Civil Service Management: What Works?

Lessons from a survey of 23.000 public servants in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America

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The problem

- Civil services are central to effective governance, yet often perceived to be performing poorly
- Civil service reform is key component of international incl. EU assistance, yet often fails or lacks sustainability
- One reason: little evidence on how to manage civil servants effectively
- ⇒ Our project complements World Bank, SIGMA, EC efforts to generate this evidence
- ⇒ Today: Focus on general lessons that travel across contexts

23.000 civil servants, ten countries, four regions

Survey of civil servants: 23.000 civil servants, ten countries, four regions

- Main focus: administrative arm of central government
- Online
  - Entire civil service: Estonia (3,555 respondents), Albania (3,655), Kosovo* (2,431)
  - Select institutions: Chile (5,742), Brazil (2,830)
- In-person
  - Ghana (1,645), Malawi (1,232), Uganda (1,441)
  - Bangladesh (513, ongoing), Nepal (1,014, ongoing)

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence, in accordance with "Arrangements Regarding Regional Representation and Cooperation - Rev10 RC 23/02/2012"

Main findings for presentation today

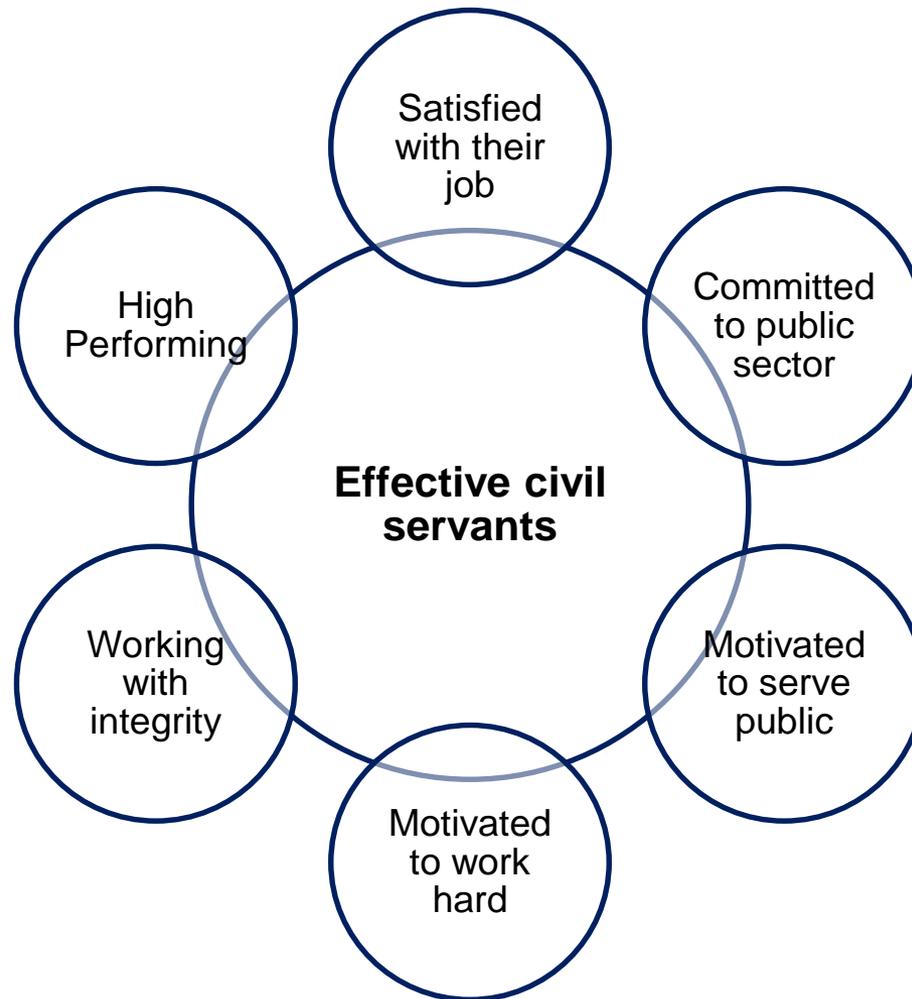I. The nature of civil servants

  1. Attitudes and behavior of civil servants vary greatly across and within countries and change over time

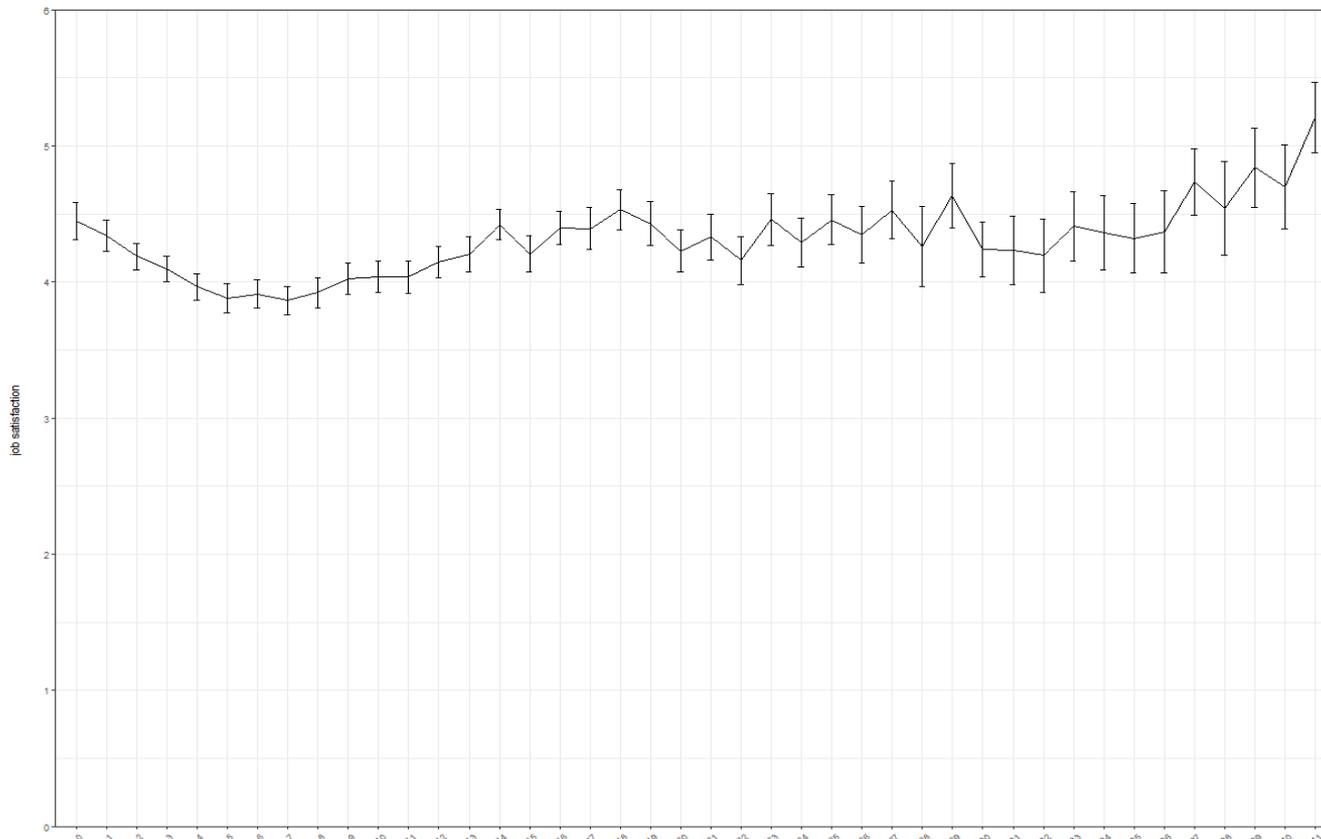II. What works in civil service management:

