

# Measuring the effects of politicisation on bureaucratic behaviour in Africa

Vinothan Naidoo  
Associate Professor  
Department of Political Studies  
University of Cape Town

## **Abstract**

*The interface between politics and administration is an existential reality and an operational hazard in the study and practice of public administration. Perhaps nowhere has the tension between these competing identities been most pronounced than in Sub Saharan Africa, where public bureaucracies – once tainted by the stain of colonial politics, have struggled to reinvent themselves as professional and trustworthy institutions under post-colonial conditions. This paper draws on expert opinion data to test the significance of political involvement in bureaucratic staffing on the behaviour of African bureaucrats in a cross-regional sub-sample of countries. Its aim was to evaluate the extent to which political involvement affects the rationality and integrity of bureaucrats. My working assumption is that the predictive effect would be both strong and negative, following the dominant narrative in the literature. I find that politicisation does indeed generate harmful consequences for bureaucratic rationality and integrity. However, recent literature about politicisation on the continent also shows that it does not conform to a standardized neopatrimonial caricature which completely sidelines merit. Moreover, it is not feasible or even realistic to create professionally neutral bureaucracies on the continent. Therefore, attainable reform options ought to focus more on converting malignant forms of politicisation into less harmful forms that are more oriented towards policy control. The findings also indicate that reducing corrosive forms of politicisation will not, in and of itself, diminish the influence of bureaucratic agency on weak rationality and integrity. More deep-seated drivers of behavioural conduct that appear to operate in parallel with the neo-patrimonial effect should be addressed, such as improving remuneration, resources and working conditions, and fostering cohesion and collective solidarity and responsibility amongst officials.*

## **Introduction**

What effect does political involvement in the staffing of public bureaucracies have on the behaviour of public servants? The often-tense relationship between politics and administration, partisan alliances and bureaucratic prescripts, has been a perennial concern in the public administration scholarship. The allure of the Wilsonian ‘dichotomy’, of forging a neat division between the shifting and calculating interests of partisan politics and the stability and routine of administrative activity, has sustained global interest for many decades. The march of administrative theory over the past century has promoted an image of a professional bureaucracy capable of insulating itself from the interfering impulses of political leaders. Despite this, the corrosive effect of political mobilisation in many societies has undermined efforts to enhance administrative integrity and rectitude. This has rendered the ideal of a

dichotomy largely still-borne, yet at the same time sustained efforts by scholars to better understand the complex interplay of interests and incentives that define the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats.

Nowhere does the picture of a politically captured and compromised civil service appear more prominent than in the experience of Sub Saharan African (SSA) countries, which have displayed the corrosive effects of politicisation wrought by an entrenched neo-patrimonial brand of politics. The promise of a new political dawn unleashed by a wave of post-colonial transitions failed to transform bureaucratic machineries in Africa to effectively tackle enormous public demands. Instead, SSA bureaucracies have evolved into institutions mired in ‘crisis’ and ‘decay’, characterized by under-capacity, weak ethical norms and unpredictable and inefficient patterns of behaviour (Adamolekun, 2002; Crook, 2010; Levy, 2004; Olowu 2000). A consistent theme running through the literature on SSA bureaucracies claims that these institutions have long been penetrated and captured by party political actors. These actors have essentially appropriated these institutions to serve narrow partisan interests, which has, in turn, undermined the professional conduct and integrity of African bureaucracies.

This paper presents findings from a statistical analysis of data on a sub-set of SSA countries collected as part of an expert survey on bureaucratic behaviour by the Quality of Government Institute (Dahlström et al. 2015). The survey gathered data on the administrative characteristics of 159 countries, including 37 SSA countries. I set out to test the significance of politicisation on specific aspects of bureaucratic behaviour in a cross-regional sub-sample of these SSA countries. My aim was to generate a more granular picture of the effect of politicisation on bureaucratic governance, and to consider this alongside existing aggregate and disaggregated measures of bureaucratic quality. For instance, The Worldwide Governance Indicators index<sup>1</sup> uses ‘government effectiveness’ as a composite measure of the quality of public services, civil service quality and degree of independence from political pressures, and quality of policy formulation and implementation. Based on a global comparative assessment, scores for SSA countries as a group lag behind other regions (see figure 1).<sup>2</sup> However, there is considerable variation in the government effectiveness scores between individual SSA countries (see figure 2).

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>; Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., Mastruzzi, M. 2010. The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues. Policy Research Working Paper, No. WPS 5430. World Bank.

<sup>2</sup> Based on 2017 data when compared to East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Asia.

