

‘Sign here’: politics and integrity in public administration (A)

4 April 2023

November 2022: Jay Adan, the most senior civil servant in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Mountain State, contemplated the list of names before him.^a It comprised 116 individuals whom the recruitment committee recommended for vacant posts in the Mountain State Emergency Services, one of the departments in the state’s Ministry of Internal Affairs. All that remained was for Adan to approve the list; then, the individuals would enter their posts, and the recruitment cycle would be over. But Adan was hesitant.

Glancing down at the names, Adan was fairly certain that the recruitment process had not followed the legal procedures required. The recruitment cycle had been well under way when Adan joined the ministry six months prior, but since taking office, Adan had received a number of complaints forwarded from the national anti-corruption office that the process had not been fair. In addition, his own investigation seemed to suggest that qualified candidates had been ruled out while unqualified ones had advanced. The law also required that 10% of those appointed were women, a quota which this list clearly did not meet. Finally, the original recruitment was meant to be for 102 vacant spots, 14 fewer than the number of recommended individuals on the list. Adan had reached out to the director of the emergency services department who was heading the recruitment committee, asking for confirmation in writing that all legal requirements had been met during the recruitment process, which he had received. But Adan remained unconvinced. He believed it was likely that the minister was pressuring the emergency services director to recommend individuals from the minister’s key constituencies in time for upcoming elections.

Such practices were not uncommon in the state. Patronage was a rampant issue in the region where, amidst high unemployment and poverty rates, the government was one of the most important employers. Political leaders frequently used recruitment cycles as a way to garner support among voters as elections approached. With the next elections just six months away, Adan’s experience told him that the interior minister was using this recruitment to bolster his own political position. But patronage came with costs to the effectiveness of public services, especially when political considerations led to the selection of less competent individuals.¹ And this was a particularly sensitive recruitment: many of the posts to be filled required technical expertise. For example, the department was looking for several new flood rescue technicians, which required a degree or diploma in nursing or paramedicine.

Adan had joined the Mountain State civil service two decades ago to make a positive difference in his region. Having strong ties to the region, he had felt a calling to the civil service. ‘I joined the profession out of choice,’ he reflected. ‘I was the first in my family to do so. My friends who did not join live more comfortably, earn better, and travel more, but they contribute less. I feel accountable in this world and the next one; if I can contribute a little, I need to do it.’²

^a The story in this case study reflects the real experiences of a senior civil servant in a regional government, but aspects have been disguised (including names, locations, and titles) to protect the identities of those involved.

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With this in mind, Adan felt it was his duty to ensure the recruitment process had followed government policies in a transparent and meritocratic way. Yet, if he refused to approve the list, it was likely that the minister would seek to have him transferred out of this post. A similar thing had happened to Adan as a younger officer in the Crops, Livestock and Fisheries Commission. In that instance, Adan had refused a corrupt request without hesitation, which had resulted in little more than him being transferred elsewhere and his replacement approving the corrupt acts anyway.

Now Adan was much more senior – as interior secretary, he was among the most important civil servants in the state. In this role, Adan could finally make the changes he had always wanted to pursue, and he had already launched several policies and programmes that were changing the way the internal affairs ministry worked in the state. Would he be able to remain in his post and make these meaningful improvements if he chose not to approve the list?

Mountain State

Mountain State, situated to the north of Country R, shared a border with three neighbouring countries, all of which had recent histories of political instability. The state was large, sparsely populated, isolated from the rest of the country, and underdeveloped. Its per capita income was less than half the national average, and the unemployment rate was the highest in the country. The state's education and health services were poor, with adult literacy well below the national rate and female literacy particularly low.

Grievances among locals about mistreatment by the federal government, along with competition across the borders between competing militia, had long fuelled unrest in the region. The most recent form of unrest was an insurgency that had been ongoing for over a decade. Insurgents typically belonged to several of the region's tribes, which played an important role in Mountain State's politics and society. Although the insurgency generally remained at a low intensity, the level of sectarian violence and terrorism rose in the region during the 2010s. The government responded by increasing the presence of military and paramilitary forces and detaining many whom they believed to be involved in the insurgency. At the same time, human rights organisations alleged many instances of abuses by the growing number of security forces in the state. However, the porous borders, remote setting, and difficult terrain made combatting the insurgency difficult for the government, despite the increased security presence.