<u>Get the basics right!</u>

  1. De-politicize civil service management

     • Apply merit safeguards and ensure their consistent implementation

  2. Ensure that performance matters in civil service management

     • Apply performance evaluation systems (if you can implement them well) to enhance performance orientation

Desirable attitudes and behavior of civil servants

Satisfied with their job

Committed to public sector

High Performing

Effective civil servants

Working with integrity

Motivated to serve public

Motivated to work hard

Insight #1: The attitudes of civil servants are dynamic
Example of job satisfaction (0-6 scale) by years of experience

Public organizations can shape attitudes

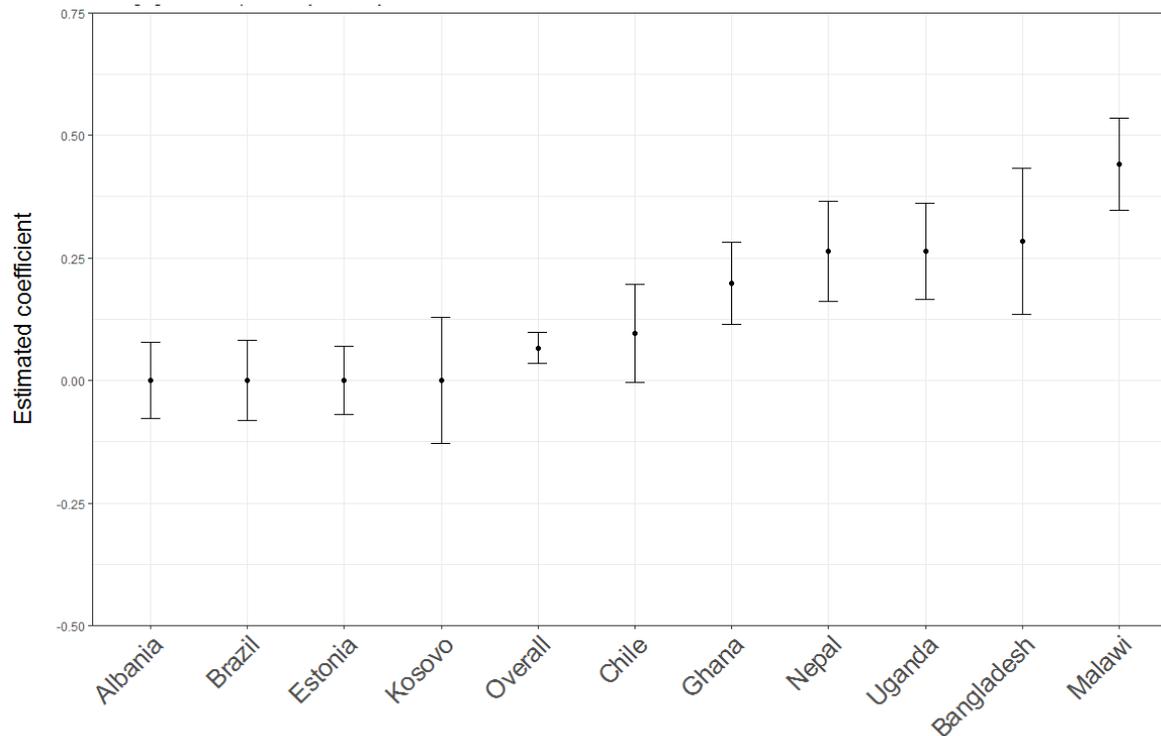# Insight #2: Good attitudes need not coincide

Public servants and institutions often score high on one indicator, while scoring low on another

	Job Satisfaction	Performance	Public Service Motivation	Work Motivation	Public Sector Commitment
Job Satisfaction	1.00	0.16	0.08	0.12	0.21
Performance	0.16	1.00	0.19	**0.32**	0.11
Public Service Motivation	**0.08**	0.19	1.00	0.22	0.08
Work Motivation	0.12	0.32	0.22	1.00	0.08
Public Sector Commitment	0.21	0.11	0.08	0.08	1.00

⇒ **Risk of trade-offs between attitudes in civil service reform**

Insight #3: Attitudes and behavior vary across and within countries and institutions
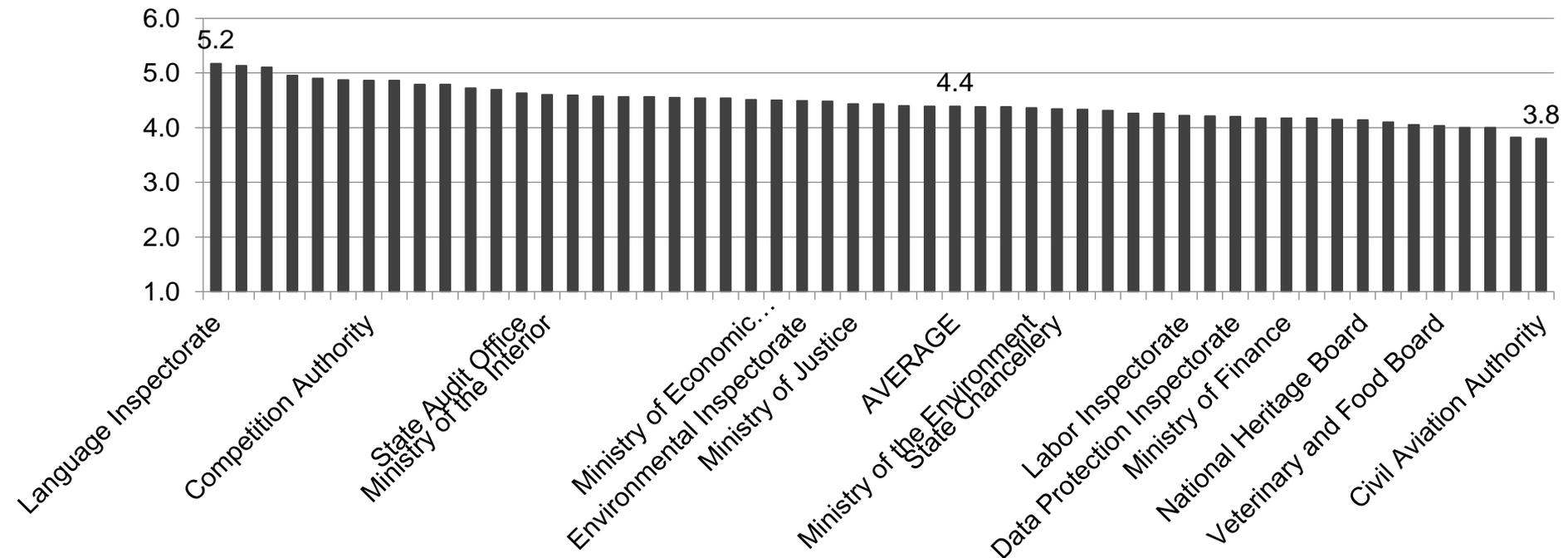Example: share of public servants willing to commit corruption

"If I were offered money or a personal present in exchange for helping someone through my position, I would accept it."

