Typologies Of Political Patronage: Expert Evidence From Mongolia's Civil Service

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Abstract

Political patronage remains a persistent feature of civil service systems worldwide, even where formal recruitment rules are nominally meritocratic. This article examines the typological forms political patronage takes within Mongolia's civil service, addressing a gap in the comparative literature between highly institutionalized European party-government systems, where influential typologies of patronage were originally developed, and post-socialist, semi-presidential contexts, where such typologies remain largely untested. Despite two decades of civil service reform explicitly modeled on career-based meritocratic systems, official Civil Service Council statistics document a rise in unlawful personnel rotation from 5.2 percent of civil servants in 2007 to over 22 percent in 2019, indicating a persistent divergence between formal rule and administrative practice. Drawing on a two-stage expert survey and interview design involving 55 experts from academia, the civil service, and political practice, this study tests the applicability of the influential typology developed by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova (2012)—distinguishing party-apparatus-based, technocratic, agency-based, and party-membership-based patronage—to the Mongolian case. Findings indicate that all four typological categories are unanimously or near-unanimously recognized by experts as operative, evidencing pronounced typological pluralism rather than a single dominant patronage logic. Further analysis reveals that these forms are systematically stratified by administrative tier and organizational domain, and that their relative prominence has shifted across three historical periods of legal reform, giving rise to an additional, previously untheorized mechanism: legislative-amendment-based patronage. The study offers the first systematic empirical mapping of patronage typologies in a Mongolian context, extends an established Western typology to a post-socialist hybrid regime, and demonstrates a methodological approach for measuring patronage in data-scarce administrative environments.

Keywords: political patronage, civil service, Mongolia, patronage typology, post-socialist bureaucracy, expert survey, meritocracy

1. Introduction

Political patronage—the practice by which politicians and political parties allocate public positions on the basis of loyalty rather than merit—remains one of the most persistent features of state administration worldwide, even in systems formally committed to meritocratic recruitment (Grindle, 2012; Kopecký et al., 2012). While patronage has been extensively theorized and measured in Western European party systems and, more recently, in Latin American and African contexts, post-socialist Asian democracies remain comparatively understudied despite exhibiting distinctive patterns of politicized appointment shaped by their transitional institutional legacies (Meyer-Sahling, 2006; Peters et al., 2023).

Mongolia offers a compelling case in this regard. Since the adoption of its first Civil Service Law in 1994, the country has pursued successive waves of administrative reform explicitly modeled on career-based, merit-oriented systems from Germany, Japan, and New Zealand. Yet official reporting by the Civil Service Council documents a steady rise in unlawful personnel rotation—from 5.2 percent of civil servants in 2007 to over 22 percent by 2019—suggesting that formal reform has coexisted with, rather than displaced, informal patronage practices. This apparent paradox raises an important theoretical and empirical question: what specific forms does political patronage take within a nominally meritocratic civil service, and how do these forms vary across levels of government and modes of political organization?

Existing typologies of patronage—most notably the influential framework developed by Kopecký and colleagues,

which distinguishes patronage based on party bureaucracies, party membership, technocratic appointees, and political agents—were developed primarily from European party-government contexts. Whether such typologies travel to a semi-presidential, multiparty post-socialist system with weak party institutionalization has not been systematically tested. Mongolia's civil service, embedded in a political landscape characterized by shifting coalitions, personalistic factions, and recurrent legal amendment as a vehicle for appointment control, presents an opportunity to interrogate and potentially extend this typological framework.

This article addresses that gap by drawing on original expert-survey evidence to identify and characterize the dominant forms of political patronage observed within Mongolia's civil service. Using data collected from 55 experts—scholars, civil servants, and political practitioners—through a two-stage design combining structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key informants, we examine the relative prevalence of patronage based on party apparatuses, professional-technocratic networks, political agents, and rank-and-file party membership.