Figure 1: Comparison of inter-regional scores on ‘government effectiveness’



Source: *Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kauffman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010)*

Figure 2: Intra-African variation in scores on ‘government effectiveness’

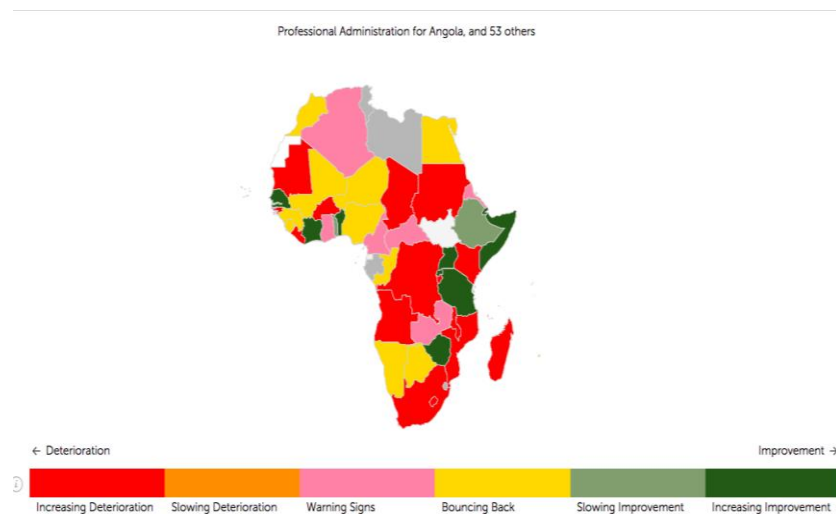


Source: *Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kauffman, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010)*

Other indices display similar findings, showing intra-African variation in the professionalisation of public administration. This includes the Ibrahim Index of African Governance<sup>3</sup>, which includes a measure of the ‘professionalism’ of public administration that shows wide variation across the continent (see infographic in figure 3).

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag>

Figure 3: Intra-African variation in scores on ‘professional administration’



Source: *Ibrahim Index of African Governance*

More recently, Krönke, Mattes and Naidoo (2022, 2, 27) also found inter-country variation and even wider intra-country differences in citizen perceptions<sup>4</sup> of bureaucratic professionalism in Africa. Although they did not test for the effects of politicisation, they found statistical backing for the positive impact that a ‘professional’<sup>5</sup> bureaucracy can have on citizens’ experiences of poverty, crime, satisfaction with government performance, and perceptions of honesty and trustworthiness of state officials in Africa.

### **The ‘politicisation’ of public administration in Sub Saharan Africa**

The relationship between ‘politics’ and ‘administration’ has a long and complex history in the Public Administration scholarship. The relationship hinges on the difficulty of ensuring that political or partisan interests do not undermine merit values in the staffing and conduct of public bureaucracies (McCourt, 2000; World Bank, 1997). Despite the advent of a professionalised bureaucracy rooted in the Weberian and Wilsonian tradition, politicisation has remained a common feature of recruitment practices in public bureaucracies globally. It has continued to afford political leaders a lever to steer the implementation of their policy agenda through the state apparatus (Matheson et al, 2007). However, politicisation can also invite the risk that party political considerations in the recruitment of civil servants will corrode the integrity and professionalism of public bureaucracies (World Bank, 1997). This has been especially visible in developing countries in general, and in SSA countries in particular, linked to the widespread use of state institutions to dispense patronage.

In the *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective*, Peters and Pierre (2004) define the concept of politicization as the ‘substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards, and disciplining of

<sup>4</sup> Based on an analysis of Afrobarometer data

<sup>5</sup> When compared with the ‘reach’ or infrastructural hardware of the state, and ‘scope’, or the institutional size and configuration of the state.

members of the public service'. They also draw a geo-political distinction between what motivates this substitution, by contrasting the more innocuous efforts by politicians to control policy and implementation in industrialised democracies, with the more damaging effects of supplying jobs to party loyalists or kin in less developed countries. In practice, proffering a neat substitution between political and merit criteria is not particularly helpful in industrialised countries, where a range of 'hybrid' arrangements is evident (Matheson et al, 2007). However, this is not typically perceived as undermining the merit principle, or levels of rationality and integrity.

A more antagonistic relationship between politicisation and merit is widely attributed to SSA countries, in which clientelistic exchanges of loyalty and rewards amongst political partisans are the primary driver of political involvement in staffing public bureaucracies (Adamolekun, 2002; Olowu, 2000). A strong patronage-driven process on the continent has been commonly associated with entrenched neo-patrimonial forms of governance, in which 'political relationships are mediated through, and maintained by, personal connections...'<sup>6</sup> (Pitcher, Moran and Johnston, 2009). A casualty of this malignant brand of politicisation is that formal and impersonal rules of conduct<sup>7</sup> are either bypassed or subverted in favour of informal and personalised patterns of exchange and the privatization of public resources (Crook, 2010; Pitcher, Moran and Johnston, 2009; Levy 2004; Van de Walle, 2012).

Olowu's (1988) review of African public administration's 'moral' crisis reflects a deep-seated consensus that public administration on the continent has been impaired by self-interest, favouritism, an undermining of merit, and a personalisation of state assets. In other words, the very ingredients that comprise elements of rationality and integrity. He critically appraised four major strands in the literature that sought to explain this state of affairs: 1) a clash of traditional and 'modern' values; 2) *politicisation* and an undermining of professional norms; 3) bureaucracies that had become captured by bourgeois capitalist interests; and 4) the denuding of administrative capacity by pressure to reduce the scope of civil service activity and promote privatization. Although conceding that none of these explanations fully and adequately explains the moral decay of bureaucracy on the continent, his synthesis arguably comes closest to highlighting the consequences of the politicisation thesis, by observing trends of increasing political centralisation on the continent, coupled with the growing authority of and risk of abuse of power by executive institutions at the expense of democratic institutions, such as legislatures, the courts, and civil society. For Olowu, it is these conditions that damage the institutional integrity, autonomy and moral compass of the bureaucracy.