(list experiment)

Insight #3: Attitudes and behavior vary across and within countries and institutions

Example of job satisfaction by institution in Estonia

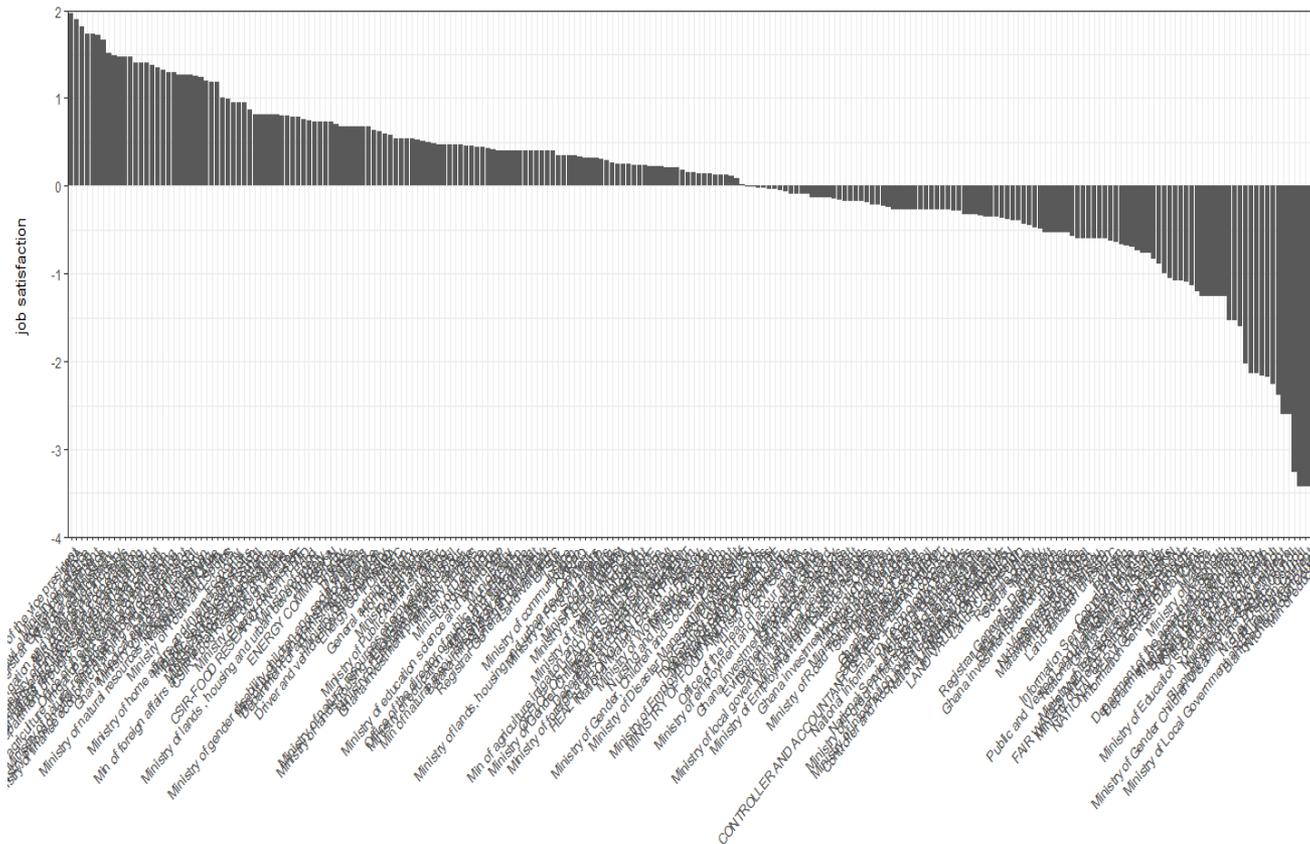=> Identify strengths and weaknesses at *institutional* level to target reforms

What works in civil service management?

Suggestive evidence from cross-sectional regressions, with set of standard controls (country, gender, age, education, years of service, income, type of position, level of hierarchy)

Insight #4: Most institutions are neither 'islands of excellence' nor basket cases
Example of job satisfaction by Institution (all countries)

Gradual differences rather than dichotomies between poor and strong performers
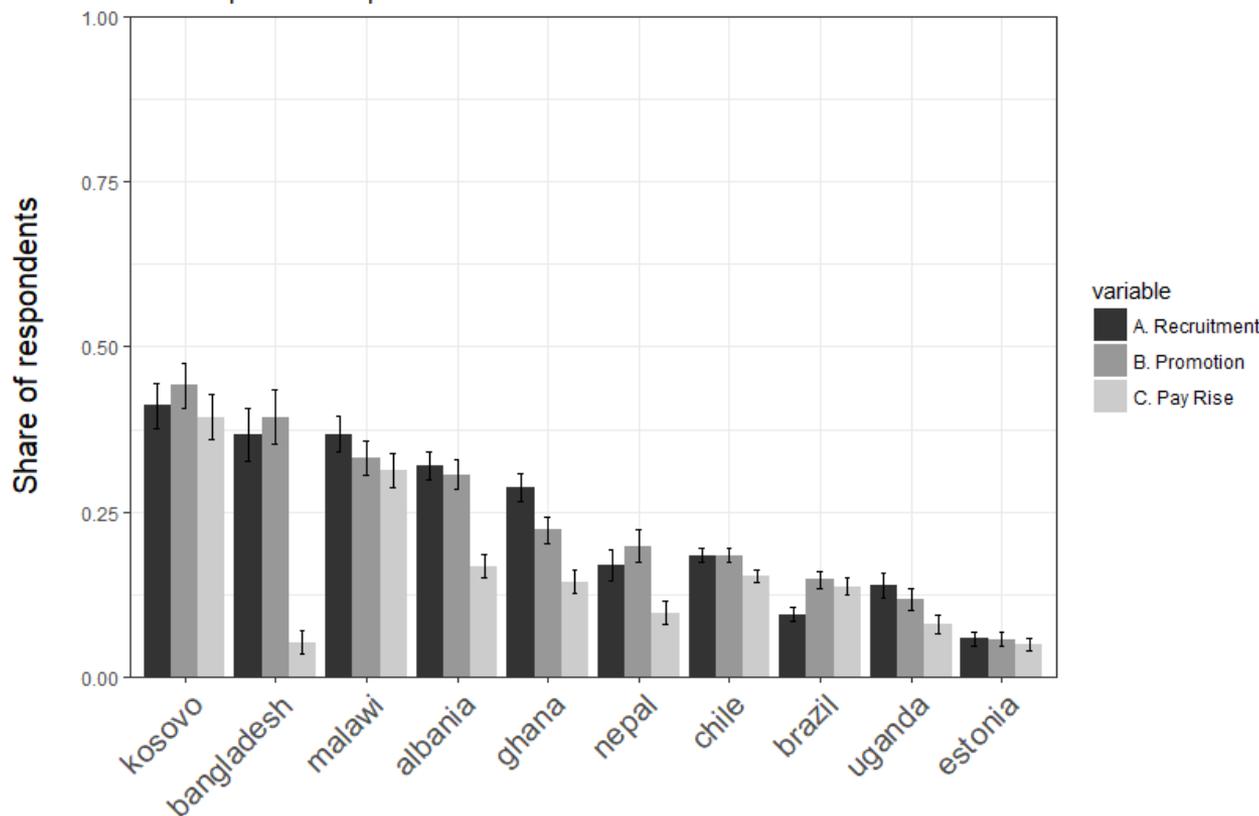
⇒Requires appreciation of institutional realities

