

Manpower Recruitment Challenges in the Public Sector: Examining Kogi Recruitment Exercise from 2015-2019

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Abstract:

This paper investigates challenges in human resource utilization in the public sector of Kogi State, Nigeria, from 2015 to 2019. Although existing scholarship on Nigerian public-sector recruitment primarily addresses the federal level or offers generalized analyses, there remains a notable lack of in-depth qualitative research on state-level dynamics. This study addresses this gap through a case-based analysis of recruitment deficiencies in Kogi State, drawing on 25 in-depth interviews with government officials, political appointees, journalists, civil society representatives, and both successful and unsuccessful job applicants. Purposive sampling ensured representation across roles, while snowball sampling facilitated access to less visible perspectives. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in gender, ethnicity, and professional background. The findings indicate pervasive corruption within the employment system, with recruitment policies advancing the self-interests of dominant political actors through practices such as the "godfather's veto" and pronounced nepotism. Institutionalized rules have been progressively undermined by weak enforcement, resulting in a workforce of underqualified and demoralized civil servants and diminishing public trust. The study situates these findings within broader governance failures and recommends centralized electronic filing for applications, administrative independence for the Civil Service Commission, and the establishment of a dedicated enforcement body to support merit-based reform. Limitations include the modest sample size and reliance on self-reported accounts, which may introduce recall or response bias.

Keywords: Public organization, hiring process, political favoritism, Kogi State, principal-agent theory, institutional theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The civil service in Nigeria, which the British set up during their period of colonization, was intended to serve the public without any interference; this principle is known as neutrality and was strengthened by the concepts of "neutrality", "anonymity" and "meritocracy", as stated in the famous recommendations of the East African Royal Commission in 1955 and subsequently influenced the Nigerian Civil Service (Adamolekun, 2002). However, things changed in the years following independence, particularly in the 1970s after the oil boom and the subsequent military involvement in Nigeria's political system. It is reasonable to say that within this period the culture and practices of the public sector transformed. It is now regarded as having been transformed, over-politicized, inefficient, and highly prone to abuse and inefficiency, so that rather than being a Weberian bureaucracy, it has become a means by which political settlements and rent-seeking are carried out (Joseph, 1987).

When democracy was restored in the country in 1999, there was a change in government. This new administration sparked the hope that public sector reforms would be implemented. As part of this, institutional reforms such as the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP), which were designed to increase the efficiency of the service and remove the existing systems based on favouritism, were introduced (Nnamani, 2005). Nevertheless, as experience in many Nigerian states has demonstrated, including in Kogi, the talk of reform has never corresponded with actual reform. The political economy of governance at the state level hinders the development of institutions and the establishment of new systems of governance, instead favouring short-term political gains, with recruitment processes being one of the key elements in this struggle (Egwurube, 2018).

The lasting effectiveness of a government is clearly determined by the way its civil service is perceived and the expertise it possesses. Since the general public are the ones who carry out policy and provide services, the success of operations within the public sector has a direct effect on a country's economic development, the level of welfare it achieves, and the quality of its governance (World Bank, 1997). Recruitment, which is what holds the system of public employment together by integrating the workforce into the civil service, is the key element within the structure of public administration. Although it may be easy to get rid of or avoid such recruitment, the inability to carry out these activities is the most important factor when assessing the impact of a well-established public system that defines an organisation or a nation (Armstrong, 2006). Any deviation from this approach hinders the effective recruitment of public administration officials and, as a result, causes serious damage and leads to ineffectiveness in an organisation, for instance through low service quality, an increase in corrupt practices, and a lack of trust from the population. In Nigeria, and particularly in its states, the actions of the Civil Service have on numerous occasions provided reasons for extensive research and criticism of alleged cases of nepotism, interference, and a total disregard for the so-called merit-based systems used

in recruiting government employees (Adebowale, 2014; Olowu, 1999). The period in Kogi State under Governor Yahaya Bello from 2015 to 2019 is an example of this. The start of that era was characterised by a large-scale recruitment drive, which caused a great deal of controversy, led to accusations of misappropriation, and resulted in legal action, perhaps indicating deeper problems in the way the state's public system functions.

Kogi State was set up in 1991 when the former Benue and Kwara States were divided. Nevertheless, since it was created, it has faced a number of difficulties. These problems have largely been connected with the administration of the public service and have been made worse by the state's ethnic makeup and by a particularly difficult kind of politics. The state's history has shown that the period from 2015 to 2019 was of great importance. During that time, it suffered from serious economic uncertainty together with a growing number of civil service employees who were well past the normal period of their service. As a result, the state was compelled to take the highly unpopular decision to carry out a number of recruitments in its civil service administration. The most controversial of these was the staff redeployment exercise and the constant mistreatment that went with it during that period. Specifically, between 2016 and 2017, there was an attempt to fill the gaps by recruiting over a thousand people across the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of the state. (Kogi Loses N213bn To Ghost Workers - Audit Committee, 2016) This recruitment exercise, however, became involved with financial matters, with many of the applicants complaining about being extorted for money, nepotism, other irregular promotions, and a lack of accountability; all of this caused a public outcry, and as a result, there were peaceful demonstrations demanding that the applicants' rights be recognised (Heilman, 2017).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The main worry that people have regarding the study is the failure to achieve its objectives. This is evident in cases involving recruitment, where transparency and efficient procedures are bypassed, a feature of the public sector in Kogi State. Indeed, the most serious conflicts occurred within the population during the recruitment of officers into the service. As a result, these issues have been considered to be matters of concern for the Commission, especially in relation to the changes in the transformed civil service (Kogi State Planning Development & Historical Survey Commission, 2016).

A key aspect of the recruitment challenges in Kogi State lies in understanding the perspectives and experiences of individuals who are directly involved in the process, including not only applicants but also those responsible for administering and overseeing recruitment. Recognizing the significance of analyzing the changes within the recruitment system over time allows for a clearer examination of how policies, practices, and actors interact in shaping outcomes. By focusing on these dynamics, this study aims to

contribute to a practical and realistic understanding of the underlying issues affecting workforce recruitment, directly connecting to the broader research problem.