Despite concerns about a crisis of morality resulting from, *inter alia*, politicisation, research at a country level has shown that the seemingly zero-sum effect of personalized politics on bureaucratic integrity is far from absolute. This reflects the very inter-country variation that we see in aggregate governance indices. For example, Kopecký's (2011) comparative study of patronage practices in Ghana and South Africa deviates from a uniform neopatrimonial narrative, by finding that a plurality of expert respondents in each country case selected [policy] 'control' as the primary motive behind why parties appointed persons into state institutions,

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<sup>6</sup> Hence, my decision to combine 'personal' and 'political' connections to form the 'politicisation' independent variable

<sup>7</sup> E.g., features of the Weberian rational-legal framework

compared<sup>8</sup> to ‘rewards’ and a combination of rewards and control. He concluded that parties appointed to positions in the state to control these institutions ‘and not “only” in order to reward their members...’, an astute choice of words which at one and the same time acknowledges but also counters the dominant patronage narrative.

Therkildsen (2014) also finds evidence of a co-existence explanation in a study which looked at the influence of neopatrimonial pressures on public sector staffing in Tanzania and Uganda. Drawing on a survey of public servants about their perceptions of recruitment practices and personnel practices, he found that the percentage of respondents who cited ‘merit’ as being an important factor in recruitment practices was far higher<sup>9</sup> than other motives, such as political, social and ethnic connections. Far from concluding that non-merit motives were inconsequential, Therkildsen observed that non-merit pressures remain ever-present, are often contained by meritocratic guardrails, but can sometimes overcome internal resistance, and can vary even within a single organisation. He also describes a more dynamic interplay between meritocratic and non-meritocratic pressures, in which pressure to appoint based on non-meritocratic motives can heighten defensive pressures to resist and bolster formal bureaucratic processes.

Brierley (2021) finds that the merit/political dichotomy should not be either essentialised in the African context, or limited to observing competing sets of pressures in an institutional environment. Drawing on data on bureaucratic appointments in Ghana, she finds support for her contention that party leaders may gain instrumentally from employing merit criteria for top level appointments whilst rewarding rank-and-file party members with patronage appointments in lower level offices. The merit/politicisation relationship can then be subject to tactical choices made by political leaders about when and where to deploy either motive in public sector appointments to maximise political gain. This recognises that either motive is endowed with both benefits and costs, depending on the political circumstances – including electoral competition and performance expectations.

## **Empirical strategy and method**

The empirical strategy was directed at answering the following question: *do high levels of politicised recruitment undermine the rationality and integrity of bureaucrats in Africa?*

I proposed two hypotheses to probe whether relatively high levels of politicised recruitment undermines the rationality and integrity of African bureaucrats:

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Countries with higher levels of politicised recruitment will experience lower levels of bureaucratic rationality

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<sup>8</sup> The gap between ‘control’ and ‘reward/control’ and ‘reward’ was larger in Ghana, indicating a greater susceptibility to rewards-based appointments in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> The gap between ‘merit’ and other motivating factors was however smaller in the Ugandan case. Conversely, the stand-out reference to merit in Tanzania was also evident in the country’s impressive scaled score for meritocracy in a sixteen-country survey of developing and transitional countries. See Hyden, Court and Mease (2003)

*H2*: Countries with higher levels of politicised recruitment will experience lower levels of bureaucratic integrity.

If politicised recruitment is found to have no significant negative effect on the rationality and integrity of African bureaucrats, the following scenarios might be posited:

- In scenario a), where politicisation is high but bureaucratic rationality and integrity is also high, SSA countries have managed to convert malignant forms of politicisation, based on patronage and rewards, into more benign forms driven by efforts to exert policy control. This creates a mutual accommodation between politicisation and bureaucratic autonomy, and creates the space to foster institutional resilience
- In a more likely scenario b), low levels of bureaucratic rationality and integrity have become ingrained in African bureaucracies, reflecting deep institutional decay, neglect and self-serving behaviour which functions largely independent of politicisation. This scenario suggests that reducing levels of politicisation is unlikely to, *ipso facto*, enhance administrative rationality and integrity.