The article makes three contributions. *First*, it provides the first systematic empirical mapping of patronage typologies in a Mongolian context, addressing a notable gap in a literature still dominated by European and Latin American cases. *Second*, it tests the applicability of an established Western typology to a post-socialist hybrid regime, assessing where the framework holds and where local specificities—such as faction-based rather than strictly party-based loyalty—require conceptual adaptation. *Third*, it offers a methodological demonstration of expert-survey techniques for measuring patronage in data-scarce environments, where administrative records alone are insufficient to capture informal appointment practices.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Political Patronage and Clientelism: Conceptual Boundaries

Political patronage is best understood as a specific institutional manifestation of the broader phenomenon of clientelism (Oliveros, 2021). Whereas clientelism describes an exchange relationship in which a patron distributes material or symbolic goods to a client in return for political support—an exchange that can occur between any two social actors—political patronage narrows this relationship to a particular arena: the allocation of public sector positions by political actors to individuals whose principal qualification is loyalty rather than professional merit (Kopecký & Scherlis, 2008). Following Kaufman (1974) and Eisenstadt and Roniger (1980), five defining features distinguish patronage relationships from ordinary bureaucratic appointment: they are dyadic, asymmetric, informal, reciprocal, and nominally voluntary. The patron—typically a party, minister, or head of government—possesses office, resources, or influence that the client lacks; the client offers loyalty, electoral labor, or political support in exchange for access to public employment. Crucially, this relationship operates outside the formal legal and procedural architecture that ostensibly governs civil service recruitment, relying instead on trust, mutual recognition, and informal obligation (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

This conceptual distinction matters because it allows patronage to be studied as a bounded, identifiable subset of political-administrative behavior rather than as a diffuse cultural syndrome. It also clarifies the unit of analysis for the present study: not the exchange of goods and services in the electorate at large, but the specific act of appointment, transfer, or dismissal of civil servants for political rather than administrative reasons.

2.2 Institutionalist and Principal-Agent Perspectives

Two theoretical traditions inform how patronage has been explained and, by extension, how it can be typologized. The first, rooted in historical and sociological institutionalism (Berger et al., 1995; Parsons, 1949; Weber et al., 1978), treats patronage as an outcome of institutional design and path dependency: where formal civil service rules are weak, ambiguous, or newly imposed atop pre-existing informal norms, patronage networks fill the resulting governance vacuum and, over time, become self-reinforcing. This perspective is particularly salient for post-socialist administrations, where formal meritocratic frameworks were often adopted rapidly during democratic transition without corresponding change in the informal norms governing bureaucratic behavior (Meyer-Sahling, 2006).

The second tradition draws on principal-agent theory, most explicitly developed by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), which frames the patron-client relationship as a hierarchical exchange characterized by information asymmetry and monitoring costs. Political principals—party leaders, ministers, elected executives—use appointment power as a mechanism for ensuring bureaucratic compliance in contexts where formal accountability structures are insufficiently robust to guarantee loyal implementation of the governing party's agenda. Patronage, from this view, is not merely a corrupt deviation from meritocracy but a rational governance strategy under conditions of institutional uncertainty (Grindle, 2012, 2017). Grindle's comparative work is particularly instructive here: she argues that no administrative system is entirely free of patronage-based allocation, and that its presence or absence is better understood as a matter of degree and form rather than binary presence.

2.3 The Kopecký-Mair-Spirova Typology

The most systematic attempt to classify the forms political patronage takes is offered by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova (2012), whose comparative study of European party governments identifies four principal bases along which patronage appointments are organized. *First*, *party-apparatus-based patronage* channels appointments through the internal machinery of political parties, rewarding party functionaries and campaign staff. *Second*, *technocratic patronage* relies on professionally credentialed advisors and program specialists who, despite formal qualifications, are selected primarily for their political reliability rather than through open competition. *Third*, *agency-based patronage* operates through political appointees embedded within specific state agencies or agencies created or restructured explicitly to accommodate loyalist placement. *Fourth*, *membership-based patronage* rewards rank-and-file party members and grassroots supporters, typically at lower administrative tiers, as a mechanism of party maintenance and electoral mobilization.

This typology has proven valuable because it disaggregates patronage from a single undifferentiated phenomenon into distinct organizational logics, each implying different mechanisms, different levels of the bureaucracy affected, and potentially different consequences for administrative performance. However, the typology was constructed primarily from data on consolidated European party democracies with institutionalized party systems. Its applicability to hybrid or post-socialist regimes—characterized by weaker party institutionalization, greater reliance on personalistic factions, and frequent legislative amendment as an instrument of appointment control—has not been rigorously tested.