Furthermore, poor hiring practices negatively impact the broader economy by discouraging educated youth who are systematically denied employment opportunities, leading to increased frustration and a decline in educational attainment due to high youth unemployment. These practices also contribute to an inflated and inefficient workforce, a problem exacerbated by a government payroll system reportedly burdened with numerous 'ghost workers' or inactive employees, thereby imposing significant financial strain on an already resource-constrained government and diverting funds from critical sectors such as infrastructure and health (ICPC, 2020). (Ezeh & Olekwara, 2025) Despite the evident nature of these challenges, no definitive solutions have been implemented, even with technological advancements and stated political intentions. The absence of effective administrative mechanisms and supportive institutional culture during the period under review in Kogi State underscores the need for this research to address the identified gap.

1.2 Research questions

To guide this inquiry, the study will be driven by the following research questions:

1. What were the main difficulties that marked the workforce recruitment process in the public sector of Kogi State from 2015 to 2019?
2. How did political influence and nepotism affect compliance with the meritocratic principles in these recruitment exercises?
3. To what extent were the institutional and legal frameworks responsible for public sector recruitment in Kogi State adequate, and what obstacles existed to the effective implementation of these frameworks?
4. What are the effects of these recruitment difficulties on public service delivery and on the performance of organisations in Kogi State?
5. What strategic reforms might be suggested in order to set up a more transparent, efficient, and merit-oriented recruitment system within the public sector of Kogi State?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The imperative of meritocratic recruitment in public administration

The modern public administrative system is well characterised by the Weberian ideal of bureaucracy, with its emphasis on impartiality, hierarchy, technical competence, and recruitment based on merit (Weber, 1947). This principle basically states that it is necessary to have a professional and neutral civil service, free from political influence, if public policies are to be implemented efficiently and fairly (Peters, 2010). Equality of opportunity is what ensures that people are selected according to their ability and qualifications rather than on the basis of any ascriptive factors in this type of system. As

Young (1958) puts it, in a meritocracy, a system makes it so that talent and effort are the main factors in determining promotions. As a result, this improves both the efficiency and the legitimacy of the organisation.

Starting in the late 20th century, New Public Management spread worldwide and, by focusing on high performance and efficiency, promoted human resources practices in order to make the public sector prosperous. Hood (1991) supports the view that the New Public Management approach, which concentrated on privatisation in the large-scale service sector, was a step towards having a public sector that carried out transparent and competitive recruitment on the lines of the private sector. Over the years, the World Bank (1997) has consistently maintained that a merit-based public structure greatly facilitates a capable state and that this is in fact a necessary precondition for achieving sustainable development. Recruitment that does not follow meritocratic principles leads to a number of negative consequences, including institutional weakness, a decline in public trust, and poor governance outcomes (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).

2.2 Global and African perspectives on public sector recruitment challenges

Although the concept of meritocracy is recognised as being of great significance, the actual implementation of it, especially not just in developing countries, is full of difficulties. Examples of such challenges that transcend borders include political interference, whereby elections are used to make appointments in order to reward supporters and strengthen power (Peters, 2010). Such practices are clearly regarded as patronage, cronyism, and nepotism. For instance, Berman (2015) notes that in most African states the public sector is the preferred place of employment, 'making it a classic target' in the politics of patronage and thus weakening its institutional capabilities. Other difficulties have been corruption within the bureaucracy, in which recruitment is manipulated entirely for one's own benefit (Transparency International, 2019). Institutions are also affected by outdated legal frameworks, inadequate resources for recruitment processes, and a lack of technical skills among civil service commissions (Adams et al., 2000; Kiragu et al., 2004). The politicisation of recruitment not only has a negative effect on the quality of the people who enter the services but also demotivates current staff and leads to a culture of mediocrity (Adebawale, 2014).

2.3 The Nigerian state as well as the phenomenon of recruitment pathology

The visible departure of the public service in Nigeria from the meritocratic foundation established during the colonial era has been examined in various publications (Adamolekun, 2002). Thus, Joseph (1987) described Nigerian politics as 'prebendal' and explained how this influences Nigerian public servants, who regard public office as something akin to personal property and a means of securing patronage. This prebendal culture has even seeped into the recruitment systems. According to Olowu (1999), it is claimed that the neutrality and professionalism of the civil service were systematically

undermined by the military during the various military regimes, a decree being issued which made loyalty rather than merit the criterion for promotion or appointment. Even with the arrival of the democratic era in 1999, these problems have continued to appear, despite reforms such as the Civil Service Reform Programme. Several issues have been highlighted in various studies.

1. Egwurube (2018) discovered that state governors and other influential politicians frequently exercise direct influence over civil service commissions in order to appoint their favoured candidates, making the official procedures irrelevant.
2. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC, 2020) has recorded instances of officials asking job applicants for bribes in order to obtain appointment letters, even in cases involving non-existent "ghost" positions.
3. **Ethnic and Nepotistic Considerations:** In a society that is made up of many ethnic groups such as Nigeria, recruitment tends to favour candidates who are from the governor's ethnic group or from the local government area, resulting in imbalances and causing a sense of marginalization (Suberu, 2001). This problem is especially evident in states like Kogi, which have a great deal of ethnic diversity.
4. The institutional framework is weak: Although the Nigerian Constitution and a number of the Public Service Rules set out procedures for fair recruitment, the mechanisms put in place to enforce them are weak. The Civil Service Commissions usually do not have the necessary autonomy and resources to overcome political pressure (Nnamani, 2005).

2.4 The Kogi State context: a microcosm of systemic failure

Very little literature is available on the way the public administration of Kogi State functions. The information that is available from other Nigerian states as well as from government documents and the news media shows what the administration of Kogi State is like. Together with many other states, Kogi State is suffering because of its fiscal deficit and the weight of its debt, factors which have a negative effect on the biggest part of the budget, namely the wage bill (BudgIT, 2019). As a result, there is a need to hire staff, something that is always a worry to political elites, who generally carry out these processes in a haphazard and unhealthily unethical manner. The recruitment exercise that took place during 2016/2017 is the one that this research focuses on, and there were many claims and counter-claims in the media regarding the inadequacies and irregularities in the recruitment process (The Guardian, 2017). References to ICIR (2018) give a summary of the cases of people who are challenging the recruitment process on the grounds of alleged fraud and for not meeting the expected standards of transparency.