Lesson #1:
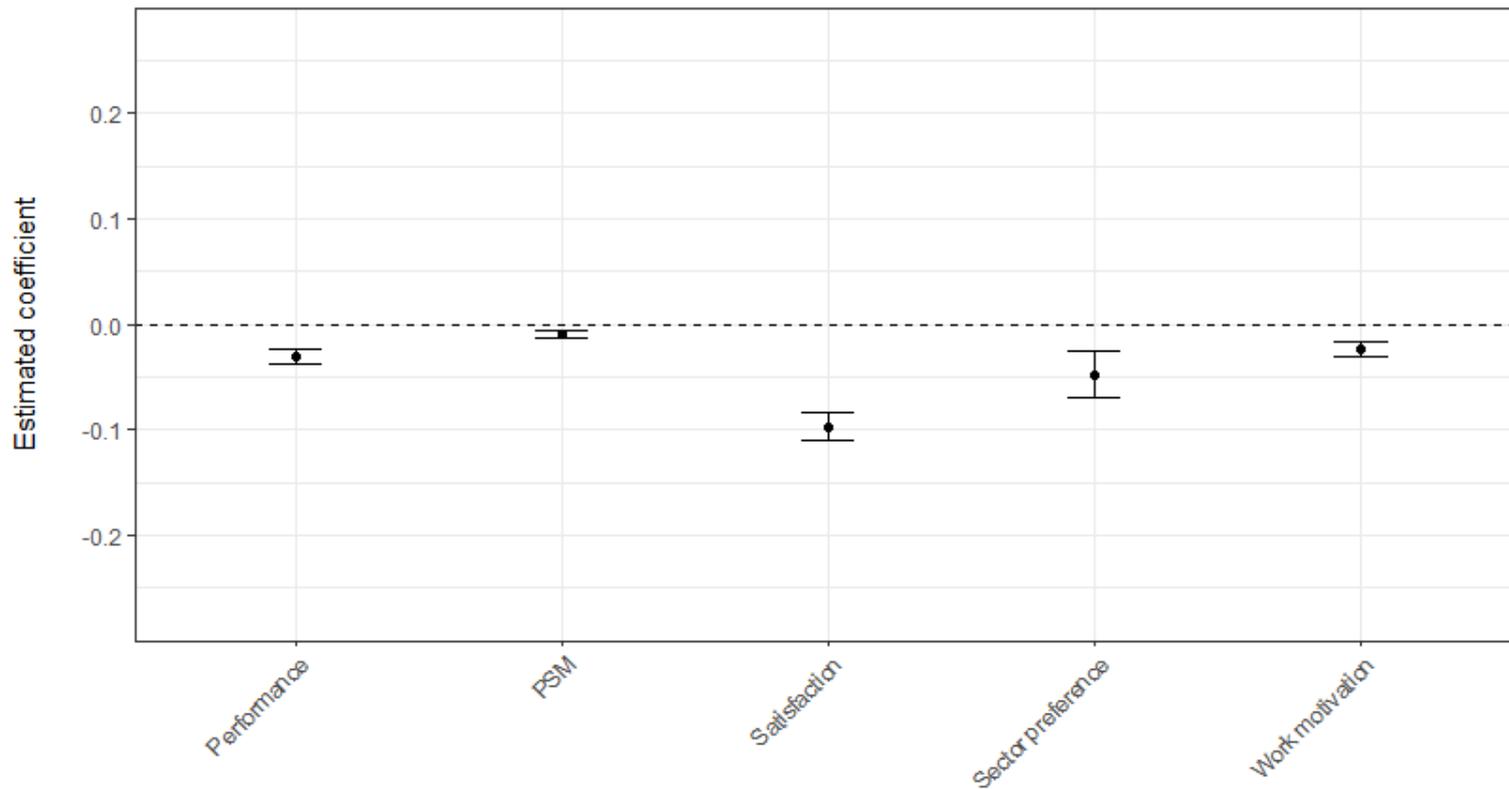
De-politicize civil service management