The leaders of various tribal groups were often divided between supporting the insurgency and the government. While some supported insurgent groups, others chose to join political parties. The state had several political parties, some of which represented the region's main tribes and ethnicities, and others which were local branches of mainstream national parties.

Like states throughout the country, Mountain State was governed under a parliamentary system, with a governor as the head of the government. Since the end of the last military junta, governments had seldom remained in power for more than one four-year term. And in late 2022, the current government had already been in power for three and a half years; elections were less than six months away.

The administration of the Mountain State government was headed by the permanent secretary, who was appointed by the governor to serve as the link between the state's political executive and civil administration. The permanent secretary led the state's civil service: an elite cadre of bureaucrats who were, at least on paper, meritocratically recruited through a series of exams, rigorously trained, and represented the country's best and brightest minds. Under the leadership of the permanent secretary, a group of senior civil servants with the rank of secretary supported ministers in running the administrative affairs of their respective ministries (see **Exhibit 1a**).

Senior civil servants were powerful players in the nation's political institutions. Formally, bureaucrats were meant to ensure continuity of policies, uphold the rule of law, and provide technical, expert, and apolitical advice and support to politicians. Thus, in theory, ministers decided on policies, and bureaucrats implemented them. In practice, however, senior bureaucrats often had a wide latitude to influence government work. Civil servants existed in strong networks and a rigid hierarchy. They typically had more technical know-how of how government administration functioned than politicians, and were able to use these levers to pursue their policy agendas. In addition, some bureaucrats allied with politicians (or else the equally powerful military elite) to secure senior postings, promotions, and job perks in exchange for manipulating policies and loopholes for politicians and supporting their political goals, especially in the run-up to elections.

Under the senior civil servants were a host of mid-level and junior civil servants, as well as technical and clerical staff who made up the larger government bureaucracy (refer to **Exhibit 1a**). Thus, in Mountain State, the government was an extremely important employer in the region, employing over 60,000 educators, 40,000 in the police service, and thousands more in the many departments and ministries.

Adan

Adan had been working in the Mountain State civil service since the beginning of his career two decades prior, with only two brief breaks for professional development, one at a national university and another abroad. After passing the civil service exams, he had worked his way up from the lowest ranks to his current position as interior secretary – one of the senior-most civil servants in the state. Throughout his career, Adan gained a reputation for efficiency and effectiveness and had worked across multiple departments and ministries, including Planning and Development, Finance, Health, Communications, and Agriculture.

However, Adan had spent the last six months without an assignment. This was not an uncommon situation for senior civil servants, as the state had more secretaries than it had departments needing secretaries. There were always some secretaries who would spend a period without assignments (though they received full salary), or as 'assistant secretaries' where extra leadership was required. Furthermore, while civil servants did not serve at the pleasure of ministers, often ministers used their political influence to remove civil servants from their departments if they did not get along. This was sometimes a method for ministers to clear away uncooperative civil servants.

A part of the issue for Adan was that, though he had earned a reputation for efficiency and competence, he was also known for refusing to bend rules to serve political agendas. For instance, when Adan had been newly posted as a civil servant in the Crops, Livestock and Fisheries Commission, he was asked to approve a procurement request of US\$2 million to replenish the commission's stocks of seed and antibiotics. However, when he checked the existing stocks, Adan found that the amount needed was closer to US\$50,000. At the time, Adan was under pressure from higher-ups to approve the file, but he rejected it nevertheless. Adan was transferred out of the role within a week. Additionally, Adan remembered, 'a number of frivolous corruption complaints were then made against me at the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the country's corruption watchdog.'³ While Adan was eventually cleared, the process was difficult for him and his family as the watchdog investigated his assets and even monitored his movements. Moreover, Adan's replacement quickly approved the procurement request which had been further inflated to US\$2.2 million.