Nevertheless, this material primarily addresses journalistic aspects and lacks the rigorous analysis the subject requires. The recruitment challenges observed in Kogi State are not unique, as similar patterns have been documented in other Nigerian states, such as Kaduna, Benue, and Rivers. For instance, studies have reported that recruitment

exercises in these states are often marred by political interference, nepotism, and financial inducements, leading to a public service workforce that is not always based on merit (Ozoh et al., 2026, pp. 189-201). While the specific actors and local contexts may differ, the underlying issues such as weak institutional frameworks, inadequate enforcement of rules, and the persistent culture of patronage are recurrent problems across state administrations in Nigeria.

This comparative perspective not only situates the peculiar case of Kogi within a broader national challenge but also highlights the urgent need for reforms that address both institutional weaknesses and the sociopolitical norms that sustain them. A loophole that leads to widespread agitation could also cause further disputes regarding the behavior of other parts of the Nigerian federation. An empirical approach appears appropriate for examining recruitment issues in the public service in Kogi State, given its particular institutional and political context. This kind of re-examination should involve a review of previous empirical studies, with attention to the gaps found in them. Moreover, there is a need for more empirical work that looks in detail at specific areas of the recruitment process in a particular state over a period of time, rather than just offering a theoretical discussion of general issues. The case of the recruitment methods used in Kogi State between 2015 and 2019 has never been studied academically but has instead received extensive media coverage. This study will complement the existing analysis by carrying out a data-driven qualitative inquiry into the recruitment issues in Kogi State and thus point toward the need for professional human resource management in the public sector of the country.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When carrying out recruitment, one encounters a number of difficulties which require a thorough analysis in order to identify the underlying causes; in this situation the principal-agent approach and institutional theory will be combined in order to account for cases where there are principal-agent motivation groups, even though the wider society and cultures do not restrict them but rather allow their actions to be influenced by culture in a more extensive sense.

3.1 The Principal-Agent Theory

When Kogi State is looked at in the context of research into hold-ups in the public sector, and more recently in terms of public sector recruitment, the citizens of Kogi State are the final delegation of authority and the holders of certain functions such as public sector recruitment.

The Agent: It is both the responsibility and duty of agents, whether they be the elected officials (such as the governor or the commissioners) or those who carry out policy through the use of technology (for example, the Civil Service Commission or the Head of Service), to carry out recruitment in what is best for the principals. As stated in PAT, the

fundamental problem is referred to as agency loss, a situation in which agents act in their own interests rather than those of their principals. This imbalance arises because of the problem of information asymmetry, which is entirely reasonable since it is usually the villains who first know what will not be done and, at times, the objectives of the principals and the agents can differ (Eisenhardt, 1989). Political Interference: The governor (who is an agent of the people) might use the recruitment process to fulfill his own desires and appoint people who support him, even if this means that he does not select the most qualified individuals, which is what the citizens want.

Corruption: Civil service officials (agents), depending on their position within the organisation, might engage in various wrongdoings, for example, by having large gaps between themselves and certain actors in the market, since this could lead them to seek kickbacks.

Lack of accountability means that the mechanisms which have been established, for example, legislative bodies, are unable to hold people responsible when mistakes occur during the recruitment process.

In both Principal–Agent Theory (PAT) and Institutional Theory, motivation is no longer the only area of focus; rather, a broader perspective is pursued. This means that one should look at the kind of harmful behaviour that takes place by adopting a macro-level approach. According to institutional theory, organisations are governed by institutions which have regulative, normative, and cultural dimensions (Scott, 2014) and which lie outside the organisations themselves. The term 'regulative' refers to the formal rules and the sanctions that are designed to keep people in line. In the case of Kogi State, this will involve the Public Service Rules and the Kogi State Civil Service Commission Establishment Acts. However, there remains concern because of the inadequacy of these rules, since they are always unable to prevent wrongdoings. The normative aspect concerns people's views, the conventional ways of behaving, and what is considered to be the correct behaviour. In Kogi State in particular, the normal values of affection and alliance are given greater importance than the hierarchical structure that is associated with a merit-based approach when one is in a government job (Joseph, 1987). The final element is the cultural-cognitive one, and it relates to the way in which knowledge is generally understood and how ideas are usually conveyed. This is shown by the strong fundamental belief in the case of public employment that 'one has to know somebody' or that one has to engage in corruption, a belief which then comes true by itself.

How clear the value of the perspectives mentioned above is becomes obvious when we consider the constructs of institutional theory is obvious. First, it shows that the formal system of rules is becoming increasingly ineffective by pointing out that clientelistic systems go beyond the limits set by law. Second, it accounts for the problem of path dependence since the customary practices of the prebendal and jobbery reinforce the idea

of appropriateness in such a way that this idea cannot be altered otherwise. Thirdly, attention is given to the isomorphism aspect by noting that the recruitment practices of Kogi State reflect the problems found in other states for reasons of identification rather than for efficiency, all in an attempt to ensure that everything is acceptable within the existing political context.

Combining PAT with Institutional Theory enables the development of a strong framework for examining relevant issues. On the one hand, PAT provides a close-up view by explaining how politicians and bureaucrats nationalize themselves in order to manipulate the recruitment processes to meet their own interests or those of the people they represent, for example, the elite community; on the other hand, Institutional Theory explains why such practices are carried out even though clear rules and regulations prescribe otherwise. In this way, the study aims not merely to offer a narrative of abnormalities but to move towards identifying the causal mechanisms that make recruitment deviations possible and not merely irregular.