2.4 Adapting the Framework to a Post-Socialist, Semi-Presidential Context

Mongolia's political-administrative environment differs from the European cases underlying the original typology in at least three respects relevant to theory-building. *First*, party organization in Mongolia is comparatively less institutionalized, with intra-party factions frequently operating as autonomous patronage networks independent of formal party structures (Radchenko & Jargalsaikhan, 2017). *Second*, the semi-presidential configuration of executive authority creates multiple, sometimes competing, centers of appointment power—the presidency, the cabinet, and parliamentary factions—each potentially generating distinct patronage logics not captured by a framework developed for parliamentary party governments. *Third*, and most distinctively, patronage in Mongolia appears to be substantially mediated through the legislative amendment process itself, whereby appointment rules embedded in the Civil Service Law are periodically altered to accommodate incumbent appointment preferences—a mechanism absent from the original typology's four categories.

These contextual features suggest that while the Kopecký-Mair-Spirova framework provides a necessary analytical starting point, its four categories may require empirical refinement—or supplementation with a fifth, faction- or agent-based category—to adequately capture the Mongolian case. The expert-survey evidence presented in this article is designed precisely to test this proposition: to determine which of the established typological categories hold empirical purchase in Mongolia's civil service, and where the post-socialist institutional context generates forms of patronage not anticipated by extant theory.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method, explanatory-descriptive research design suited to a phenomenon that is both underdocumented in official statistics and resistant to direct observation. Because political patronage typically operates through informal channels that are deliberately concealed from public record, purely quantitative approaches relying on administrative data are insufficient to capture its underlying logic; equally, purely interpretive approaches risk producing findings that cannot be systematically compared or generalized. Following the classification proposed by Kerlinger and adapted for post-socialist administrative contexts by Baatartogtokh, the design combines descriptive elements—establishing the prevalence and form of patronage typologies—with explanatory elements aimed at identifying the causal logic underlying the observed variation. This corresponds to what Jargal and Selenge term "tailbarlakh sudalgaa" (explanatory research), which builds upon prior exploratory and descriptive work to uncover relationships between phenomena rather than merely documenting their existence (Baatartogtokh, 2012; Jargal & Selenge, 2020; Kerlinger, 1986).

The empirical strategy follows the methodological precedent established by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova (2012), who identify expert assessment as the most effective available method for studying political patronage, citing its capacity to access tacit, practitioner-level knowledge that neither party membership surveys, career-trajectory analysis, nor purely quantitative indicators can adequately capture. Each of these alternative approaches carries a specific limitation: surveys of party members and voters capture only patronage that operates through formal party channels; career-trajectory analysis fails where patronage manifests as specialized rather than incremental appointment; and quantitative indicators, while enabling broad comparison, sacrifice the contextual granularity needed to distinguish between typological forms. Expert assessment, first employed systematically by Geddes,

addresses these limitations by drawing on the accumulated tacit knowledge of individuals positioned to observe patronage practices directly, whether as scholars, former officials, or civil society practitioners (Geddes, 1996).

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in two sequential stages, consistent with established practice in expert-based patronage research (Batbaatar et al., 2019).

Stage One: Structured Expert Questionnaire. A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to a purposively selected panel of 55 experts, comprising academics specializing in public administration and political science, current and former civil service officials, and practitioners with direct professional exposure to appointment processes within Mongolian state institutions. Purposive rather than random sampling was employed because the population of individuals possessing the requisite tacit knowledge of patronage practices is small and not amenable to standard probability sampling frames; expertise, rather than representativeness in a demographic sense, was the primary selection criterion. The questionnaire instrument asked respondents to identify the underlying causes of political patronage in Mongolia's civil service and to characterize the dominant forms (or "types") through which patronage manifests, allowing multiple responses per item to capture the multidimensional character of the phenomenon as it is experienced in practice. Response frequencies and the percentage of cases citing each category were calculated to establish the relative salience of candidate typological categories, following standard practice for multiple-response categorical data.