Of course, Adan did have options for employment outside of the Mountain State civil service. He knew he could easily get a posting in the federal civil service on a secondment basis, or else leave the civil service altogether and join an NGO or enter the private sector. But Adan felt committed to trying to make it work as a Mountain State civil servant. 'In Mountain State, I

can have a much bigger impact than I could at the federal level or outside of government,' Adan believed.⁴

What's more, Adan had allies. He was well-connected in the military and intelligence fields, whose senior officers were important political players in the region. After six months of waiting without a posting, Adan's connections in the military approached the governor and the permanent secretary and asked for Adan to be appointed as the administrative head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Interior secretary

The Mountain State Ministry of Internal Affairs was responsible for internal security, peacebuilding, law and order, and responding to emergencies in the state. The ministry worked closely with the federal home and foreign ministries, especially in cross-border matters, as well as with the military, paramilitary and intelligence units working in the state. Departments in the ministry included the state police force, the state prison service, a number of paramilitary law enforcement agencies, and the Mountain State Emergency Services (which was responsible for emergency responses to traffic accidents, medical emergencies, building collapse, fire, explosions, and flood and water rescue, etc.). The ministry also included various divisions which dealt with arms licensing, development projects, and internal functions such as procurement and budgeting. (See **Exhibit 1b** for an organisational chart.)

The interior minister initially opposed Adan's appointment. By mid-2022, the minister had been in his role for three and a half years, that is, since the last elections. The minister was a respected member of the ruling party as well as a tribal elder from the state. He had sacrificed a lot of his standing within his tribal community for his position in the government, as many in his tribe were involved in the insurgency and working directly against the peacekeeping aims of the internal affairs ministry, and his sacrifices were recognised and rewarded by the party leadership, including the governor. He had connections throughout the ministry's leadership, having replaced senior-level individuals whom he thought might prove to be obstacles with people he trusted (although civil servants in the ministry were not officially political appointees). Having thus largely curated a ministry with hand-selected personnel loyal to him, the minister had not been keen for someone with Adan's reputation to become his second-in-command, especially given the wide latitude afforded to civil bureaucrats in the country's public administration. But given Adan's support from senior military officials – and pressure from the governor and permanent secretary in light of this support – the minister had been persuaded to accept Adan's posting.

Adan joined the ministry in May 2022. The posting as interior secretary was the most senior position he had ever had. 'It was a very important assignment,' he reflected.⁵ In the role, Adan now had the authority and resources to create the change that he had joined the civil service to achieve. But, at the same time, he recognised that it would not be an easy assignment: 'It was a 24/7 job and given the law-and-order situation in our state, it was very taxing and very stressful.'⁶ And right from his first weeks in office, Adan experienced friction with the minister.

Transfers

When Adan entered the role, he conducted a review of his staff and noticed that two division officers were not performing well. Adan immediately sought to have them transferred out of the ministry, something that was well within his purview as the most senior civil servant in the ministry. 'It was nothing personal,' he reflected. 'It was purely based on their suboptimal performance.'⁷ Yet, a few days later Adan received a call from the governor and the permanent secretary. The interior minister was not happy with the transfers: he had complained to the governor and the permanent secretary that Adan was trying to transfer all of his people. When Adan tried to explain, the governor and permanent secretary advised

him against proceeding with the transfers. 'They told me, "You've just been posted after six months, at least wait a while before you start doing all this,"' Adan remembered.⁸

Adan decided to compromise. He did not want a repeat of his experience at the Crops, Livestock and Fisheries Commission. Instead, Adan approached the minister. 'Tell me your top three people whom I can't get rid of,' he recalled telling the minister. 'I can't leave the entire team to you – with our security situation in the state I need to appoint the people who I think are the best – but tell me three people you don't want me to transfer and I will keep them.'⁹ The minister agreed to give him three names: the two division officers whom Adan had tried to move, and Adan's own chief of staff. The third name was a blow. Adan knew that if the minister controlled Adan's chief of staff then he would control everything that came and went to Adan's office – and ultimately the flow of information around the ministry. But Adan had offered the deal and felt unable to rescind his offer now. He decided to keep all three names in line with the minister's wishes, though he did bring in a second chief of staff to work alongside the one chosen by the minister. For Adan, the compromise did not feel good, but reflecting on it, he said, 'I tried to lower my standards of honesty for what I saw as this bigger cause – I had policies and projects I wanted to see through.'¹⁰

Priorities

With the immediate tension with the minister solved, Adan could get to work on those projects. Among his priorities were:

- Installing CCTV cameras in major urban areas to increase surveillance ability and control crime.
- Improving the hiring practices for senior police officers to create a more rigorous and meritocratic process.
- Increasing community policing through more trained officers while decreasing the presence of paramilitary border forces in community-facing law enforcement roles.
- Changing the system of arms licensing to limit the number of licenses per person and to create a transparent and accessible record of licenses.

