then been subdivided into groups with either weak or strong rewards and recognition.³

Figure 2: **The impact of strong rewards and recognition on organisational performance**



Other survey results indicated that staff themselves see the value of this approach. The surveys showed that many staff consider recognition more important than increased remuneration.

The conclusions are clear. In an environment of low accountability, steps to reduce political patronage are as productive as banging heads against the proverbial brick wall. Managers can still make a difference, however, by the simple expedient of recognising good behaviour. Carrots work better than sticks.

Findings to date are available at the website:
<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/surveys.htm>.

- 1 This contribution presents some summary findings. It reflects work in progress and should not be taken as any indication of World Bank policy.
- 2 Ranjana Mukherjee and Omer Gokcekus, 'Civil Service Reform Options when Patronage Cannot be Eliminated Immediately,' draft World Bank Working Paper, 2001. See also the following papers: Omer Gokcekus, Nick Manning, Ranjana Mukherjee and Raj Nallari, 'Institutional Environment and Public Officials' Performance in Guyana,' World Bank Technical Paper, 2001; Nick Manning, Ranjana Mukherjee and Omer Gokcekus, 'Public Officials and their Institutional Environment: An Analytical Model for Assessing the Impact of Institutional Change on Public Sector Performance,' World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2427, 2000, <<http://econ.worldbank.org/view.php?type=5&id=1182>>; and Ranjana Mukherjee, Omer Gokcekus, Nick Manning and Pierre Landell-Mills, 'Bangladesh: The Experience and Perceptions of Public Officials,' World Bank Technical Paper, 2001.
- 3 Ranjana Mukherjee and Omer Gokcekus (2001).