Stage Two: In-Depth Interviews with Key Informants. From the full panel of 55 respondents, four experts were purposively selected for semi-structured, open-ended follow-up interviews. Selection at this stage prioritized informants whose institutional positioning offered the broadest possible vantage point on appointment practices across different levels and branches of the civil service. The rationale for this second stage follows Batbaatar and colleagues' observation that individual in-depth interviewing offers a comparative advantage in allowing the phenomenon under study to be examined in greater breadth and interpretive depth than closed-ended instruments permit, enabling respondents to elaborate on mechanisms, provide illustrative cases, and qualify or contextualize patterns identified in the aggregate survey data (Batbaatar et al., 2019). Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to passages addressing the mechanisms, targets, and organizational logic of appointment practices, and are cited in this article using anonymized informant codes (O1–O4) in accordance with the confidentiality protocol described below.

3.3 Analytical Approach

Two complementary analytical techniques were applied. First, content analysis was used to code interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses against the four-category typology developed by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova (2012)—party-apparatus-based, technocratic, agency-based, and membership-based patronage—while remaining inductively open to categories not anticipated by this framework, consistent with the theoretical expectation, developed above, that the Mongolian case might exhibit forms not captured by a typology built from European party-government data. Second, descriptive statistical analysis of the structured questionnaire responses was used to establish the relative frequency and case-coverage of each typological category, providing a quantitative complement to the qualitative interview material and allowing triangulation between the two data sources.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Given the politically sensitive nature of the subject matter, all respondents participated on the basis of informed consent, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality communicated prior to data collection; no identifying information is reported for individual respondents beyond the anonymized codes used for direct quotations. Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the purposive nature of the sample, while methodologically appropriate for accessing specialized tacit knowledge, precludes statistical generalization to the broader population of Mongolian civil servants or political elites; findings should be understood as reflecting expert consensus rather than population-representative estimates. Second, as with all research relying on retrospective expert judgment, responses may be subject to recall bias and to experts' own positional interests within the political system they are describing—a risk partially mitigated by triangulating structured questionnaire data against independent interview material and by cross-referencing expert assessments against publicly available Civil Service Council statistics on unlawful personnel rotation. Third, the relatively small number of in-depth interviews (n = 4), while consistent with established practice in expert-based patronage studies, limits the extent to which qualitative findings can capture the full diversity of perspectives present within the broader 55-member expert panel. These limitations are addressed substantively in the discussion of findings and inform the caution with which typological claims are advanced.

4. Findings

4.1 The Scale and Persistence of Patronage in Mongolia's Civil Service

Before turning to the typological evidence that forms the core of this article, it is necessary to establish the empirical backdrop against which experts were asked to characterize patronage practices. Official Civil Service Council reporting documents a striking and largely monotonic increase in unlawful personnel rotation over the past two decades. In 2007, 5.2 percent of civil servants were affected by unlawful transfer or dismissal; by 2012 this figure had risen to 9.3 percent, reaching 11.5 percent in 2013, 13.1 percent in 2014, 13.4 percent in 2015, 14.2 percent in 2016, and 15.5 percent in 2017 (Civil Service Council of Mongolia, 2018; Otgonbayar & Tumur, 2022). By 2019, a World Bank assessment found that 22.3 percent of administrative civil servants had been subject to unlawful rotation (World Bank, 2020)—a more than fourfold increase in twelve years, despite two intervening rounds of civil service legislative reform explicitly designed to insulate the bureaucracy from political interference.

This trend is corroborated by data on the formally designated "political civil servant" category, which nominally captures only a small fraction of the workforce—between 1.7 and 2.0 percent of all civil servants in the 2020–2023 period. Yet the near-stability of this narrow formal category stands in stark contrast to the much larger and rising share of civil servants experiencing politically motivated turnover, a discrepancy our expert respondents repeatedly identified as evidence that patronage in Mongolia operates predominantly through informal rather than formally designated channels. As one senior academic informant summarized the pattern: roughly one in five civil servants changes position in any given year, and one in ten experiences outright unlawful rotation—figures that, in the words of several respondents, indicate a bureaucracy in a state of chronic, rather than episodic, politicization.