The relationship between politicisation and bureaucratic behaviour was tested via a cross-sectional analysis of a sample of 12 SSA countries included in the QoG dataset (Dahlström et al, 2015). The dataset included 37 SSA countries in total, with the number of expert respondents per country ranging from as little as 1, for Sierra Leone, to 32 for Nigeria. The sample of 12, consisting of four countries in each of three sub-regions: West, Central and Eastern, and Southern African, was selected to gauge cross-regional variation about the effects of politicisation, whilst at the same time minimizing the range of sampled respondents per country to enhance respondent reliability. The countries sampled in each region along with their respective number of respondents is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Sample\* and regional\*\* composition of SSA countries and expert respondents per country

<i>West Africa sub sample</i>	<i>Central &amp; East Africa sub sample</i>	<i>Southern Africa sub-sample</i>
Benin (6)	Somalia (6)	Zimbabwe (5)
Senegal (5)	Uganda (6)	Botswana (5)
Cote D'Ivoire (6)	Malawi (8)	Mozambique (4)
Guinea (4)	South Sudan (4)	Namibia (6)

\*N=65

\*\*N=21 (West Africa), N=24 (Central and East Africa), N=20 (Southern Africa)

The reduced sample of 12 countries out of a possible 37 SSA cases limits the ability to advance generalisable findings about the effects of politicisation across the continent. Moreover, the absence of countries that may be considered sub-regional powers also limits the scope of the conclusions that can be drawn. However, countries

such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia garnered much larger and more varied groups of expert respondents<sup>10</sup>.

The independent variable was represented by the concept of ‘politicisation’, and as such, measured the extent of direct party political, or partisan, involvement in the staffing or recruitment of public servants.

The following two questions<sup>11</sup>, from the Dahlström et al (2015) expert survey, were combined to produce a composite measure of ‘politicisation’:

- *‘When recruiting public sector employees, the political connections of the applicants decide who gets the job’*
- *‘When recruiting public sector employees, the personal connections of the applicants (for example kinship or friendship) decide who gets the job.’*

Politicisation is therefore measured by the level of influence that expert respondents believe the ‘political’ and ‘personal’ connections of bureaucrats have on recruitment decisions. Both questions were indexed to produce a measure of politicisation, based in part because of their highly-correlated relationship<sup>12</sup>. I argue that both questions ought to be retained in a composite measure of politicisation to compensate for limitations in the wording and scope of what the two questions could individually test. In the first instance, however, I acknowledge that the personal connections of bureaucratic applicants may be considered, to a large and practical extent, a dimension of party political selection criteria. Alternatively, ‘political connections’ may be viewed as a form of ‘personal connection’ in itself; forged by the partisan bonds of actors who share a common political project, whilst also representing a formal and institutionalised vehicle through which these loyalties can be used to strategically place partisans in state institutions. The questions are highly interconnected and it is difficult to disentangle them. The political is the personal, or, being able to inject political considerations into the selection of civil servants assumes that personal judgments or preferences are also being advanced.

On the other hand, the dynamic inter-play between these two questions results from the varied use of politicisation as a tool to exercise control over the administrative levers of policy, and to reward loyalists with state employment. Although the latter variant has been strongly attributed to the experience of SSA countries, the wording of the two questions falls short of ascribing motive, meaning that it would be presumptuous to exclude rather than retain both in a composite measure. Furthermore, the QoG questionnaire provides another means of teasing out a possible distinction in motive behind how politicisation operates. It does this by posing two questions elsewhere in the survey<sup>13</sup> under the theme of ‘policy making and implementation’: *‘public sector employees strive to fulfill the ideology of the party/parties in government’*, and, *‘public sector employees strive to implement the policies decided upon by the top political leadership’*. It could be argued that the latter is oriented more towards politicisation as a means of effecting policy control, whilst the former represents a more personal or patronage-driven form of politicisation. If it was indeed

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<sup>10</sup> Ethiopia (15); Ghana (21); Kenya (11); Nigeria (32); South Africa (24)

<sup>11</sup> Questions 2\_b and 2\_c in the survey

<sup>12</sup> .785 at the 0.01 significance level

<sup>13</sup> Questions 5\_n and 5\_o



possible to clearly distinguish between these two motivational forms of politicisation for the purpose of this study, then they should exhibit a negative relationship. However, they yielded a moderately strong correlation coefficient.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it would be useful to include both questions as a measure of politicisation due to possible interpretive leakage associated with how the questions were phrased in the QoG instrument. For example, to what extent does ‘political connections’ exclude personal ties, or conversely, what precisely comprises a political connection? Combining these questions would therefore alleviate concerns about measurement validity.

I tested the effect of politicisation on two aspects of bureaucratic behaviour, which were operationalised into two distinct dependent variables. The first aspect is defined as ‘bureaucratic rationality’, and was produced by combining the following two questions<sup>15</sup> from the Dahlström et al (2015) survey:

- *Thinking about the country you have chosen, how often would you say the following occurs today...public sector employees strive to follow rules?*
- *When deciding how to implement policies in individual cases, public sector employees treat some groups in society unfairly.*

Bureaucratic rationality encompasses the Weberian conception of rule-adhering officials dispensing administrative decisions in a fair, consistent and even-handed manner. Rules in this instance stem from the notion of rational-legal authority; regulates the process of dispensing fair administrative actions, and reduces the risk of arbitrary and biased decision-making that can be unduly influenced by political considerations. I contend that high levels of bureaucratic rationality are unlikely to prevail in SSA bureaucracies because of the prevalence of politicisation. Equally, politicisation is likely to undermine the degree to which bureaucrats will exhibit rational behaviour. The effect of politicisation will therefore tend to act as a disincentive to rational behaviour, where officials who hold their position at the behest of party political actors engage in actions that are guided by obviating impersonal rules to favour or unfairly serve the interests of powerful patrons or preferred client groups.