When it came to these projects, the minister supported Adan's efforts. Strengthening law and order in the state had been a key part of the government's platform in the previous elections. In particular, the party had run on the idea of transforming the police and paramilitary forces into well-trained, depoliticised, and effective law-enforcement bodies and providing modern technology to support their efforts. And Adan knew the minister was benefiting from the impression that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was getting things done. 'He considered it good that I was starting all these initiatives,' Adan told interviewers, 'because, at the end of the day, he got credit for it, and that was very important because the elections were so close.'¹¹

The upcoming elections also impacted the other side of Adan's job: approving appointments to vacant positions in the ministry. There were several recruitment cycles upcoming on the calendar when Adan joined in May 2022, but one, a recruitment of 102 posts for the Mountain State Emergency Services, was already underway.

Vacancies at the Mountain State Emergency Services

In early 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs identified 102 vacancies in the Mountain State Emergency Services and began the recruitment process to fill them several months before Adan joined the ministry in May. The positions ranged from entry-level posts with limited experience or qualifications needed, to technical positions which required years of training in certified courses (see [Exhibit 2](#)).

Following standard procedure, the recruitment was run by a departmental committee chaired by the director of the Mountain State Emergency Services, and would include an application, examinations, and interviews. Once the committee had made their selections, the director

would send a list of recommended candidates to the interior secretary for approval. Once the secretary approved the candidates, they could start immediately. Under Mountain State law, each employee had a maximum two-month probation period. (See **Exhibit 3** for more on the recruitment process.)

Adan had misgivings right from the beginning. Long experience had told him that patronage was rampant in Mountain State (see **Appendix A**). Moreover, Adan knew the emergency services director was loyal to the minister – he had been appointed to run the department by the interior minister despite not being a civil servant, and thus was officially ineligible for the role. Adan now suspected that the minister would be using his influence over the director to control the recruitment cycle and thus to give out employment to people in his constituency in order to bolster his position going into election season.

A test

It was not uncommon for senior bureaucrats to have some vacancies set aside for them to give to relatives and connections in government recruitment cycles. So, Adan was unsurprised when, shortly after he was appointed interior secretary, he was approached by the director of emergency services and asked if he would like to add any names to be considered for any of the roles.

Adan suspected this was an effort to neutralise him and stop him from objecting if the recruitment was unfair, given that he was the one who would need to approve the final list. However, he had a plan. He could use the opportunity to test the credibility of the process: he would recommend an individual for one of the flood rescue technician positions who was unqualified and ill-suited for the role. If the list came back with this name on it, Adan would know the process had been rigged. 'Yes, I have a name,' he told the director.¹²

The list

By November 2022, Adan had been in office for almost six months. Already, the ministry was gaining a good reputation among both senior government leaders and the public, and Adan's projects were beginning to have an impact, although he knew he needed more time to fully establish them. The minister was pleased with some of the developments as well and had begun referring to the projects, such as the changes to arms licensing, in campaign speeches.

Meanwhile, Adan was anticipating issues regarding the recruitment cycle. Over the past months, he had received a number of complaints forwarded from the state branch of the anti-corruption watchdog claiming that the recruitment process had not been fair or transparent. Adan forwarded the complaints to the recruitment selection committee in line with procedure, but kept track of the complaints himself.