This context matters for the typological analysis that follows. A civil service in which politicized turnover is rare and confined to a handful of visible political appointments would generate a very different typological profile than one in which such turnover is pervasive, cyclical, and embedded in ordinary administrative practice. The evidence presented below suggests strongly that Mongolia belongs to the latter category, and that this pervasiveness is itself a function of the multiplicity of forms patronage takes—the subject to which we now turn.

4.2 Expert-Identified Causes: Setting the Conditions for Typological Diversity

Understanding why patronage persists provides essential context for understanding *how* it is organized, since the causal logic identified by experts directly shapes the typological forms that emerge. When asked to identify the underlying causes of political patronage in Mongolia's civil service, our panel of 55 experts produced the response pattern summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors influencing patronage appointments in the civil service

Reason	**N**	**% of responses**	**% of cases**
Senior officials lack interest in combating patronage	48	40.0%	87.3%
Political parties/politicians act to control state power	39	32.5%	70.9%
Electoral system dynamics	11	9.2%	20.0%
Officials' declining ethical standards	5	4.2%	9.1%
Weak administrative-legal norms governing hierarchy	4	3.3%	7.3%
Weak legal regulation of civil service ethics	4	3.3%	7.3%

The overwhelming majority of experts—87.3 percent of cases—attributed the persistence of patronage not to gaps in formal law but to the absence of political will among senior officials to enforce existing legal protections. This finding is theoretically significant: it suggests that Mongolia's patronage problem is best characterized not as an institutional design failure in the narrow sense, but as what might be termed *enforcement capture*—a condition in which formally adequate rules exist but the actors empowered to enforce them are themselves embedded within, and benefit from, the patronage system they are nominally responsible for policing. This finding is consistent with the institutionalist expectation, discussed in the theoretical framework above, that formal rule adoption without corresponding change in enforcement incentives produces persistent gaps between de jure and de facto practice (Meyer-Sahling, 2006).

A second, related battery of questions asked experts to identify the specific mechanisms through which patronage manifests in practice (Table 2).

Table 2. Mechanisms generating patronage in Mongolia's civil service

Mechanism	**N**	**% of responses**	**% of cases**
Parties/politicians seeking control over state resources	54	31.0%	98.2%
Informal structures serving narrow group interests	39	22.4%	70.9%
Citizens' own desire to obtain civil service positions	32	18.4%	58.2%
Dominant personal traits of leading/executive officials	27	15.5%	49.1%
Politicized organizational culture within institutions	6	3.4%	10.9%
Conflict of interest between officials and institutions	2	1.1%	3.6%

Two features of this distribution merit emphasis before proceeding to the typological findings proper. First, near-unanimous expert consensus (98.2 percent of cases) identifies the drive by parties and politicians to control state resources as the dominant mechanism, confirming the principal-agent logic articulated by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007): appointment power functions as an instrument through which political principals secure bureaucratic compliance. Second, and more novel, is the substantial share of experts (58.2 percent of cases) who identified *citizen demand*—ordinary individuals' own desire to secure civil service employment through informal channels—as a contributing mechanism. This finding complicates a purely elite-driven, supply-side account of patronage and points toward a demand-side dynamic in which patronage networks are sustained not only by political principals seeking loyalty but by citizens actively seeking access to a scarce and desirable form of employment. As one informant (O3) explained, "an individual may be appointed to a state position through connections—acquaintances, friends, people from the same home region or graduating class. This may not sit comfortably with that person, but it is understood that no appointment is ever entirely free of the ruling party's influence." This observation—that patronage is experienced as both imposed from above and actively sought from below—provides an important interpretive backdrop for the four typological categories examined next, since it suggests that different typological forms may correspond to different points along this supply-demand continuum.

4.3 Four Typologies of Patronage: Testing the Kopecký-Mair-Spirova Framework

The central empirical task of this study was to determine which forms of political patronage, as classified within the Kopecký-Mair-Spirova (2012) framework, experts identify as operative within Mongolia's civil service, and with what relative frequency. Respondents were asked to characterize the "style" (khev shinj) of patronage appointment they had observed, with multiple responses permitted to reflect the coexistence of different forms. Table 3 reports the results.