Apply merit safeguards to curb politicisation

Political connections matter to many civil servants' entry, advancement, and remuneration, but not equally within or across countries
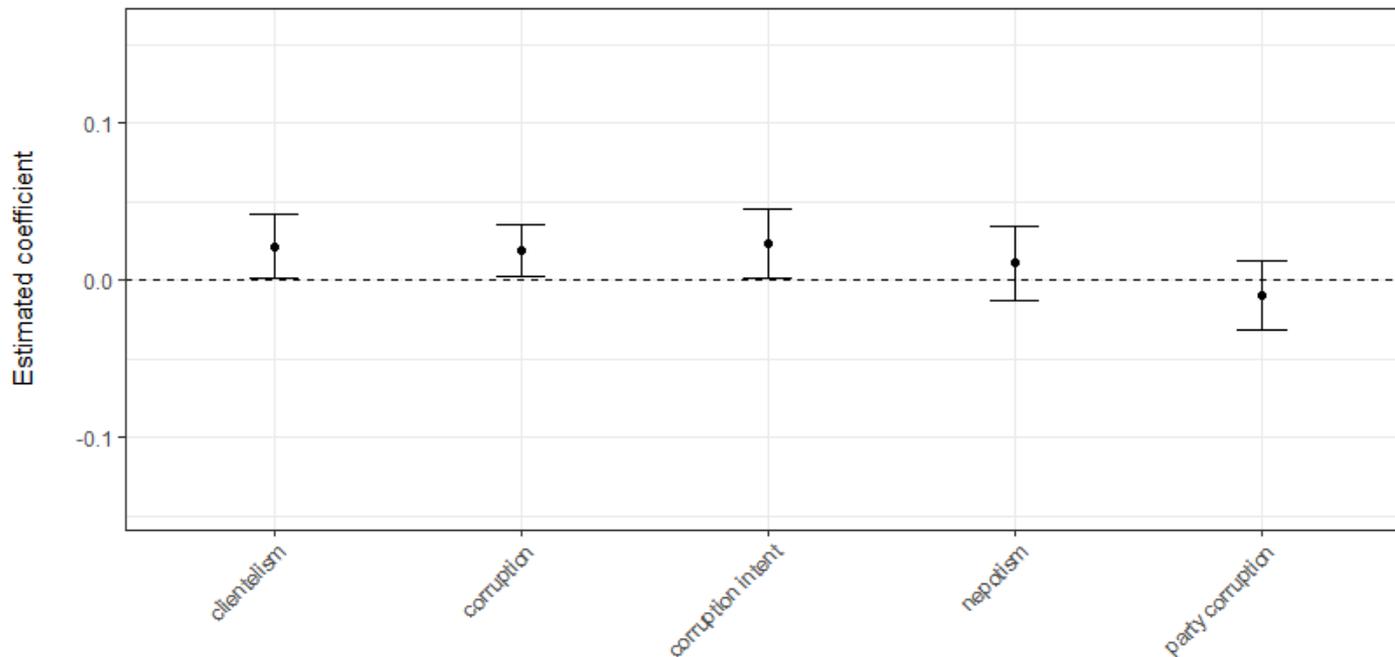

Politicization is <u>not</u> a management-level phenomenon – it spans the hierarchy

Politicized recruitment negatively affects the motivation, commitment, performance, and satisfaction of public servants
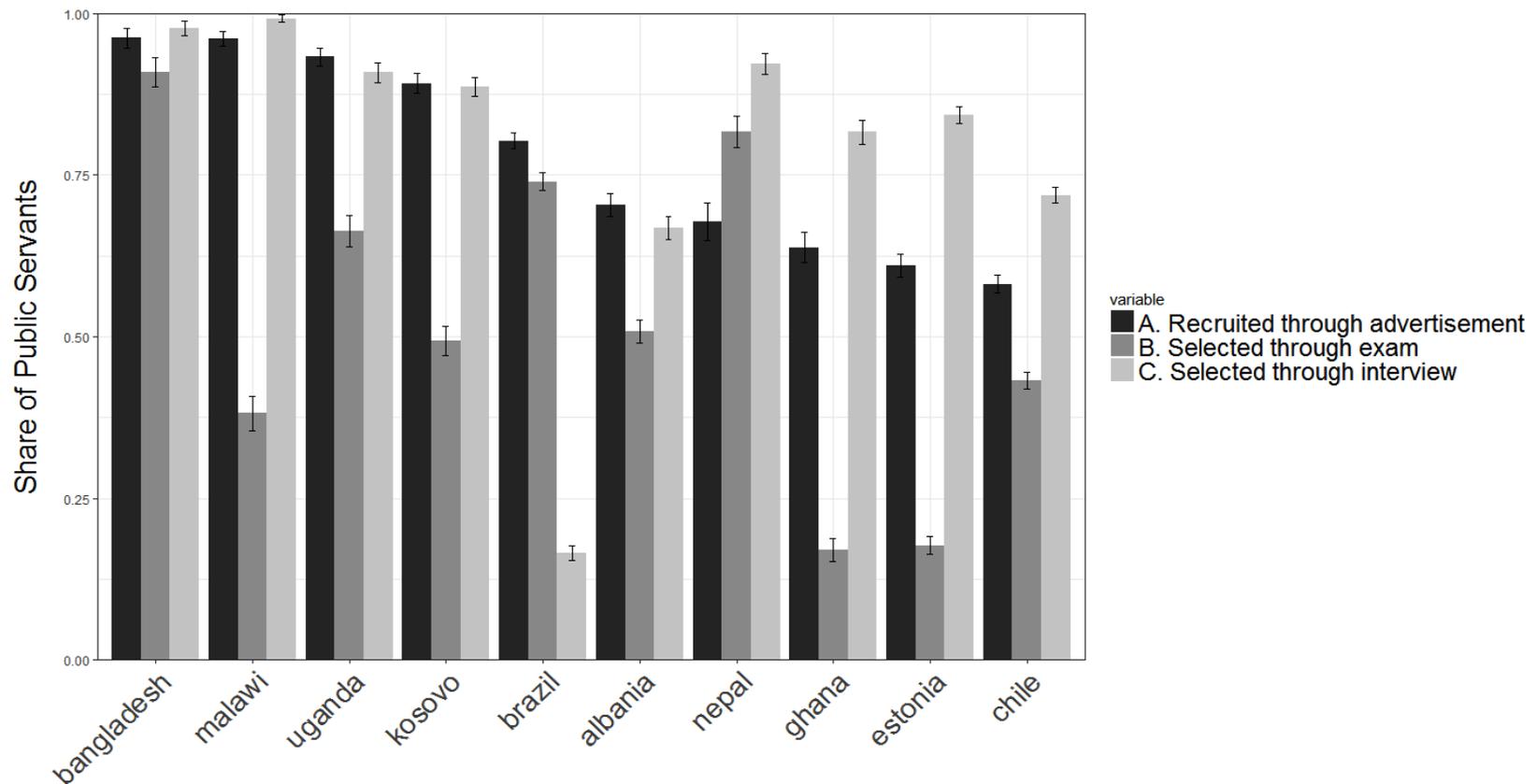
Politicized recruitment increases clientelism, willingness to engage in corruption, and corrupt behavior
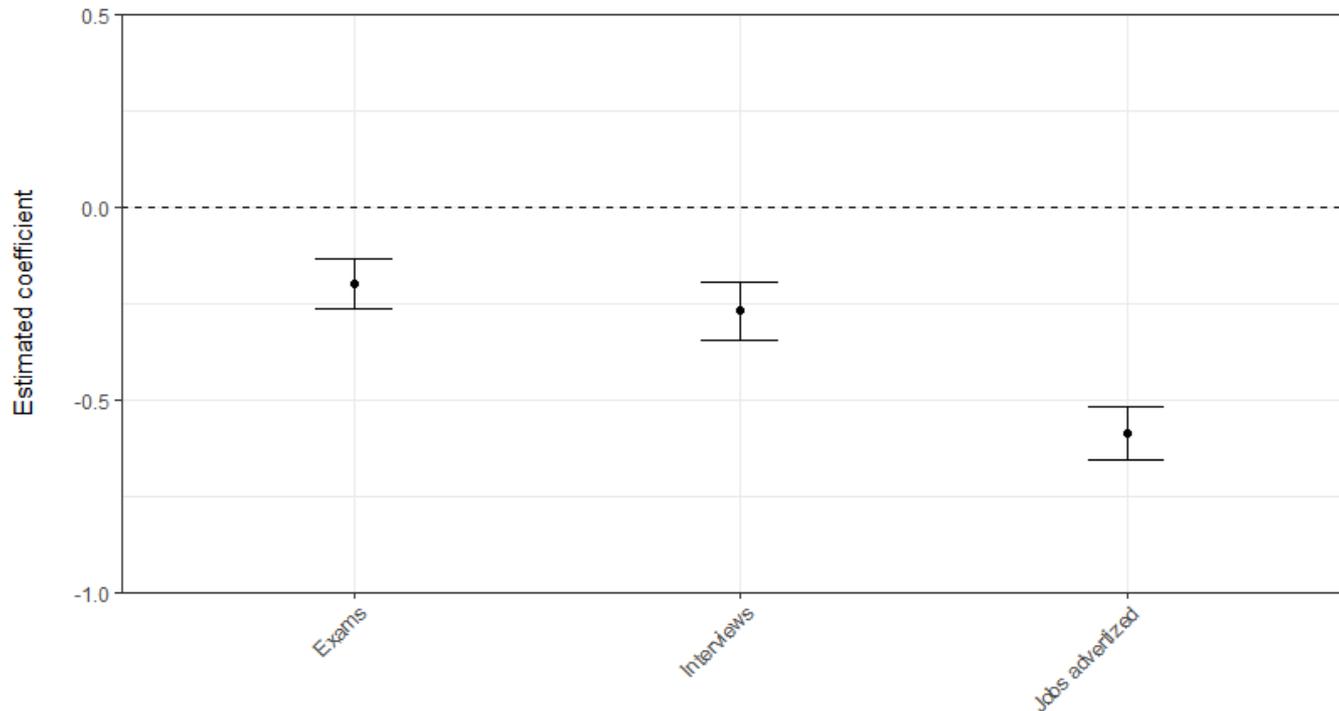