Put differently, while PAT deals with the manner in which decisions are made, with the coherence of actions and with the orientations of individuals, Institutional Theory looks into the reason why these activities are continued. Together, these approaches provide a well-structured basis for collecting and analysing data concerning workforce recruitment problems in Kogi State. This study primarily applies PAT and Institutional Theory within the specific context of state-level public sector recruitment in Nigeria. However, by focusing on the ways these theories interact and manifest within the Kogi State case, the analysis also extends the practical application of these frameworks. It highlights the importance of accounting for the complex interplay of formal rules and informal practices, demonstrating that a combined lens can reveal both the actor-driven and structural roots of persistent recruitment challenges. Thus, the study not only utilizes these theories to structure inquiry but also advances scholarly understanding of their relevance and limitations in empirical contexts marked by entrenched informal institutions.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a single, extreme, or highly specific case study to examine the workforce recruitment challenges faced by the public service sector in Kogi State from 2015 to 2019. This methodology was selected due to the complexity and socio-political nature of the research problem, which necessitates an in-depth exploration of problematic situations, stakeholder perceptions, and power dynamics, factors not adequately captured through quantitative analysis. The case study design facilitates a critical examination of a contemporary issue within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly delineated (Yin, 2018). By conducting an in-depth case study of Kogi State,

the research demonstrates how recruitment challenges are shaped and perpetuated within specific institutional and political contexts, offering comparative insights for other Nigerian states.

While this study is context-specific, its findings provide analytical generalizations that may inform understanding of public sector recruitment dynamics in similar environments across Nigeria and other regions facing comparable governance challenges. The recurring issues identified in Kogi, such as political interference, weak institutional enforcement, and the erosion of meritocracy, reflect patterns observed in other sub-national administrative entities in Nigeria. (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019, pp. 1-10) As such, the insights gained from this case study can aid academic peers and policymakers in assessing the broader transferability and relevance of its conclusions for reform efforts beyond Kogi State. The research approach emphasizes understanding the actions and experiences of social actors, focusing on the meanings and motivations underlying their behaviors (Bryman, 2016). The objective extends beyond summarizing respondent perspectives to achieving analytical generalization and critically examining the processes by which such generalizations are formed.

To enhance transparency and rigor, it is important to acknowledge the potential biases and limitations of this study. One limitation lies in the selection of interview participants through purposive and snowball sampling. This approach may have inadvertently favored individuals more willing or able to share their perspectives, potentially underrepresenting dissenting or marginalized voices. The researcher's positionality and prior familiarity with the institutional context may have influenced the framing of questions or interpretation of responses. The single-case study design, focused exclusively on Kogi State, limits the generalizability of findings to other contexts or states in Nigeria. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of recall bias or social desirability bias, as some participants may have been reluctant to disclose sensitive information regarding irregularities.

To mitigate these biases and enhance the reliability of findings, this study employed triangulation by systematically cross-validating interview data with documentary evidence. After collecting data from 25 semi-structured interviews, key claims and themes emerging from participant accounts were compared against official documents, including the Kogi State Public Service Rules, state gazettes, recruitment circulars, anti-graft agency reports, and relevant newspaper coverage. When interviewees described specific recruitment practices, these accounts were checked against procedural documents and contemporaneous news reports to assess their consistency and accuracy. Discrepancies or convergences between sources were noted, helping to distinguish between individual perceptions and patterns observable in publicly available records. This cross-verification process strengthened the credibility and plausibility of the study's results.

Specifically structured interviews were used as the main tool for gathering data because they provide a flexible and focused way of obtaining detailed qualitative information.

Within this approach, an interview schedule or guide was used, which contained all the key topics and allowed for the asking of open-ended questions related to the research aims and objectives, as well as the relevant theoretical assumptions. The interviewers followed the framework of the interview schedule but also took into account the interesting responses given by the respondents, sought further clarification on the issues raised, some of which were complex and initially unknown, and explored other topics of interest that arose during the course of the conversation. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were successfully carried out with a convenience sample of target participants who were aware of the recruitment process. Another five to ten participants, belonging to the typologies developed for the analysis, will be included. (Sunday et al., 2026) These methods were useful in achieving the aims of the study because they enabled the identification of rich-source cases that were essential for addressing the research questions. The sample included ex- and current employees of the Kogi State Civil Service Commission and those from the Office of the Head of Service as the key groups involved in recruitment planning; political appointees from the period (2015–2019) who had access to and could interpret the policies and political directives in question; and journalists working with the contentious local media.

The sample also comprised representatives of civil society organizations and the applicants, both those who were successful and those who were not, in the implementation of the process. The conclusion regarding the sampling strategy was that the approach taken was comprehensive and thus all possible aspects of the subject matter were covered in the study. (Edegbo et al., 2026) The combination of the participants' perspectives then extends along the line of implementation to the 'injectors' of the policy as well as the 'end users', that is, the citizenry applying for the particular policy or admission; and also, to the borrowers in relation to the relevant areas or functions mentioned in the theories. (Stephen & Joel, 2021)

The research revealed that access to participants, particularly those who were serving government officials, was the most urgent challenge for the study. In light of this, the snowball technique was used, initially identifying potential participants through professionals within the field or at school and through written letters of commendation from the researcher's institution. Consent protocols and consent forms were followed during all interviews, and all participants who gave accounts were assigned new names to enhance confidentiality and avoid revealing identity, given the place and time of the interviews and the nature of the critique of the government they offered. Each interview, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, was conducted in English, digitally audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy during analysis (Analysis of Qualitative Interview Data – An Introduction to Research

Methods in Sociology, 2024). In addition, to verify and contextualize the information obtained during the interviews, the research consulted relevant documents such as ... Another primary data source used in this research, besides interviews, was documentary review. This included accessing various packages of documents comprising the Kogi State Public Service Rules, the state's official gazettes, the annual statements from the Anti-Graft Agency on the state's wage bill – ICPC, the recruitment activities covered in national newspapers and local dailies' commentaries, and speeches delivered by the state. By reviewing these documents, we obtained guidelines such as how the applicant was to be inducted, the event time and date during the recruitment ... The document analysis also helped us determine formal, regulated, and some illegal processes, including the series of events that formed the basis of the case placement within the general public sphere, with assistance in future comparison of certain claims against the researched value system of the interview.