Table 3. Typologies of patronage appointment identified by experts

Typological category	N	% of responses	% of cases
Professional consultant/program-technocrat-based patronage	55	25.9%	100.0%
Political-agent-based patronage	55	25.9%	100.0%
Party-membership-based patronage	55	25.9%	100.0%
Party-apparatus-based patronage	47	22.2%	85.5%
Total	**212**	**100.0%**	**385.5%**

The most immediately striking finding in Table 3 is the near-total saturation of three of the four categories: every single expert in the panel (100.0 percent of cases) identified technocrat-based, political-agent-based, and party-membership-based patronage as present in Mongolia's civil service, while 85.5 percent additionally identified party-apparatus-based patronage. The cumulative response rate of 385.5 percent of cases—meaning that, on average, each expert identified nearly four distinct typological forms simultaneously—provides strong evidence against a model of patronage as a singular, uniform practice. Instead, the data indicate that Mongolia's civil service exhibits *typological pluralism*: multiple forms of patronage operate concurrently, often within the same institution, rather than one dominant mode displacing the others. This finding itself constitutes an important corrective to accounts of patronage—including much of the earlier Mongolian-language literature reviewed in this study (National Academy of Governance, 2009, 2014)—that have tended to treat "improper personnel rotation" as an undifferentiated category, without disaggregating the distinct organizational logics through which it is produced.

We examine each of the four categories in turn, drawing on both the quantitative distribution and the qualitative interview material to characterize their distinguishing features in the Mongolian context.

4.3.1 Party-Apparatus-Based Patronage

Party-apparatus-based patronage, in the original Kopecký-Mair-Spirova formulation, refers to appointments channeled through the internal organizational machinery of political parties—rewarding party functionaries, campaign strategists, and administrative staff of party headquarters with public sector positions. This category received the lowest, though still substantial, endorsement among Mongolian experts (85.5 percent of cases), suggesting that while present, it is somewhat less central to the Mongolian pattern than the other three forms.

Interview data help explain this relative positioning. Informants consistently distinguished between appointments flowing from a party's formal organizational apparatus—its permanent administrative staff—and appointments flowing from looser, more personalistic networks surrounding individual politicians, which respondents more often coded under the "political-agent" category discussed below. As informant O1 observed, legislative amendments to the Civil Service Law have historically been used by "the ruling party, force, and politicians" collectively, rather than by the party apparatus as a discrete bureaucratic entity, to reshape appointment rules in ways that favor incumbent loyalists. This suggests that in Mongolia's relatively weakly institutionalized party system, the formal party apparatus functions as one vehicle among several for patronage distribution, rather than the primary or exclusive channel that it appears to represent in more institutionalized European party-government contexts (Kopecký et al., 2012). This finding is consistent with the broader literature on post-socialist party systems, which emphasizes that party organizations in newer democracies often lack the disciplined, hierarchical structure presupposed by patronage typologies developed from Western European cases (Radchenko & Jargalsaikhan, 2017).

4.3.2 Technocrat-Based Patronage

Perhaps the most theoretically interesting finding to emerge from the expert panel is the unanimous identification (100.0 percent of cases) of technocrat-based patronage—appointments of professionally credentialed advisors, program specialists, and policy consultants selected primarily for political reliability despite possessing genuine formal qualifications. This category is significant precisely because it complicates any simple dichotomy between "meritocratic" and "patronage" appointment: technocrat-based patronage describes appointees who satisfy, on paper, the formal qualification requirements associated with meritocratic recruitment, while nonetheless owing their selection primarily to political loyalty rather than competitive, open selection.

Several informants elaborated on this dynamic in terms that closely track Grindle's (2012) observation that patronage and technical competence are not mutually exclusive categories but frequently coexist. One informant described a recurring pattern whereby incoming administrations retain or install credentialed policy advisors whose technical qualifications provide a legitimating veneer for what remains, at its core, a loyalty-based selection process. This form of patronage is particularly difficult to detect through administrative record review alone, since the appointee's formal qualifications are genuinely adequate to the position—the politicization operates not

through the substitution of unqualified for qualified personnel, but through the selective preference for politically aligned individuals *among* the pool of qualified candidates. This finding has significant implications for anti-patronage reform efforts premised on strengthening formal qualification requirements: such reforms, our data suggest, are unlikely to substantially reduce technocrat-based patronage, since this form already operates within, rather than in violation of, formal qualification standards.

