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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## PATRONAGE APPOINTMENTS IN MONGOLIA

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines political patronage in Mongolia. It argues that political patronage reaches the public sector. Weak control and accountability mechanisms in the civil service result in increased corruption, which impedes the country's development. One key feature of a democratic political system is public oversight. Exercising power without public oversight can lead to negative consequences. Further, we offer preliminary evidence from our study of political patronage in Mongolia to suggest that variations in patronage roles can be related to variations in the institutionalization of party systems and the nature of the links between political actors and civil servants.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, Mongolia has initiated and implemented a wide-ranging reform process covering all areas of social life (Batsuch, 2000). An integral part of this process is civil service reform. Building a democratic political system was impossible without an effective civil service (National Academy of Governance, 2014). The main goal of civil service reform is to establish a professional, stable, transparent, accountable, and non-political civil service. Until now, many policies, decisions, and laws have been developed and implemented in this direction. However, practical results are not abundant, and implementation leaves much to desire (World Bank, 2020). One of the many contributing factors to this is political patronage. According to a 2022 report by Freedom House, Mongolia has been peacefully transitioning to a democratic political regime since 1990, and has made great strides in ensuring civil and political human rights and freedoms, and corruption of the ruling parties and the patronage networks poses severe problems for further development (Freedom House, 2022). Political patronage has hence become a key feature of Mongolian civil service. Mongolia is a specific interesting case for research on political patronage (Oyunsuren, Dierkes, & Byambakhand, 2023). For example, "team building" after the 1996 election, "structural changes" after the 2000 election, "consensus" after the 2004 election, and after the 2012 election, state-owned enterprises, and budget enterprises were established in large numbers and qualified civil service employees were transferred and placed, as

well as the process of transfer and assigning positions for political purposes under the name of "the executive" intensified (National Academy of Governance, 2014). According to the annual report of the Civil Service Council, in 2007, 5.2% of all civil servants were affected by illegal dismissals and transfers. In 2012, the number was 9.3%, 11.52% in 2013, 13.09% in 2014, 13.35% in 2015, and 2016, and increased to 14.23% in 2017 and 15.5% in 2017, respectively (Civil Service Council, 2018). By 2019, 22.3% of civil service employees experienced illegal dismissals and transfers (World Bank, 2020). A large number of people, on their request, transferred to another organization, or based on structural changes. That is an indication of political patronage. In the context of the article, the researchers tried to consider political patronage in the Mongolian civil service, their causes, and limiting possibilities. In doing so, the results of expert research are used as an essential source. This article consisted of five parts: introduction, theoretical framework, research method, hypothesis, research findings, and conclusions.

### Research Status at Home and Abroad

**Political patronage:** Patronage in the political world is not a new, but a universal phenomenon (Kopecky, Mair, & Spirova, 2012). Scholars have extensively researched the crucial significance of patronage in maintaining clientelistic balance (Wilson, 1961). The word patronage originally came from the late Latin patronus, patron, or protector, patron, and the Old French patron, or protector (Tuguldur, 2022). From 1769, from the meaning of "beneficiary holy saint", "protector",

and "patron of work and deeds", it became "the authority to distribute goods, work, service providers, and work in public services" (James Donald, 1903). Patronage as a political phenomenon and process originated in ancient Greece and Rome. Through this concept, unequal social relations based on mutual benefit are expressed. Patrons, who have wealth, prestige, and power, and clients, who provide political support and assistance, ensure legitimacy to the government, and seek material support in return, determine the content of the relationship (Quinn, 1982). Why does political patronage emerge? What are the reasons for the differences in political patronage across various countries? What are the consequences of political patronage? Is it possible to solve political patronage? A lively scholarly debate exists around these questions.

It has been used extensively in political science since the 1950s. Conceptually, researchers understand the phenomenon by different names, such as "patronage", "political patronage", "patron-client relationship", and "patronage appointments". Most definitions of patronage emphasize the quid pro quo nature of the exchange in a specific way: the provision of goods and services is contingent upon the consumer action. Consistent with the general understanding in the literature, we argue that patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services. Besides doing their regular jobs, these supporters expected to provide political services for the incumbent who hired them. This vulnerability is used by politicians and brokers, who politicize access to scarce resources. In modern political research, patronage appointments are considered one of the main methods and tools of power distribution and retention by the ruling party and forces. Political scientists have mentioned four main approaches to studying patronage in the civil service: political economy, cultural, institutional, and political. A characteristic feature of the political economy approach is the patronage attribution in the civil service to social and economic factors such as poverty, education, and income levels. Yet, the institutional approach prioritizes patronage as a representational norm of social interaction. There is also a cultural approach to patronage study in the civil service due to cultural backwardness in developing countries. Additionally, the approach to politics emphasizes power distribution in the political arena and the influence of parties and politicians in the process (Oliveros, 2021). /See Figure 1/