Data analysis was a highly systematized and goal-directed process based on the thematic analysis principles developed by Braun and Clarke in 2006 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involved a structured, step-by-step approach designed to elicit, analyze, and identify patterns or themes in the material under study. The process began with a phase of waiting for the data, also referred to as decreased or negative (erroneous) stance intake, during which focused attention inadvertently depleted all the (counseled) people who had come to watch the observation list (Usman & Obi, 2023). This phase concerned the subject or topic of the research and the data that had been collected. This was followed by an initial coding stage, in which the interesting features of the data were systematically recorded using NVivo software, which helped organize and manage the large amount of qualitative data.

The initial codes were then collected and grouped into possible themes, after which these themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they formed a coherent pattern and were supported by the data. The last step was to define and name the themes, as well as to incorporate them into a clear and precise answer to the research questions. This particular analytical procedure was not merely a straightforward sequence from one stage of analysis to the next; rather, it was an interactive and dynamic process that engaged with the data, the codes generated, and the theoretical frameworks from the two theories, Principal-Agent Theory and Institutional Theory. For instance, codes such as 'instructions from above' or 'political pressure' were brought together under the broader thematic category 'Political Interference as Agency Failure', while codes describing 'how things are always done' or 'the importance of connections' were interpreted in light of the normative and cultural-cognitive aspects of Institutional Theory. The opportunity for dialectics in the research meant that the analysis went beyond simply producing findings and conclusions and instead took on a more explanatory character by elaborating the mechanisms underlying the widely discussed wrongful recruitment behavior.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Thematic analysis based on research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: PREDOMINANT CHALLENGES IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

From a review of the discussions, it was clear that the recruitment process faced three major and closely linked obstacles: a fundamental lack of transparency in the system, widespread greed and fraud, and the system's impotent excuses.

Theme 1: Excluding information and preplanned resistance

Both the applicants and the constituents of the Independent Social Society strongly objected to the posts not being advertised in the appropriate manner. One applicant (P05) stated, 'Applying for the vacancies through this system was carried out under very informal conditions. The positions were never publicly advertised in the official publications or on the website. It seems as though they did not want many applicants.' Since all the members of the panel agreed that the media is one of the key elements of a lively democracy, a member of Crenary Integrity pointed out that freedom of the press and civil society organizations regard women as observers, especially since women are a politically marginalized group under Sharia law. This lack of transparency was further highlighted by one of the journalists (P17), who said, 'The number of vacant positions and the deadlines are never made public at CSC.'

The usual reply is that there are no vacancies or that applications have been closed without providing any further explanation. There is always a blackout, and it is extremely misleading even when looking at the information included in the subsequent advertisements.' This lack of transparency was also confirmed in an interview with a source who asked to remain anonymous and who is the Head/Director: "When you advertise a lot, you hardly manage to drive people away. In fact, you reach a point where you can no longer take it from all the different groups. Nevertheless, when it is quiet... everything is fine." The aspect of 'control' and the possibility of achieving it concerning the public are fundamental to this situation, as they promote tendencies that make it possible to misuse power beyond the scope of merit-based considerations.

Research theme 2: The monetisation of opportunity

A frequently mentioned problem was the direct request for bribes (in the fourth paragraph of the introduction). This issue concerns how applicants were treated and is acknowledged by some experienced officials. Both those who were successful and those who were not in their attempts described having to pay money at various stages. One applicant at stage three (P09) stated: "After the written test, a man phoned me saying that he was from the ministry. He told me that I had passed, but that I would have to pay ₦150,000 in order to 'guarantee my appointment letter'. When I told him that I did not

have the money, I never heard from him again.” A senior civil servant (P02) also denounced this practice and attributed it to political leaders: “The problem is that the politicians regard the civil service as a source of income. They therefore get their associates into the Civil Service Commission, who in turn treat recruitment as a profitable activity. These allies go on to set the fee for each post.” The participants referred to a number of ‘economic evaluations’ for certain positions, indicating a well-organized system of corruption that fueled monetary demands and undermined the principle of merit in the workplace.

Theme 3: The effects of logistical violence on institutional performance

In cases where the proper procedures had been observed, it became clear that the money had been used so badly as a result of which corrupt civil servants gained control. One of the officials who took part in the 2016 exercise (P01) described the disorderly state of the exercise: “We were not even provided with the basic support systems needed for the exercise. I want to stress that we were asked to examine thousands of people in a place which could not even hold a hundred. There were no correct identification documents and no clear instructions as to what should have been done. A very dangerous situation was developing. It was extremely alarming.” This lack of met logistical requirements often served as an excuse for taking shortcuts. One political turncoat (P04) stated, “You can be sure that there could be no fair recruitment that is, one that is not political when there are no resources. The government was in financial difficulty. I mean, a great deal of the action had to be carried out on an ad hoc basis.” However, including the current government, it has been claimed that, in reality, the argument that the country lacked the resources to carry out a fair recruitment was not valid since an underhand commission had been obtained.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND NEPOTISM

Politics and family relationships formed the main basis for domination within the meritocracy. They highlighted two key aspects: the primacy of ‘godfatherism’ and the general acceptance of tribalism and nepotism.

Theme 4: The Godfather's veto

The Principal-Agent Theory is clearly illustrated in this theme. In every instance, participants stated that the Civil Service Commission never had an official role in the final approval of any appointment; instead, that power belonged to the political godfathers. As one former Head of Department (P07) put it, “The Commission might shortlist candidates on the basis of their qualifications, but the final list had to be sent to the ‘Big Man’s’ office, where the real selection took place. Names would be struck off and those of their own candidates inserted. Our technical assessment was merely a formality.” Another official (P01) used a rather apt metaphor, saying, “We were just a clearing house, a rubber stamp. The actual recruitment took place at Government House.” If a formal procedure is seen

to exist in the face of such direct interference, the entire process is nullified, and the expert body (the agent) is reduced to simply carrying out the political (the principal's) wishes, which, more often than not, were against the public interest.