4.3.3 Political-Agent-Based Patronage

Political-agent-based patronage likewise achieved unanimous endorsement (100.0 percent of cases) among the expert panel, and interview data suggest this category captures much of what respondents considered the most consequential and pervasive form of patronage in the Mongolian context. This category refers to the placement of individuals into specific agencies, or the restructuring of agencies themselves, explicitly to accommodate the installation of politically loyal personnel—a pattern that recurred throughout respondents' historical narratives of Mongolia's civil service development.

Informants repeatedly linked this category to the episodic restructuring of ministries and agencies following changes in government. As documented in the historical record reviewed for this study, each change of ruling coalition since 1996 has been accompanied by a distinctive euphemism for what experts uniformly characterized as politically motivated agency-level reorganization: "team formation" following the 1996 election, "structural reform" following the 2000 election, and "consensus-building" following the 2004 election. Informant O2 was direct on this point: legal reform is, in this informant's words, ultimately constrained by the fact that "the ruling party is the one that passes the law"—meaning that agency restructuring, ostensibly justified on administrative-efficiency grounds, functions in practice as a vehicle for political-agent placement that operates independently of, and often in direct tension with, formal civil service protections. The unanimous expert recognition of this category, combined with its documented historical recurrence across multiple electoral cycles, positions political-agent-based patronage as perhaps the single most institutionally entrenched typological form identified in this study.

4.3.4 Party-Membership-Based Patronage

The fourth category, party-membership-based patronage—rewarding rank-and-file party members and grassroots campaign supporters with public positions, typically concentrated at lower administrative tiers—also achieved unanimous expert endorsement (100.0 percent of cases). This finding directly corroborates the demand-side dynamic identified in Section 4.2 above: the substantial share of experts (58.2 percent of cases) who identified ordinary citizens' desire for civil service employment as a causal mechanism aligns closely with the mechanics of membership-based patronage, in which party affiliation and campaign participation function as informal currency exchangeable for lower-tier administrative positions.

This category was frequently discussed by informants in terms of its function as a party-maintenance and electoral-mobilization tool rather than a governance-control mechanism per se. Unlike political-agent-based patronage, which our respondents linked primarily to securing loyal implementation of the governing party's agenda at senior administrative levels, membership-based patronage was more often characterized as an incentive structure for sustaining grassroots political labor—rewarding, in the words of the dissertation's broader analysis, "members and supporters who actively participated in party activities" with employment opportunities at the middle and lower tiers of the civil service. This distinction between agent-based and membership-based patronage—corresponding respectively to elite governance control and grassroots mobilization incentive—represents a meaningful refinement of the Kopecký-Mair-Spirova framework as applied to the Mongolian case, since it clarifies that these two categories, while both achieving unanimous expert recognition, operate through distinct causal logics and target distinct organizational levels.

4.4 A Multi-Tier Structure: Where Each Typology Operates

Building on the four-category typological findings above, our analysis of interview data reveals that these forms are not randomly distributed across the civil service but are systematically stratified according to administrative level and organizational domain. Experts consistently distinguished between two broad domains of patronage targeting—general state administration and state/local-owned enterprises—each further divided into two tiers.

Within general state administration, **first-tier patronage** targets senior leadership positions: ministers' offices, agency heads, and department directors. Interview evidence indicates that appointments at this tier correspond most closely to the political-agent-based and party-apparatus-based typologies, reflecting the priority placed by incoming administrations on installing personally trusted individuals capable of ensuring faithful implementation of the governing coalition's policy program. **Second-tier patronage** within state administration targets mid- and lower-level positions—department and division specialists and below—and corresponds more closely to party-membership-based patronage, functioning primarily as a reward mechanism for active party participants rather than as a governance-control instrument.