The second dependent variable is defined as ‘bureaucratic integrity’, and combined the following two questions<sup>16</sup> from the Dahlström et al (2015) survey:

- *Public sector employees steal, embezzle or misappropriate public funds or other state resources for personal or family use.*

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<sup>14</sup> .408 at the 0.01 significance level

<sup>15</sup> This comprised questions 5\_m and 5\_f in the survey. These two questions produced a significant negative correlation coefficient of -.480 at the 0.01 confidence level, because of the opposite phrasing of the questions, which did not align with the response scale. I therefore reverse coded question 5\_m to align both with the response scale prior to indexing.

<sup>16</sup> Questions 8\_d and 8\_c in the survey, which also yielded a correlation coefficient of .935 at the 0.01 confidence level

- *Public sector employees grant favors in exchange for bribes, kickbacks or other material inducements.*

Bureaucratic integrity speaks to another aspect of the Weberian rational-legal seeking bureaucrat: their internal ethical compass. Here, it is assumed that officials are capable of maintaining a clear boundary between the public and private realms; and are able to insulate themselves from the undue influence and pressure to offer gratification on the basis of political or personal ties. Moreover, it also reduces the likelihood that they themselves will engage in personal enrichment with the knowledge that they will be shielded from sanction by political patrons.

All of the questions comprising the composite independent and dependent variables employed the same ordinal response scale in the QoG questionnaire, which ranged from 1 – 7, where 1= ‘hardly ever’, and 7= ‘almost always’. This scale measured the views of expert respondents for each question. Each question was also posed in the negative to ensure consistency of the scaled responses, with the exception of q 5\_m, which was subsequently reversed-coded. The results show mean scores for the independent and dependent variables. Descriptive statistics are first shown on levels of politicisation, bureaucratic rationality and bureaucratic integrity across the three SSA sub-regions and constituent countries, followed by a simple linear regression test to investigate the predictive effect of politicisation.

## Results and discussion

The first set of results provides descriptive statistics on expert responses to the three composite variables for *politicisation*, *bureaucratic rationality*, and *bureaucratic integrity*. The data displayed in table 2 compares mean scores across the three SSA regional sub-samples and individually sampled countries.

Table 2: Distribution of mean scores for Politicisation, Bureaucratic Rationality, and Bureaucratic Integrity across SSA regions

Central/East Africa sub-sample	<i>Politicisation</i>	<i>Bureaucratic Rationality</i>	<i>Bureaucratic Integrity</i>
• Somalia	5.58	4.63	5.00
• Uganda	5.00	4.58	5.92
• Malawi	4.21	4.25	5.42
• South Sudan	<b>6.13</b>	4.50	6.00
<i>Sub-sample group score</i>	<b>5.11</b>	<b>4.48</b>	<b>5.60</b>
Southern Africa sub-sample			
• Zimbabwe	5.00	4.90	<b>6.13</b>
• Botswana	<b>2.40</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>2.80</b>
• Mozambique	4.83	4.33	4.67
• Namibia	5.67	4.33	4.00
<i>Sub-sample group score</i>	<b>4.50</b>	<b>4.08</b>	<b>4.25</b>
West Africa sub-sample			
• Benin	4.80	4.00	5.30

• Senegal	4.10	4.10	4.38
• Côte D'Ivoire	4.92	4.58	5.50
• Guinea	<b>5.63</b>	<b>5.63</b>	5.38
<i>Sub-sample group score</i>	<i>4.83</i>	<b>4.53</b>	<i>5.18</i>

\* Scores range from 1 = 'Hardly ever' through to 7= 'Almost always'

A descriptive assessment of mean scores across the sub-regional sample confirms the prevalence of politicisation, in which the political and personal connections of officials appears to hold considerable sway over recruitment decisions. The degree to which politicisation is perceived to affect recruitment decisions is particularly strong across the Central and East African sub-sample, and is most strikingly evident in cases such as South Sudan and Somalia, which have also experienced significant political ructions in the recent past. In the Southern African region, the relatively lower aggregate score belies the still strong if more variable influence of politicisation. Botswana's score is a clear regional outlier that is consistent with its promotion of meritocratic values, as ascribed to the country in the developmental state literature<sup>17</sup>. Politicisation is also perceived to be a factor in the West African sample, although at more moderated and uniform levels, with the exception of Guinea, a country that has also experienced considerable political turbulence.

When asked to assess the 'rational' behaviour of Sub Saharan African bureaucrats, there was consensus amongst respondents across all three regional sub-samples that officials were more likely to not act fairly or even-handedly when implementing policies and adhering to formal rules. The scoring was not however as pronounced or widely varied when compared to politicisation. Without yet testing for the effect of politicisation, this implies that there is a prevailing bureaucratic culture in SSA countries which is not primarily disposed towards administrative rationality, echoing scenario 'b' described earlier. Bureaucrats in the West African sub-sample were on average more likely to flout rational norms of conduct, although Guinea's score clearly has a disproportionate pull on the sub-sample mean, and is consistent with its politicisation score. Conversely, the Southern African sub-sample's lower aggregate score was again affected by Botswana officials' comparatively robust adherence to rule-oriented conduct.