Theme 5: The importance of 'state of origin' over 'state of mind'

Another political influence closely linked to geographic and ethnic favoritism is this one, in which the normative element of Institutional Theory takes hold and is no longer an exception but the standard practice. A candidate who belonged to a minority ethnic group in the country (P14) expressed a strong sense of frustration: "If you are not from the same local government as the governor or the commissioner, there is no point in applying at all. They will openly tell you that the post is meant for 'our sons and daughters' and that merit is only for the textbooks." To explain this practice, the political aide (P12) said: "Each administration has to reward its political base; that is what is expected of it. If you campaign in a particular community, people expect you to give them jobs when you win. That is the way politics works here." This shows that the norm of patronage supersedes formal merit-based rules, producing a self-sustaining situation in which every breach of the merit principle becomes expected and is in fact justified.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: ADEQUACY OF INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND IMPEDIMENTS

The main problem was that, instead of producing a void through the absence of law, there had been a disregard for the legal framework itself. This was the key conclusion drawn from the various interviews.

Theme 6: robust rules, weak enforcement

Almost all participants, including those in government, acknowledged that the Kogi State Public Service Rules and relevant laws, in principle, were adequate and called for recruitment based on merit. An administrative lawyer (P19) stated that "the framework is sound since it provides for a fair hearing, advertising, and competitive selection; the real problem is one of enforcement, for the rules are ignored without any consequences". A civil service official from the Commission (P03) noted that "the Commission is not independent since the Governor appoints both the Chairman and the members. How can you bite the finger that feeds you? If the Governor wants a particular candidate, the Commission has no authority to refuse." This highlights a serious flaw in the institution's design: the body responsible for upholding meritocracy is structurally tied to the main source of political interference.

Theme 7: The culture of impunity as a barrier

A widely held belief is that a culture of impunity is firmly established. This aligns with the cultural-cognitive aspect of Institutional Theory, namely the common belief that breaking the rules has no repercussions for anyone. An individual from civil society (P21) stated that "there is no punishment for violating the recruitment guidelines. When the

media brings to light a case of corruption in recruitment, nothing occurs. No one is investigated, let alone prosecuted. This clearly shows that the rules are not taken seriously." This point was supported by a journalist (P18) who said, "We published the names of those who had paid for jobs, together with evidence. The government's reaction was not to carry out an investigation but to threaten us. Impunity is the greatest factor in enabling this kind of corruption." Because of this lack of accountability, it is reasonable to expect that adherence to formal rules would be treated as a weakness to be taken advantage of rather than a duty. Among the consequences that the participants perceived, the most serious were institutional decline and serious social harm.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: IN RELATION TO EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, WHAT IS THE CHARACTERISTIC WHICH HAS THE GREATEST EFFECT ON THE IMAGE OF A COMPANY AMONG THE VARIOUS FACTORS CONCERNING THE PERCEPTION OF RECRUITMENT DIFFICULTIES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA?

Theme 8: The de-skilling of the civil service

This situation was seen as leading to a reduction in quality and a lack of competence among staff. "Thirty years' service, a veteran civil servant (Po6) sadly noted, 'now anyone can join with the inability to write a simple memo. They are rude, lazy and unqualified. However, they cannot be dismissed since they have a 'godfather'. How can such a service possibly meet the needs of the people?' The Public Affairs Analyst (P23) made the same point: 'A person who is teaching himself while being paid has taken the chance to obtain an easy transactional certificate and has been given a job as a result; clearly, the wrong sort of education has been prescribed. This is why it is obvious that incorrect methods in the state services, which lead to poor governance outcomes, are the result of politicians or of security personnel who hold positions which have corrupt motivations.' This issue is so important because recruitment problems have greatly contributed to governance outcomes.

Theme 9: Morale and social trust have broken down

The Effects on Current Staff and on Society as a Whole. Among the other major themes were the hardships endured by the existing cadre. It was reported that professional civil servants felt deeply demoralized. One individual (Po8) stated, "What point is there in working sincerely when one of my new semi-literate colleagues has been appointed simply because his uncle is a commissioner? It kills your enthusiasm and promotes a culture of mediocrity." The consequences extend beyond the public service sector: there is a severe decline in social trust. The Youth Leader (P15) said, "Young people in Kogi no longer believe in hard work or in education. They think that the only way of getting a job is by means of connections or money. This is very dangerous for the future of our country." This state of disillusionment undermines the social contract between the government and citizens, leading to cynicism and alienation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: proposed strategic reforms

A small number of respondents offered solutions that fall between the two categories and can therefore be reduced to two general ideas: the use of technology to eliminate the need for human intervention and the reform of institutions to promote accountability. However, implementing these reforms may face significant political and practical challenges. Resistance from entrenched interests who benefit from the existing system, limited political will, and fears regarding transparency may all hinder the adoption of technological platforms or the granting of true independence to oversight institutions. Practical setbacks could arise from resource constraints, a lack of technical expertise, and insufficient infrastructure to support robust e-recruitment systems. Recognizing these obstacles is critical for anticipating future barriers and for designing reform strategies that are both realistic and sustainable.

To overcome these challenges, several concrete pathways for reform are suggested. First, initiate a public awareness campaign to educate citizens, applicants, and stakeholders about the value of transparent, merit-based recruitment and the risks posed by patronage and corrupt practices. Second, establish an independent reform task force, including representatives from civil society and technical experts, to guide and monitor the implementation of e-recruitment systems and institutional restructuring. Third, pilot the e-recruitment platform in select ministries or departments before scaling it up statewide, allowing for the identification and resolution of technical or logistical issues on a smaller scale. Fourth, provide targeted training for civil service commission staff in the use of digital tools and in best practices for fair recruitment, sourced through partnerships with national and international capacity-building organizations. Fifth, develop legal provisions for the protection of whistleblowers and the enforcement of penalties for obstructing reform, thereby reducing fear of retaliation and incentivizing compliance. Finally, secure phased funding through state budgets and external grants to ensure that e-governance initiatives and institutional reforms are adequately resourced and maintained. These actionable steps provide a practical framework for initiating genuine change, directly addressing both political and operational resistance, and can guide policy-oriented stakeholders seeking to improve the integrity and efficiency of public-sector recruitment in Kogi State.