When the list of names finally arrived on his desk in early November 2022, it was worse than he had feared. At a glance, he could tell the quotas for women had been completely missed and Adan deemed it likely the other quotas had not been fulfilled either. Then, there were too many names on the list – 116 names for 102 vacancies – something which would immediately flag concerns if this ever appeared in court. Finally, the name Adan had recommended was there and in one of the most technically challenging posts, for which Adan knew the candidate was wholly unqualified. 'With his name on the list and in that role, I could assume 95% of the other names are of the same calibre and completely lacking technical capabilities,' Adan thought.¹³ He believed the majority of the list was composed of names selected to help the minister politically, rather than to provide Mountain State with technically proficient and professional emergency services.

'My hunch was that the entire process was crooked,' Adan remembered.¹⁴ As the administrative secretary, Adan was obliged by law to ensure that the correct recruitment process had been followed. Cases could be brought before the high court and if irregularities were found, recruitment cycles could be thrown out and restarted. Those responsible, for example, civil servants who failed to do due diligence, could be prosecuted, and even face jail time, although Adan knew this was very rare in practice (for more, see [Appendix A](#)).

'In an ideal setting, I would have cancelled the recruitment and restarted it, but things weren't that simple,' he said.¹⁵ Adan had the formal authority (and, in his mind, the legal duty) to order the recruitment to start over, but realistically he had to consider the interior minister. 'The minister had nothing to do with the whole process on paper, but he controlled it by exercising his influence; if I tried to have it cancelled, it would be too direct a confrontation with the minister – I would be transferred out of the post,' Adan reflected.¹⁶ Outside of the courts, the only others with the official authority to cancel and restart the recruitment were the permanent secretary and the governor. Although Adan believed the permanent secretary was 'a good guy, who wanted transparency and merit to prevail', he knew the permanent secretary would not act directly against the governor.¹⁷ And for the governor's part, Adan knew he would not antagonise an important minister in the lead up to elections.

Adan could approve the list. Although he knew he could technically face legal consequences if anyone could prove that he had failed to do due diligence, Adan knew that this outcome was unlikely. More realistically, if Adan decided to sign the approval, he would be able to stay in his post and see through the projects he had started. 'I do not want to lose this assignment,' he thought. 'If I go now, everything we have been working for over the past six months will likely be jeopardised. And from my own professional standpoint, I know I wouldn't be parked forever if I lost this posting, but from then on, I would only get very minor and small posts for the sake of routine. While I'd probably be happier and could spend more time with family and have far less stress on the same salary, if I lose this posting now, I will lose all chance to contribute in a meaningful way to my state.'¹⁸ In addition, the emergency services recruitment cycle was just the first of several recruitments coming up for the other departments in the internal affairs ministry. Adan believed that if he kept his job, he would be able to exert much more influence over those recruitment processes as he would be in post before the selection committee was even chosen. Moreover, if he blocked the appointments, Adan anticipated that he would shortly be the subject again of corruption complaints at the ACC, and he and his family would have to relive that stress and intrusion into their lives.

Yet, for Adan, approving the list would come with a high cost. 'I know you have to lower your standards of honesty to remain in this system and to be able to manoeuvre and contribute, but I'm not sure my personal morality will allow me to approve this list,' Adan debated.¹⁹ Patronage was damaging his state, putting underqualified individuals in sensitive roles, and limiting the public's access to professional and effective public services. Adan felt he had already compromised his ethics to stay in the role when he had agreed not to transfer individuals at the request of the minister; this was a much bigger compromise and not one he could take lightly. In addition, if Adan failed to do due diligence and the case ever ended up in court, he could face legal consequences.

Stalling for time

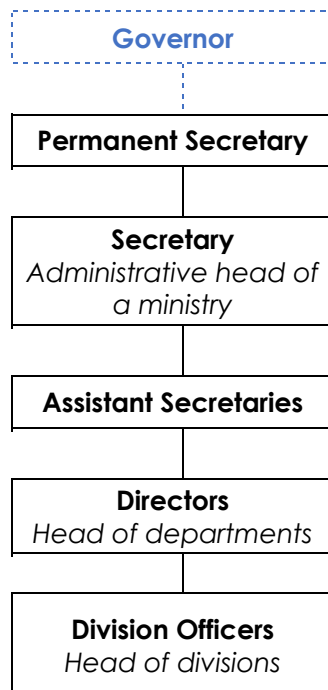
Adan decided that at the very least he needed to have the emergency services director answer questions about the recruitment in writing, a step which had the added benefit of delaying the process. In a previous encounter with illegal recruitment when he was the secretary of irrigation, Adan had followed a similar strategy of prolonging the process for as long as possible. It had paid off: Adan stalled, and when a new government had formed after elections, a new irrigation minister was appointed, and Adan started the recruitment afresh. He hoped the same strategy would work again, although elections were still months away.