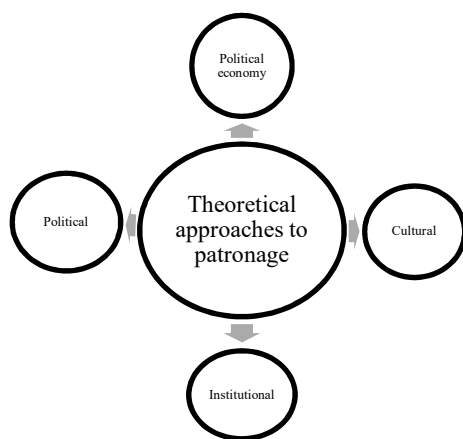


Figure 1. Theoretical approaches to patronage

In political science, patronage can refer more generally to the whole host distribution of scarce resources in exchange for political support. Some scholars argue a broader definition of patronage involves a complete class of patron-client interactions between persons of unequal power in a reciprocal relationship (Bearfield, 2009). Some have suggested that political patronage involves not only the distribution of positions but also the provision of services and the exchange of materials. Alternatively, researchers have suggested that industries dominated by a few firms are more effective at soliciting the state than highly decentralized industries. Other political scientists have highlighted the role played by domestic institutional variation in

aggregating and mediating the demands of aspiring government clients. Yet, it is also necessary to pay special attention to two things. First, patronage is a form of broader social relations known as clientelism (Oliveros, 2021). Second, it is a phenomenon that occurs in connection with appointing, releasing, and dismissing civil servants as leaders of the political dimension.

### Features of patronage

From this point of view, just like a clientelistic relationship, patronage can be considered to have the following main features. /See Figure 2/

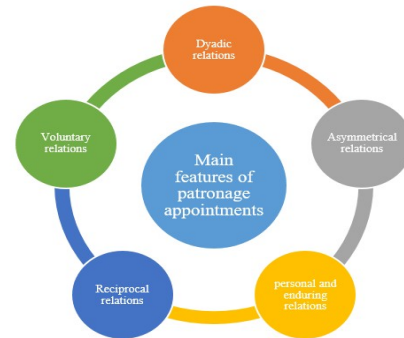


Figure 2. Main features of patronage appointments

According to Virginia Oliveris, there is a self-enforcing theory of patronage, and the fear of losing power and position has a specific effect on patrons and clients (Oliveros, 2021). Francisco Panizza, Conrado R. Larraburu, and Gerardo Scherlis published a study titled "Unpacking Patronage: The Politics of Patronage Appointments in Argentinian and Uruguayan Central Administrations" in the Journal of Politics in Latin America. That was to reduce the gap in understanding and define the situation in Latin America. First of all, based on the ideas put forward by Kopecký, Scherlis, and Spirova, patronage appointments refer to "the power of political players to appoint people to non-elected positions within the public sector regardless of whether the decision is legal or not" (these researchers used the concept of patronage appointment in political research when it firstly introduced). In the process of research, it found that there are four main reasons for the popularity of patronage appointments in the civil service of developing countries (Panizza, Francisco, Conrado Ricardo Ramos Larraburu, and Gerardo Scherlis, 2018). This idea has been discussed in the 2019 and 2022 studies (Francisco Panizza, B. Guy Peters, & Conrado Ramos Larraburu, 2019; Panizza, Peters, & Larraburu, 2022). Patronage, defined by researchers in many different ways, contrarily based on common characteristics, can be considered as follows. We understand and determine political patronage as a two-way relationship between patrons and clients involved in appointing members and supporters to public positions requiring knowledge, qualifications, and experience, as well as dismissing public servants, regardless of the resolution's legality (Batbold & Otgonbayar, 2024). In Mongolia, the tradition of public service patronage has been established since ancient times. From the Hun dynasty to the time of Genghis Khan, patronage developed strongly. Later, during the Mongolian People's Republic, it was considered the main principle used in the appointment of civil servants (Otgonsaikhan, 2023). The term political patronage in Mongolian was used in recent studies as "protection policy", or "political protection appointments" (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2021; Zumberellham, 2020; Batbold T., 2018).

## RESULTS

**Research methods and hypothesis:** An expert assessment method was used to organize the data collection for this study, which took place from April 13, 2023, to December 20, 2024. To achieve the research objectives, the study included three groups of participants in the expert assessment.

1. Educational and research institutions

2. Ministries and agencies
3. Local government organizations

The expert study included seventeen researchers in political science, public administration, and management, specializing in public human resource management, political parties, and the evolution of the civil service. Additionally, thirty-five civil servants, each with over 20 years of stable employment in government, were selected for their profession and expertise.