The informality syndrome that has historically been attributed to bureaucracies in Africa has been a difficult condition to shake. It has been critically acknowledged that past empirical studies of African bureaucracies focused more on their deficiencies as judged against Western norms (Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan, 2014b). The emergence of more recent and progressive ethnographic approaches to the study of bureaucracies on the continent have sought to challenge this paradigmatic binary. Yet, this scholarship hasn't so much challenged the relevance of these behavioural categories as much as it has sought to universalize their application globally, instead of implementing remedial strategies based on discredited normative value hierarchies between Africa and the West:

In Africa as in Europe, all public bureaucracies are permeated by tensions  
between prescribed and real conduct, between official and practical

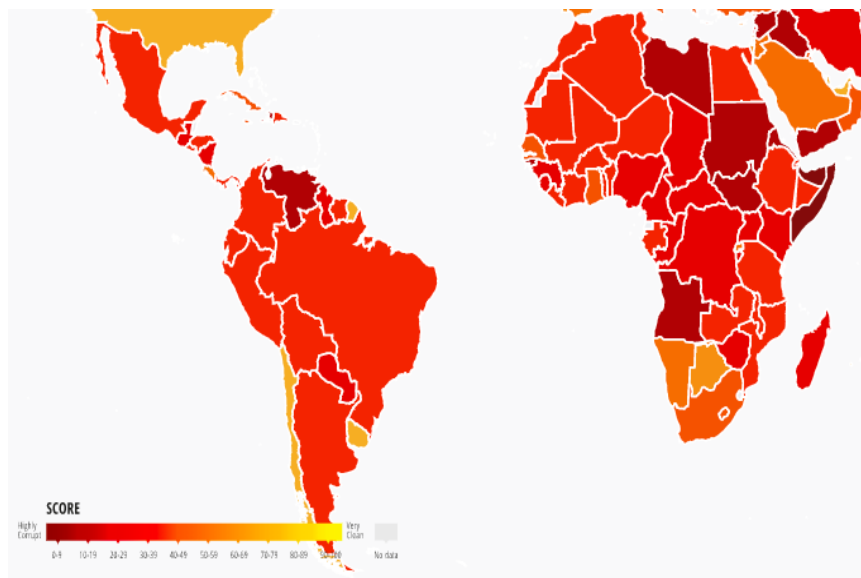
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<sup>17</sup> See for example Taylor, 2002.

norms... Bureaucracies are, without exception, subject to a host of contradictory directives. (Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan, 2014a)

When asked to assess the ‘integrity’ of Sub Saharan African bureaucrats, expert respondents were generally critical of the ethical tendencies of officialdom. They expressed a belief that it was very likely that officials would engage in the misuse of public office and resources for personal gain, and be susceptible to undue influence. This was most widely and strongly displayed in the Central and East African sub-sample, even with the exception of South Sudan and Somalia; yet was also markedly visible across the West African cases, despite being less prominent in Senegal. The Southern African sub-sample generated a comparatively moderate aggregate score, although with considerable inter-country variation ranging from high integrity Botswana to semi-moderate integrity in Namibia to severely weak integrity in Zimbabwe.

Figure 4: Corruption perception index scores for Africa, 2015

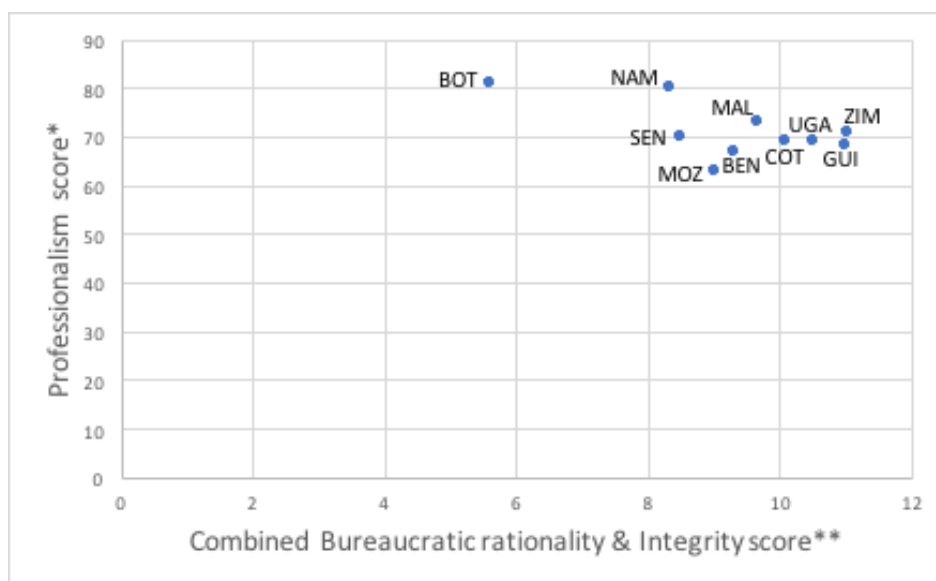


Source: Transparency International (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2015>)

Contemporaneous results from Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>18</sup> (figure 4) generally accorded with integrity concerns in the Central and East African sub-sample, although differed in the relative ranking of countries; was mostly consistent with the rank ordering of integrity concerns in the West African sub-sample; and was entirely consistent with the rank ordering of countries in the Southern African sub-sample.