On the pretext of doing his due diligence, Adan thus took a week to review the list before sending it back to the recruitment committee with a detailed set of questions about the selection process – for example, why the quota for women had not been met and why more posts had been filled than vacancies existed. While Adan thought it would take the committee several days to reply, to his surprise, they sent a thorough response the very next day, including statements that no women had applied for the roles and that new vacancies had appeared during the process.

The following week, Adan instructed the emergency services director, who headed the recruitment committee, to certify in writing that the correct process had been strictly followed. Again, Adan received an immediate response – the director was happy to confirm that the recruitment had followed all legal processes to the letter. Adan observed, 'On the face of it, everything seemed to be in order. But I knew that everything had been manipulated: the exam questions, answer sheets, and even their responses to my questions.'²⁰

By now it was late November and soon the minister's staff were going to come asking for the approved list. Adan needed to decide what to do.

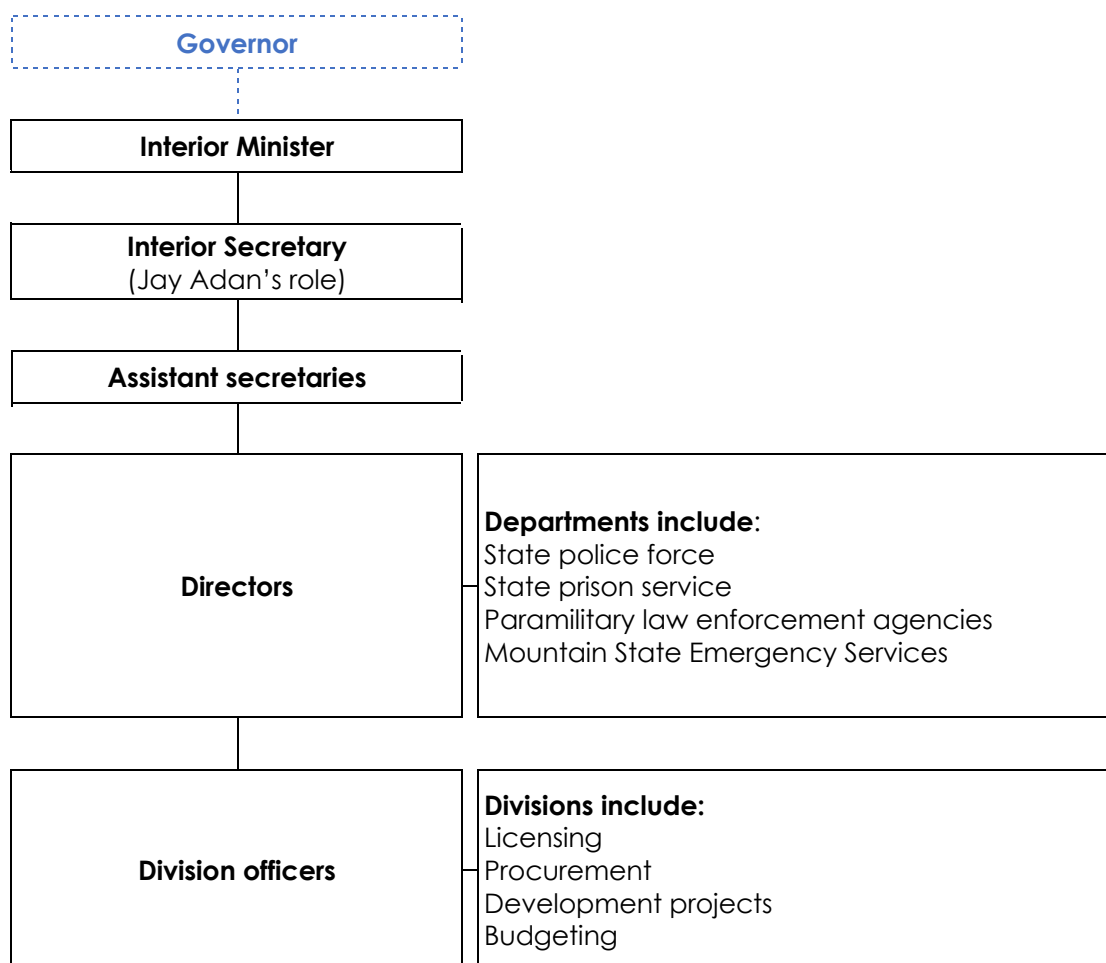
Exhibit 1a Simplified structure of the state civil service