Theme 10: The use of technology as a means of preventing the abuse of discretion

Many of the participants, particularly the candidates and the younger civil servants, viewed technology as an important part of the solution. It was proposed to introduce an end-to-end e-recruitment platform. An IT-focused applicant (P10) stated that there should be an online one-stop shop – covering the entire process from the advertisement through the application, shortlisting, the examinations, and the release of the results – with all these steps carried out online. This would mean that all activities are recorded in the system, eliminating the various stages where bribes could be offered and making the

entire process visible to all the relevant parties. This addresses the particular wrongdoing identified by the Principal-Agent theory, that is, it gives the principal (the public) the information needed to monitor the agent (in this case, the recruiting body).

Theme 11: A reorganisation aimed at promoting self-reliance and transparency

The main corrective measures concerned the organization's structure, and it was on this point that the meeting concluded that the Civil Service Commission should be given more power and freedom. For example, the practice of retaining Commission members after their appointment should be enshrined in the state Constitution, which should state that members of the Commission must not have political connections with the president, thus ensuring that appointments are made on the basis of qualifications. The second point concerned financing, with the Commission to be funded on a budgetary basis from the Constitution, entitled to first appropriation from the consolidated revenue fund, as being above Parliament. It was also stressed the need to set up an Independent Public Service Complaints Ombudsman to more effectively monitor and protect against abuses that violate the principles of fair competition in the selection process. A certain retired judge (P20), who raised this issue firmly, said, 'We have to allow an institution to emerge which will handle claims, act as an investigating body in respect of such claims and also function as a body that combats such baseless practices. So long as people do not know that they will be dealt with strictly, this situation will not end.' This is in accordance with the Institutional Theory, which holds that in order to bring about any change it is necessary to create new, very powerful regulatory bodies which will have adequate sanctioning mechanisms concerning the defunct normative and cultural cognitive aspects of patronage which surround us all.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to conduct a critical assessment of the constraints facing human resource recruitment in the public service of the state of Kogi between 2015 and 2019. When 25 semi-structured interviews, each with a particular thematic emphasis, are critically examined, it becomes clear that there should be a practice of recruiting people on the basis of their abilities. However, this is undermined because the vertical bureaucratic structures meant to support such a practice have been compromised by corruption, collusion, and corrupt attacks carried out by a certain section of the population, most often the political elite. The chapter therefore places these findings in the context of the existing literature. It examines them using the study's conceptual framework, which is made up of the Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) and the Institutional Theory.

Nevertheless, the thematic analysis of workforce recruitment in Kogi is recursive; it is marred from the beginning and is marked by a loss of control, thus allowing political interference and nepotism to take place. To put it simply, the system of vertical

recruitment in Kogi is structurally flawed because of the weak rules that are meant to regulate it, but these rules are not enforced due to the established culture of impunity. As a result, a large number of unqualified leadership personnel will be appointed, which is contrary to the interests of the civil service since it leads to a decline in the quality of its staff.

The suggested changes, which relate to technological methods of governance (Theme 5.1) and to increasing the independence of the civil service (Theme 5.2), do not represent a mere adjustment since they involve the most fundamental type of reform that is, the destruction of the mechanisms of governance, including the systems for making requests and handling appeals, which determine the objectives and expected results of recruiting staff members. The conclusions regarding this issue effectively reinforce the cumulative arguments developed in the study. The influence exercised on officers by powerbrokers is an example of a loss of agency as described in the Principal-Agent model; in this situation, the resilience and the forces of order under which they operate assign the credit for not achieving the expected outcomes to the agency. The contradictions of the Principal-Agent theory and its concepts can be described as either actual behaviour that violates such norms, or as excessive demands made by the agency, which are driven solely by its power and by its opportunities to extract resources. The stakes at the heart of the existing institution may result in demands for certain resources, thereby leading to corruption, fraud, theft, and other vices. However, the recruitment problems in Kogi State cannot be remotely controlled as one might desire, and it would be wrong to make such concessions for a few 'rotten heads'. The entire system is structured in such a way that these problems arise.

To address the first research question, we examined the recruitment process, the difficulties encountered, and the reasons behind these obstacles. Three points in particular emerged from the entries: an intentionality behind secrecy, the commercialization of the hiring process, and inefficiencies within the agency. This aligns with Adebowale's (2014) claim that in public processes here, bureaucratic secrecy is not accidental; it is a deliberate strategy for avoiding scrutiny and retaining dominant power within the system. This article goes beyond that by noting that considerably less information was available because this aspect of administrative reform had been used as a means of achieving 'controllability' at the level of Kogi State, enabling officials to circumvent the prescribed procedures. The acceptance of bribes to secure appointments also aligns with the findings of the exercises carried out by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC, 2020) regarding bribery in the public service sector in Nigeria. However, the interview transcripts also raise further unclear issues involving breaches of confidentiality and references to 'greenbacks' and complex leverage networks, indicating that the problem is not merely about corruption in general but about inclusive exploitation in a particular context.

Another reason concerned the role of political interference and linked it to 'juicy' patronage. This highlights a problem known as "agent loss," which is part of the Public Administration Theory paradigm. This problem is illustrated by the widespread presence of the 'godfather's veto,' in which agents (the Governor and his appointees) advance their own interests by rewarding loyal clients and securing bureaucratic power against the wishes of senior officials, who are also regarded as the proper recipients (the citizens) of the services, provided only that the client services are carried out efficiently. Joseph's idea of prebendalism, which refers to the occupation of government posts as personal or group benefits for those who are entitled to hold them, is the source of this notion. It must be stressed that the Civil Service Commission did not function as a check on the executive but was used as a tool of "rubber-stamping" to benefit the executive, thus showing that the institution had been captured. The dispute regarding the consideration of 'state of origin' rather than merit goes beyond simply reexamining the more functional elements of Institutional Theory (as Socio-technical Science does), since it also involves some normative and cultural-cognitive aspects (Scott, 2014). Ethnic partiality is not seen by the perpetrators as corruption, but rather as a legitimate use of power in political terms, reinforcing loyalty. This broadens the understanding of how norms or beliefs that are not formally endorsed, which is what is referred to at the sociological level of analysis, can have a greater influence on behavior than rules based on merit.