<sup>18</sup> The scale runs from ‘highly corrupt’ (from 0, dark red) to ‘very clean’ (to 100, bright yellow)

Figure 5: Comparison of bureaucratic professionalism measures\*\*\*



\*Based on citizen/public responses via Afrobarometer (Krönke, Mattes and Naidoo, 2022, 14)

\*\*Based on expert responses in QoG survey (combined bureaucratic rationality and integrity scores)

\*\*\*Somalia and South Sudan were excluded as these countries were not scored as part of the Afrobarometer citizen-derived measure of professionalism.

Another perspective on the scores for bureaucratic rationality and integrity across the sub-regions is shown in figure 5. This aggregates the country scores for each of these measures shown in table 2, based on expert respondents, and then compares these against comparable<sup>19</sup> if not identical measures of bureaucratic professionalism drawn from Afrobarometer public perception data by Krönke, Mattes and Naidoo (2022). The comparison clearly shows Botswana as an outlier in both public and expert appraisals of bureaucratic professionalism, with its southern African neighbour Namibia also performing well on both scores. On the other hand, Mozambique appears at the lowest end of the citizen-generated professionalism scale, whilst performing marginally better on the expert scale. In contrast, Zimbabwe generates the worst score on the expert assessment of rationality and integrity, whilst performing better on citizen perceptions of professionalism. The remaining countries covering the west and east/central African sub-sample mostly clustered along a narrow band for the citizen-generated professionalism score, with the biggest divergence being between Malawi, with the highest score, and Benin, with the lowest. There was wider variation and a slight alternating regional pattern for expertly-derived rationality and integrity scores, with Senegal performing best and Guinea performing worst.

<sup>19</sup> Comparable in the sense that the bureaucratic professionalism index comprised questions about a) the ease of accessing public services through bureaucracies, which can roughly be equated with bureaucratic rationality – rule adherence and fair treatment; and b) payment of a bribe, gift or favour to obtain a service, which can roughly be equated with bureaucratic integrity – bribery and misappropriation of public funds.

Further testing of the linear relationship between politicisation, bureaucratic rationality and bureaucratic integrity found a generally significant relationship as outlined in table 3.

Table 3: Simple linear regression results for Politicisation, Bureaucratic Rationality, and Bureaucratic Integrity

<b>Sub-regional sample</b>	<b><i>Politicisation &amp; Bureaucratic Rationality</i></b>	<b><i>Politicisation &amp; Bureaucratic Integrity</i></b>
Central/East African sub-sample	$r^2 = .301, F(1,18)=7.8, p<0.05$ $\beta_i = .549^*$	$r^2 = .039, F(1,18)=.731, p=.404$ $\beta_i = .198$
Southern African sub-sample	$r^2 = .388, F(1,17)=10.8, p<0.05$ $\beta_i = .623^{**}$	$r^2 = .348, F(1,16)=8.54, p<0.05$ $\beta_i = .590^{**}$
West African sub-sample	$r^2 = .408, F(1,18)= 12.4, p<0.05$ $\beta_i = .639^{**}$	$r^2 = .304, F(1,17)=7.44, p<0.05$ $\beta_i = .552^*$

\*\*Significant at the 0.01 confidence level

\*Significant at the 0.05 confidence level

Modeling the effect of politicisation on bureaucratic rationality and integrity revealed a generally positive covariate relationship and statistically significant predictive effect to explain non-rational behaviour and weak integrity across all three sub-regions. The predictive influence of politicisation was comparatively stronger in explaining variance in non-rational behaviour across all regions, compared to weak integrity, whilst showing no significant explanatory effect on weak integrity in Central/Eastern Africa. These findings generally support the research question: that high levels of politicised recruitment do indeed undermine the rational behaviour and integrity of African bureaucrats; robustly supports hypothesis 1, and more moderately supports hypothesis 2. The results also clearly reject scenario a), in which high levels of politicisation occur alongside high levels of bureaucratic rationality and integrity. This demonstrates that SSA countries have not managed to rid themselves of a harmful<sup>20</sup> variant of politicisation which undermines institutional integrity and professionalism.

Despite the significant influence of politicisation in explaining the propensity of African bureaucrats to deviate from rational norms of conduct and administrative integrity, there remains an appreciable portion of behavioural conduct that politicisation cannot account for on its own. This suggests that an orientation towards exhibiting weak integrity in particular, and to a lesser extent non-rational decision making – considering variance at the sub-regional level - is more deeply ingrained in public administration. It also implies that bureaucrats themselves wield agency in

<sup>20</sup> With the proviso that sampling limitations have to be factored into this outcome. The more palatable form of politicisation as ‘policy control’ has been found to mingle with patronage in other SSA country cases (e.g. Kopecky’s work on South Africa and Ghana), and other countries have seen dramatic improvements in merit scores (Tanzania)

perpetuating these behavioural norms in ways that are seemingly independent of politicisation. This indicates, as outlined in scenario b), that reducing politicisation will not, in and of itself, resolve the problem of weak integrity and low rationality, where multi-pronged interventions would be more efficacious.