Source: Compiled by case writers.

Note: The permanent secretary is appointed by and reports to the governor.

Exhibit 1b Simplified structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mountain State



Source: Compiled by case writers.

Note: At each level, officers are supported by various technical, clerical, and auxiliary staff.

Exhibit 2 Mountain State Emergency Service sample job advertisement

MOUNTAIN STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE				
<i>Join the Emergency Service to save lives</i>				
Staff required for district projects				
<i>The Mountain State Emergency Service is looking for qualified, motivated, and dynamic professionals to work on a contractual basis in different state districts.</i>				
SN.	Name of post	Pay scale ^b	No. of vacancies	Required qualifications
1	Rescue commanders	15	2	MBBS degree preferably with Master's in Disaster Management and at least 2-5 years of experience in management of trauma and critical emergency patients or emergency response.
2	Paramedics	13	10	Nursing or paramedical degree or diploma (2 nd division) from a recognised institution with 2-3 years of experience in any emergency rescue organisation, including hospital or ambulance service.
3	Flood rescue technicians	11	10	Nursing or paramedical degree or diploma (2 nd division) from a recognised institution with 2-3 years of experience in any emergency rescue organisation, including hospital or ambulance service.
4	Emergency medical technician	11	25	Nursing or paramedical degree or diploma (2 nd division) from a recognised institution with 2-3 years of experience in any emergency rescue organisation, including hospital or ambulance service.
5	Maintenance technician	11	20	Diploma of mechanical engineering from a recognised institution.
6	Technical instructor in Fire Service Academy	14	5	Bachelor's degree in fire engineering from a recognised university with 3-4 years of experience in fire prevention, protection, fighting or training in the fire department of any organisation.
7	Driver	3	30	Secondary school diploma; driver's license for light vehicles
Instructions for candidates: Candidates will be required to sit for a written examination, a physical fitness test, and a final interview. Selected candidates shall be sent to the National Emergency Services Academy for 6 months of professional hands-on training. During training, a fixed stipend shall be provided by the department to the trainees as per their role. The probation period shall be no longer than 2 months. How to apply: • Please download the application form and deposit slip from our website. • Pay the prescribed test fee online and complete the application form. • Submit the payment receipt and completed form on our website or via mail. • Last date for submission of application form: 1 July 2022. Note: Emergency services uniformed personnel are expected to be physically and mentally fit as they must manage extremely challenging situations, including accidents and trauma emergencies; building collapses; water, flood, deep well rescue operations; and fire rescue evacuations. Candidates will be required to undergo a physical endurance test to ensure they have the required fitness level to manage search and rescue operations.				

Source: Case writers.

^b The pay scale ranged from 1 to 20, where 20 was the highest pay scale in the public service.

Exhibit 3 Public sector recruitment in Mountain State

Public sector recruitment rules and processes were standardised and laid out in law. Recruitments were to be fair, transparent, and meritocratic. In addition, in Mountain State, public sector recruitment had to fulfil a number of quotas, namely, 10% of those appointed must be women and 10% must come from ethnic and religious minorities. Recruiters could avoid these quotas only if insufficient numbers of women and minorities applied.