Measured using list experiments to provide protection and prevent socially desirable answers

Public advertisements of job vacancies, written examinations and personal interviews: Major differences across and within countries

Effectiveness of merit recruitment procedures: Politicized recruitment can be contained using job adverts, exams and interviews

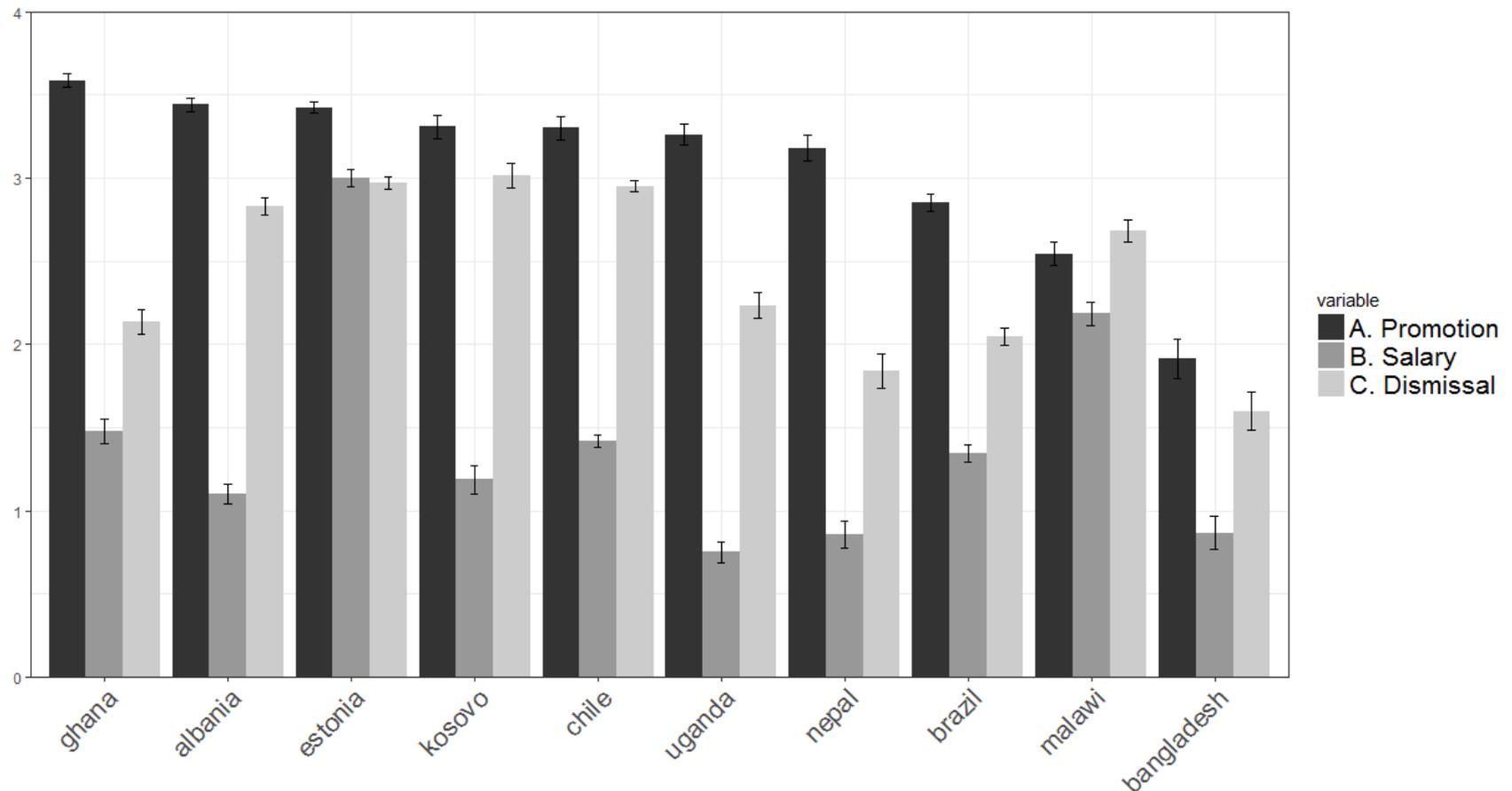This holds for most but not all countries in the study

Lesson #2:

Ensure that performance matters in civil service management
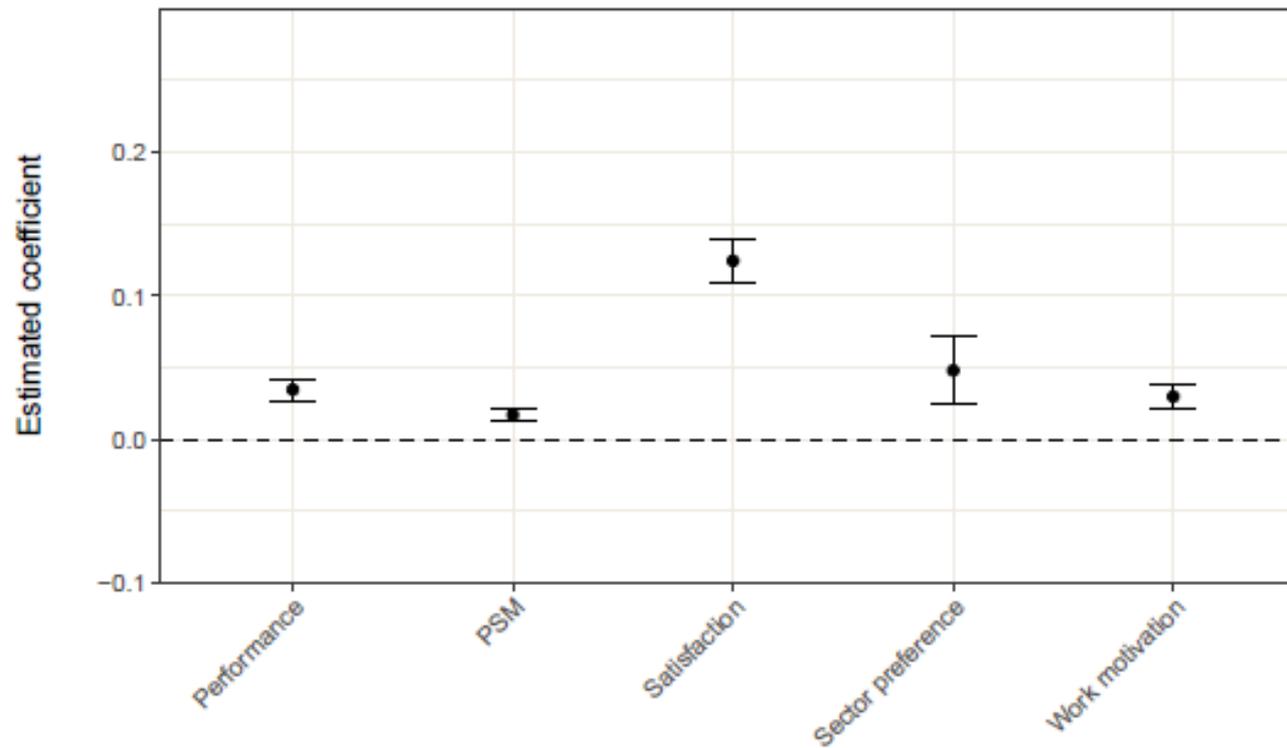
Apply performance evaluation systems – but only if you can implement them well

There is *some* perceived performance orientation in all surveyed civil services

Measures: Importance of performance in future career advancement // 'I might be dismissed from the civil service if I do not perform well.'
'My work performance has had an influence on my salary in the public service.'

Public servants are more satisfied, committed and motivated where they perceive that performance matters for their promotion prospects
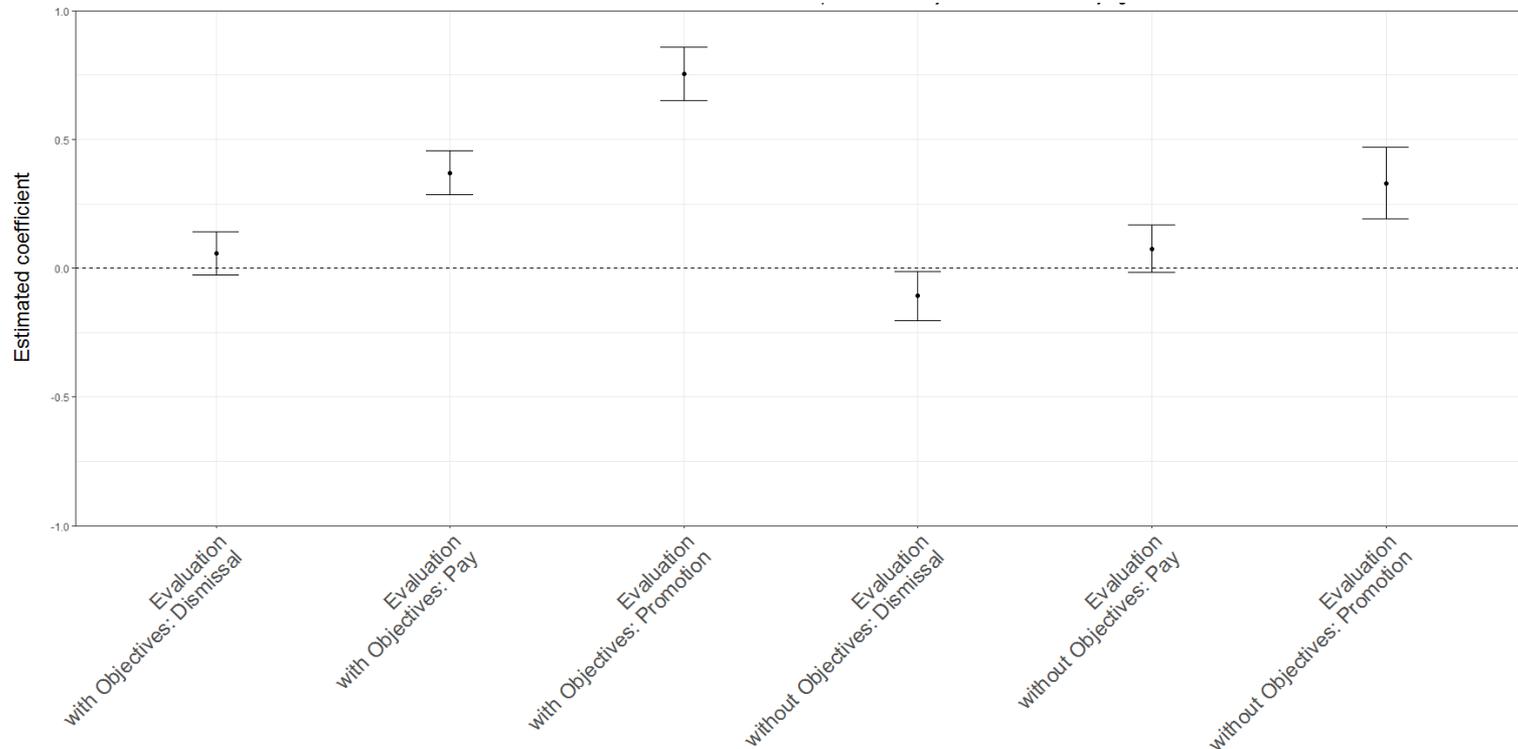

Similar but less consistent positive effects of performance-oriented pay and dismissals

Frequency of performance evaluations: Most civil servants receive an evaluation once per year

Whether performance evaluations have a positive or negative effect depends on design and implementation, including whether performance objectives are set in advance

Implications for EC and future of EU public administration policy towards member states

1. **Get the basics right!**
   - Keep up efforts to improve the implementation of merit recruitment procedures, e.g. public job adverts, written exams, standardized interviews to curb politicisation (and nepotism)
   - Ensure that performance evaluation systems are implemented well and that quality of process supports (rather than undermines) performance orientation

2. **Civil service management practices, civil servants' attitudes and behavior vary across and within countries**
   - Need to tailor reforms, assistance and monitoring at institutional level (rather than country level)

3. **Generate evidence before designing reforms and assistance**
   - Staff surveys as effective diagnostic tool to improve quality of public administration

4. **EC with important role**
   - Support evidence gathering (*to enable self-help*)
   - Identify and promote basics in EU member states
   - Promote cross-country and cross-institutional learning

Thank you for your attention.