The following challenges were encountered in the expert survey. Include:

- **Firstly**, few researchers specialized in political patronage and had produced a specific quantity of single-subject works. This posed a significant challenge in selecting researchers to be a part of the expert team. In this regard, it should be noted that the 55 experts chosen for this study were researchers who conduct research and analysis in politics and public administration and officials working in government institutions according to their profession and specialization. Due to the poor feasibility of establishing a unified measurement, an analysis of the possibilities for including experts in the expert team was not conducted.
- **Second**, there was a notable lack of consistent terminology, definitions, and concepts, leading to various viewpoints among researchers and scholars. As a result, it was essential to examine terminology and concepts in detail, analyze the diversity of positions among researchers, synthesize the findings, and compare them to reflect this understanding in the expert study questionnaire.
- **Thirdly**, there has been limited experience in Mongolia in organizing expert studies related to political patronage and collecting data. This has created the necessity to develop a unified questionnaire for expert research based on theoretical and methodological foundations. The Kendall concordance coefficient was calculated to assess the level of agreement among all expert team members involved in the study. To perform this analysis using the SPSS program, follow the steps outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Teststatistics**

N	55
Kendall's W <sup>a</sup>	.737
Chi-Square	2635.973
Df	65
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance

When calculating the Kendall concordance coefficient, the consensus coefficient  $W=0.737$  is high, which concludes that the given parameters may be utilized to determine the causes and limitations of patronage appointments in the civil service.

#### Research hypothesis:

- H<sup>1</sup>** Patronage appointments within the Mongolian civil service remain consistent across all levels.
- H<sup>2</sup>** The desire and interest of the ruling parties to achieve power without public control is the main reason for patronage appointments in the civil service.
- H<sup>3</sup>** Improving public control overruling any party's activities will be the essential way to reduce patronage appointments.

## FINDINGS

The Fifty-five experts who participated in the survey gave the following answers to the question of how you evaluate patronage appointments in Mongolian civil service (See Table 2).

**Table 2. Patronage appointments in Mongolian civil service**

How do you evaluate patronage appointments in Mongolian civil service?

No		Frequency	Percent
1	Doesn't see anything bad	0	0
2	Doesn't know the good or bad	0	0
3	Criticizes	55	100
4	Other (write your answer)	0	0
	Total	55	100

Source: Authors' elaboration

All the researchers answered the question of which part of the civil service is more patronized (See Table 3).

**Table 3. Level of patronage appointments in Mongolian civil service**

In which part of the civil service are patronage appointments made more often?

No		Frequency	Percent
1	Executive positions	2	3.7
2	Management positions	53	96.3
	Total	55	100

Source: Authors' elaboration

According to this, experts believe that patronage appointments are organized mainly within management-level positions in the civil service. The researcher's first hypothesis was partially rejected. At the same time, the following answers were given to the question of whether the uncontrolled activities of the ruling parties will affect the patronage appointment of civil officials (See Table4).

**Table 4. Involvement of ruling parties in patronage appointments**

Uncontrolled activities of the ruling parties will affect the patronage appointments of civil officials.

No		Frequency	Percent
1	No	6	11
2	Yes	49	89
	Total	55	100

Source: Authors' elaboration

There are 37 political parties registered in the Supreme Court in Mongolia. In the last thirty years, two parties have alternately held the power of the state. There is almost no ideological difference between the parties. Therefore, strong political parties have been able to control the state power without public control. In this regard, most of the experts participating in the research attributed patronage in the civil service to arbitrary political decisions. In other words, no matter how many policies and activities are implemented, if the ruling parties do not accept them, it is impossible to develop a specialized civil service. This can be seen more clearly in how the experts answered the next question (See Table5).

**Table 5. Limit to civil service patronage appointments**

Is it possible to limit civil service patronage appointments?

No		Frequency	Percent
1	Don't know	3	5.4
2	Impossible	4	7.3
3	Possible	48	87.3
	Total	55	100

Source: Authors' elaboration

Most of the experts believed that it is possible to limit patronage appointments in the civil service. The following answers were given to the question of how patronage could be limited (See Table6).

**Table 6. Opportunities to limit patronage appointments**

How can patronage appointments in the civil service be restricted?

No		Frequency	Percent
1	Don't know	3	5.4
2	Law enforcement	11	20
3	Political competition	25	45.6
4	Public control	16	29
	Total	55	100

Source: Authors' elaboration

Experts agreed (29%) that improving public control over political parties and government officials is an opportunity to limit patronage appointments. In addition, the more competition in politics, the fewer patronage appointments (45.6%). Experts have recognized that the implementation of legislation plays a role in influencing patronage appointments. However, as evidenced in the table above, it is not the determining factor. Instead, public control and party competition are highlighted as having a more significant impact on patronage appointments.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the article, the following ideas are presented as a conclusion. It includes:

- The hypothesis that patronage appointments in the Mongolian civil service are maintained at all levels is completely rejected. According to the research, 96.3% of respondents believe patronage appointments are more common in civil service management positions.
- It has been confirmed that ruling party activities without mass control are essential to patronage appointment formation in the public sector. According to the research, 92.3% of the respondents believed that the lack of community control leads the ruling political parties and forces them to make campaign-based dismissals, replacements, and appointments in government positions after winning the elections.
- The third hypothesis, that improving public control will be an essential way to reduce patronage appointments, is fully confirmed. The results of the expert evaluation study demonstrate this.

## Abbreviations

IPP: Index of party patronage.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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