To test for this, I reviewed how African citizens rather than expert respondents described their direct interactions with bureaucrats in the twelve countries sampled. This was extracted from round 6 of the Afrobarometer public attitudes survey, which posed two questions that could be used to gauge public attitudes about bureaucratic integrity and rationality. Question 53\_c of the survey asks *'how many of the following people [government officials] do you think are involved in corruption...'* This serves as a proxy for bureaucratic integrity as the same question was posed separately for other 'political' representatives, including members of parliament and the presidency. Question 51\_b asks: *'in your opinion, how often...are people treated unequally under the law?'* Although this question does not distinguish the role of administrative officials in dispensing policies unfairly and unequally, it could prompt citizens to formulate a response based on their personal interactions with public servants on a day to day basis. The results are shown in table 4

Table 4: Public perceptions on bureaucratic rationality and integrity (Afrobarometer, round 6 data)

	<i><b>Bureaucratic rationality proxy</b></i>		<i><b>Bureaucratic integrity proxy</b></i>	
	Never/rarely	Often/always	None/some	Most/all
Central/East African sub-sample	50.4	49.6	54.6	<b>45.4</b>
Southern African sub-sample	53.4	46.6	59.3	40.7
West African sub-sample	<b>27.0</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>61.9</b>	38.1

In general, the findings showed that a large minority of respondents believed that people are often or always treated unequally under the law, and that most or all government officials were involved in corruption. The proportion of respondents from countries in the Central/East African sub-sample who expressed concerns about poor integrity was noticeably higher compared to the other two sub-regions, which corresponds with the degree of integrity concerns for this region in the QoG data, which also appeared largely insulated from the politicisation effect. Another notable finding was that nearly three-quarters of people in the West African sub-sample believe that it is often or always the case that people are treated unequally under the law, a considerable segment when compared against the aggregate sub-sample score for this region on bureaucratic rationality, although a view that may be fueled by the significance of the politicisation effect.

## Conclusion

The findings from a cross-regional sub-sample of Sub Saharan African countries revealed that politicisation continues to generate harmful consequences for bureaucratic rationality and integrity. However, recent literature on politicisation on the continent has also shown that it does not conform to a standardized neopatrimonial caricature, where context and varying motives shapes how it is deployed and how much damage it can wreak. The vision of a professionally neutral bureaucracy will clearly not be easily or widely attainable on the continent, or is even necessarily desirable given both the inescapable politics of bureaucratic life<sup>21</sup> and the presence of less damaging forms of political influence in bureaucratic appointments globally. Therefore, a more easily attainable reform option ('lower hanging fruit') might be for SSA countries to pursue scenario a), referred to earlier, where countries try to convert malignant forms of politicisation that clearly do undermine bureaucratic rationality and integrity, into less harmful forms that are more oriented towards exerting policy control. Recent literature on SSA bureaucracies cited earlier suggests that there is clearly room for a co-existence and even a manageable tension between political subjectivity and meritocratic objectivity in staffing decisions, which does not have to degenerate into weakened rationality and integrity. It may be possible to fashion a more virtuous politicisation dynamic, in contrast to realistically eliminating it, which would reduce the corrosive effect on rationality and integrity and enhance the steering capacity of political leaders. Adamolekun's (2002) suggestion of a more transparent and regulated process governing the appointment, conduct, role and competency of 'political appointees', and more clearly distinguishing political from career officials whilst shielding the latter from political interference<sup>22</sup>, may be instructive here.

The findings also indicated that reducing corrosive forms of politicisation will not, in and of itself, diminish the influence of bureaucratic agency on weak rationality and integrity. More deep-seated drivers of behavioural conduct that appear to operate in parallel to the neo-patrimonial effect should be addressed. Crook's (2010) analysis of the obstacles confronting civil service reform in Africa acknowledges that the patronage-fueled influence of neo-patrimonialism does play a role, but it cannot fully account for the perverse incentives that continue to fuel weak rationality and integrity. He argues that more intensive efforts directed at rehabilitating the organizational 'culture' in Africa's bureaucracies need to operate in tandem with efforts to quell the damaging effects of patronage. Motivated by empirical evidence of 'islands of [institutional] effectiveness' on the continent, he cites a combination of tangible: improved remuneration, resources and working conditions, as well as intangible reforms: fostering cohesion and collective solidarity and responsibility amongst officials, as showing the potential to alter perverse behavioural incentives.

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<sup>21</sup> A similar argument is put forward by Durokifa, Uwizeyimana, and Enaifoghe (2022)

<sup>22</sup> Brierley's (2021) observation that non-partisan motives were driving the recruitment of bureaucrats at higher-levels in Ghana shows that there is political appetite for choosing merit.



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