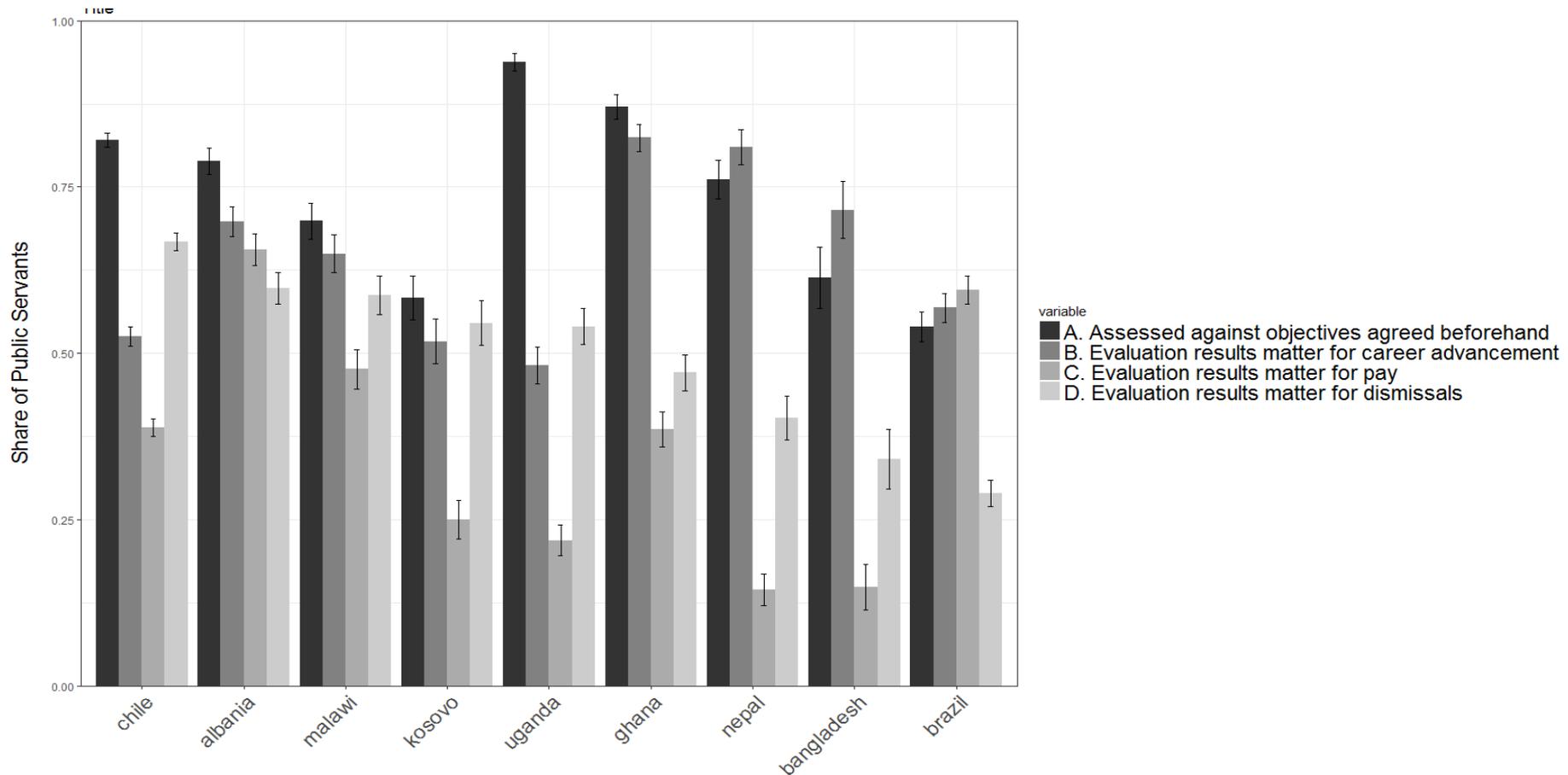## Questions?

Jan Meyer-Sahling (http://www.meyer-sahling.eu/)

Report available at

https://www.britac.ac.uk/project-blog-civil-service-reform-and-anti-corruption-developing-countries-tools-and-evidence-eight

Appendix

Perception of performance evaluations: objectives agreed beforehand and linkages to promotion, pay and dismissals prospects

Measures

- Job satisfaction
- On a scale of 1 to 7, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job? (Scale: 1: Completely Dissatisfied; 7 Completely Satisfied)
- Work motivation (latent measure)
- How frequently do the following statements apply to you? (Scale: from 'Never' to 'Always or almost Always')
- I start work early or stay late to finish my job
- I am willing to do extra work for my job that isn't really expected of me
- I put forth my best effort to get my job done regardless of any difficulties
- Self-assessed performance
- How frequently do the following statements apply to you? (Scale: from 'Never' to 'Always or almost Always')
- In my opinion, I contribute to the success of my institution
- Public sector commitment
- Imagine that, hypothetically speaking, you had to find a new job in the next few months, in which sector would you prefer to search for a job? (Response options: Public sector // Private sector)

Measures

Public service motivation (latent measure)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Scale: 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree')

- I admire people who initiate or are involved in activities to aid my community
- It is important to contribute to activities that tackle social problems
- Meaningful public service is very important to me
- It is important for me to contribute to the common good
- I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important
- It is important that citizens can rely on the continuous provision of public services
- It is fundamental that the interests of future generations are taken into account when developing public policies
- To act ethically is essential for public servants
- I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged
- I empathize with other people who face difficulties
- I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly
- Considering the welfare of others is very important
- I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society
- I believe in putting civic duty before self
- I am willing to risk personal loss to help society
- I would agree to a good plan to make a better life for the poor, even if it costs me money

Measures

Integrity: personal corruption intent

Public servants sometimes receive offers in the course of their work life or daily activities. Below is a list of several hypothetical offers. Please indicate how many (not which) of them you would accept.

- If I were offered a public job in a region I do not know well, I would accept it.
- If I were offered the opportunity to teach classes at university about my field of work, I would accept it.
- **If I were offered money or a personal present in exchange for helping someone through my position, I would accept it.**
- If I were offered a better paid job in exchange for taking on broader responsibilities at work, I would accept it.

How many of these offers would you accept?