The focus on the third target was the examination of the effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms. The evidence indicates that in most of these countries there were well-established regulations, even though in some cases the rules existed only on paper. This points to the fundamental cause of the problem, namely a political rather than a technical issue, namely the lack of political will and the fact that the responsible people were not accountable. These findings support Nnamani's (2005) observation that policymakers contradict themselves when implementing civil service reforms in Nigeria. Moreover, a key aspect of the SSC's operations was that it suffered from structural defects because it was the department most affected by both financial limitations and the biased allocation of executive positions. This was a disadvantage to the theoretical basis of the SSC, since in practice it ended up becoming an extension of patronage politics. The institution that was meant to ensure that meritocracy was put into action was, in fact, the one that was absorbed by those people who undermined it.

Impunity was a harmful practice that nullified all official and formal efforts to maintain merit-based recruitment rules because the informal institutions in those states were very powerful, leading to a situation in which violations of the recruitment statutes went unpunished and thus even remained viable.

The fourth objective was the Recruitment Imperfection Damage Assessment. The paper outlines two negative outcomes of inadequate recruitment: the first is a decline in the quality of the civil service, and the second, even more important, is a deterioration in

society's morale and trust. These findings reinforce the World Bank's 1997 warning that non-bureaucratic systems are not only an obstacle to service delivery but also to development. This point is further supported by a previous study of the formal structure of public administration, which found that the demoralization of experienced staff was leading to a vicious cycle of 'easy mediocrity' because top-level staff had either become inactive or had left the system. In particular, the drop in goodwill among the younger population was seen as a long-term threat to good governance. The system encouraged connections and bribery instead of work as a means of achieving success, thus undermining a meritocratic culture and increasing the existing disdain for state institutions. It was stated that professional practice should be based solely on qualifications.

The final objective dealt with the reforms that could be made. The group made only a few recommendations, involving reform of the administration and a change of the office's procedures. The informants regarded e-recruitment as one of the basic changes that would prevent information suppression. This problem has existed across all the challenges the system is trying to deal with. E-recruitment was suggested as an essential means of tackling information asymmetry, which is a major PAT issue, as well as reducing the discretion that is used to perpetuate corruption. If the proposed changes regarding who sets the fiscal rules are to be implemented, they must be accompanied by a directive aimed at promoting stricter rules against civil servants' malpractices. Hence, the approach is not primarily a technical one but rather involves a fundamental sensitivity to the system or institution and the chain of events that may have been causing the dysfunction.

7. CONCLUSION

The study states that the difficulties experienced in recruiting a workforce in the public sector of Kogi between 2015 and 2019 were not merely isolated instances of malpractice but reflected deep-seated problems within the system of governance. Recruitment procedures were repeatedly compromised by political interference, nepotism, and corruption, all of which were enabled by weak institutions and a culture of impunity. Although formal rules on meritocracy were in place, they were consistently overridden by informal practices based on patronage and prebendalism.

The combined theoretical framework of PAT and Institutional Theory has proven to be a good explanation of these situations. PAT accounted for the motives and methods of individual actors and showed why politicians and bureaucrats manipulated the recruitment processes to obtain personal benefits, while Institutional Theory provided the structural and cultural background, explaining why such practices continued even in the face of formal bans. Together, they demonstrated that the failure to recruit effectively

in Kogi State is a sign of a wider governance crisis in which public institutions have been taken over for private and partisan purposes.

These persistent failures in recruitment have significant long-term consequences for governance, state capacity, and legitimacy. Over time, the erosion of merit-based recruitment diminishes the competence and professionalism of the civil service, weakening the machinery of government. As the public service becomes less effective and more politicized, the state's capacity to deliver essential services is undermined, hampering economic development and the provision of basic welfare. The ongoing sidelining of rules and the prevalence of patronage also erode citizens' trust in government, delegitimizing state authority and deepening the disconnect between the government and the people. If left unaddressed, these trends risk entrenching cycles of poor governance, further reducing the prospects for reform and sustainable development.

This has serious implications: the civil service has been weakened and is no longer able to deliver quality services, staff no longer feel motivated, and both the youth and a large part of the population are now completely disillusioned about the legitimacy of state institutions. To meet these challenges, it is necessary to make further progress in reform; instead, there needs to be a systematic restructuring of the system of accountability and the incentive structure.

7.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. If one is to deal with the fundamental problems concerning the employment system in Kogi State, technology should be adopted. It is essential to introduce a highly integrated e-recruitment system which will include all the procedures involved in recruitment, such as advertising, application submission, electronic shortlisting, the administration of tests, and the publication of results. This system is necessary since it reduces human intervention and ensures that all actions can be traced, thus helping to prevent fraud and the promotion of unethical practices and measures like discrimination and bribery.
2. Even more so, the Public Service Commission should have real independence. In order to meet this obligation, it will be necessary to amend the operational requirements so that the Commission is able to govern itself with complete financial autonomy and so that no decisions are made without proper checks and balances regarding qualifications, advantages, and spheres of interest. Such autonomy will enable the Commission to maintain a high standard of performance in its decision-making and will decrease the extent of political interference.
3. Thirdly, the powers of the Independent Public Service Recruitment Ombudsman should be divided and placed under the State House of Assembly yet remain

independent of it. The ombudsman's duties involve receiving complaints, keeping sight of the distribution in real time, and punishing the offenders. By threatening offenders with sanctions, it undermines the existing system for recruiting those who commit a crime.

4. The four subordinate activities should continue to promote citizen involvement and awareness. Civil society organisations, in cooperation with the media, have to work on making citizens aware of the election rules and on giving them the means to call for accountability or punishment in the case of anyone who fails to respect the rules, thereby turning voters from passive into active agents in their own defence of the public interest within the principal-agent relationship.
5. We suggest that the government adopt and pass a code of professional conduct for politicians which should clearly exclude any involvement in human resources decisions. Not only will this reform improve human resources in the field of public administration, but it will also set a boundary between political service and service delivery.

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