While the recruitment of senior-level positions was conducted by a specialised autonomous recruitment body with its own rules and processes, junior and mid-level positions were recruited directly by the employing ministry. The ministries conducting recruitment cycles formed a selection committee made up of a chair and at least six members from the department. Once the committee was formed, the stages of recruitment were as follows:

- **Advertisement:** All vacancies had to be advertised in leading newspapers and on the department's website. The advertisement had to include details such as the number of positions available, the qualifications and experience required, and the application deadline.
- **Application submission:** Interested candidates who met the eligibility criteria submitted their application along with any required documents.
- **Examination:** Depending on the role, candidates were required to take a written test that covered topics such as general knowledge, current affairs, and subject-specific knowledge.
- **Interview:** Candidates who passed the written test were called in for an interview. The interview panel typically included members of the selection committee and occasionally subject-matter experts from the department.
- **Final selection:** Based on the results, the committee would recommend a list of candidates suitable for the roles. The recommended candidates were usually appointed under the authority of the ministry's administrative secretary – typically the most senior civil servant in the ministry.
- **Probation:** Under Mountain State law, new employees could be placed on a probationary period of no longer than 2 months, after which they became permanent employees.

Source: Case writers.

Appendix A Patronage and recruitment in Mountain State

The role of patronage

Despite the rules and processes laid out to guide recruitment, official meritocratic recruitment processes existed alongside networks of political patronage in Mountain State.

Legally speaking, the relationship between the bureaucracy and elected officials was clearly defined and politically neutral, with government departments implementing policies and programmes decided by ministers in consultation with bureaucrats. However, in practice, civil servants often had informal political affiliations and loyalties to specific political parties. It was common for promotions, additional responsibilities, or special salaries to be reserved for those who were well connected with the political leadership.

The culture of patronage also filtered down to lower levels and contractual positions, where patronage-based recruitment depended on a combination of political party affiliations and tribal connections. Private sector roles in Mountain State were few and far between, and public sector jobs continued to be highly respected and desirable, particularly for the social status and benefits they provided. Beyond guaranteeing healthcare, education, and pensions, certain jobs also provided housing facilities, vehicles, and mobile phones, not to mention the opportunity to extort bribes and misappropriate funds – both of which were common forms of corruption in the region. Public sector recruitment thus continued to be an important source of influence for politicians seeking to consolidate loyalty among their voter base, especially when elections were around the corner.

Scandals and punishment

Mountain State had seen several widely publicised recruitment scandals in its recent history. Notably, in 2015, the health department was accused of favouring candidates related to influential politicians and officials in the recruitment of a large number of nurses. Rejected candidates protested and alleged that the exam had been poorly written, with questions that were out of the syllabus, and that it had not been properly checked. They demanded the cancellation of the exam, structural reform of the recruitment process, and for the exams to be rescheduled only after the reforms were put in place. Eventually the high court had ruled in their favour, and fresh exams were conducted. Then, in 2017, the chairman of the state's autonomous recruitment body was arrested on charges of misuse of powers and involvement in illegal recruitment, and later sent to jail on judicial remand. He was accused of making around a hundred appointments as directed by the erstwhile state government, and even recruiting his own son into the government though he was not qualified for the role.

However, prosecution and punishment of those involved in illegal recruitment cycles had remained rare. The ACC, the corruption watchdog, had faced criticism for being selective in both investigation and prosecution. Some critics had questioned the commission's independence and accused it of being influenced by political pressures. The ACC was also sometimes accused of only going after high-profile cases, and typically only after political support had shifted away from the individual under investigation. And which cases of corruption became high-profile was also a politically charged question in Mountain State; much of the state media had close ties to politicians and the national media hardly covered Mountain State at all.

Source: Case writers.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Emanuele Colonnelli, Mounu Prem and Edoardo Teso, 'Patronage and Selection in Public Sector Organisations', *American Economic Review*, vol. 110, no. 10 (2020), pp. 3071-99; Guo Xu, 'The Costs of Patronage: Evidence from the British Empire', *American Economic Review*, vol. 108, no. 11 (November 2018), pp. 3170-98. For an alternative view, see Guillermo Toral, 'How Patronage Delivers: Political Appointments, Bureaucratic Accountability, and Service Delivery in Brazil,' *American Journal of Political Science*, (28 January 2023), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajps.12758>, accessed March 2023.

² Interview with protagonist and case writers, February 2023.

³ Interview with protagonist and case writers, February 2023.

⁴ Interview with protagonist and case writers, February 2023.

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