A parallel two-tier structure operates within state- and locally-owned enterprises, which experts identified as a

domain with distinct incentive structures. **First-tier patronage** within this domain targets the management of state-owned enterprises, while **second-tier patronage** targets rank-and-file enterprise staff. Notably, informants characterized patronage within this domain as oriented less toward policy control than toward rent-seeking and personal enrichment, with several experts describing enterprise-level appointments as motivated primarily by opportunities for asset appropriation rather than by the loyalty-for-governance-compliance logic that characterizes agent-based patronage within core state administration.

This multi-tier finding extends the four-category typology in an important respect: it demonstrates that typological classification and organizational-level targeting operate as two independent but interacting dimensions of the same phenomenon. A complete account of patronage in Mongolia's civil service therefore requires specifying not only *which* typological form is operative, but *where within the administrative hierarchy* it is concentrated—a two-dimensional mapping not explicitly incorporated into the original Kopecký-Mair-Spirova framework, which was developed primarily with reference to central government appointments rather than the state-enterprise sector.

4.5 Temporal Evolution: How Typological Dominance Has Shifted

A further contribution of this study's evidence base is its capacity to trace how the relative prominence of these typological forms has shifted across three distinct historical periods identified through both interview data and documentary analysis of legislative change.

During the **first period (1995–2008)**, patronage operated predominantly through outright violation of existing civil service law, in the absence of any defined accountability mechanism or operational definition of "political influence" within the legal framework. Interview and documentary evidence from this period point most strongly to political-agent-based and party-apparatus-based patronage, exercised through direct instruction and informal pressure on appointment-authorized officials, with minimal need for legal justification given the absence of enforceable sanctions.

The **second period (2009–2019)**, initiated by presidential-led amendments to the Civil Service Law explicitly intended to insulate the bureaucracy from political influence and to define "political influence" for the first time in law, marks a shift in patronage strategy rather than a decline in its incidence. Ruling parties adapted to the new accountability framework through two principal mechanisms: further amendment of the law itself, and manipulation of the newly mandated open competitive selection procedures. This period corresponds to the emergence of technocrat-based patronage as a increasingly salient form, since formal competitive procedures created pressure for politically preferred candidates to also satisfy credential requirements—precisely the dynamic described by informants in Section 4.3.2 above.

The **third period (2019–present)**, initiated by the 2017 comprehensive revision of the Civil Service Law establishing the career principle in law, has nonetheless seen the law amended twenty-six times, alongside instances of ordinary legislation—such as the 2020 COVID-19 emergency law—explicitly suspending competitive selection requirements for specified periods (The State Great Khural, 2019). This period suggests the emergence of what might be considered a fifth, previously untheorized mechanism: **legislative-amendment-based patronage**, in which the legal framework itself becomes a repeatedly modified instrument of appointment control, rather than a fixed constraint that political actors must circumvent through the four established typological channels. As informant O1 observed: “There are different approaches to understanding political patronage. However, it is clear that this phenomenon is highly detrimental to the political system, particularly the civil service. Following the 2008 amendments to the Civil Service Law, we believed that patronage-based appointments had been fully addressed. Yet, after the 2012 elections, we saw that the situation remained essentially unchanged, although patronage had taken on different forms and manifestations. A campaign was launched encouraging civil servants who supported opposition parties, or who had been appointed when those parties were in power, to voluntarily resign from their positions. Yet, remarkably, none of them filed a complaint. We believed that political patronage was taking place within the civil service, but we could find no evidence to prove it. Everything appeared to be legally compliant. This situation was repeated as a matter of course following each of the last two parliamentary elections.” This account illustrates how political patronage may persist despite successive legal reforms, adapting its methods to the prevailing institutional and legal environment. The absence of formal complaints and the apparent legality of personnel changes made it difficult to establish direct evidence of politically motivated appointments or dismissals. Informant O1’s testimony therefore supports the argument that patronage does not necessarily disappear when legal safeguards are strengthened; rather, it may evolve into less visible forms that operate within, or appear to comply with, the existing legal framework. This observation provides qualitative support for the argument that legislative change can alter the mechanisms through which patronage is exercised without necessarily eliminating the underlying practice.

“The underlying causes of political patronage in Mongolia are directly linked to the actions of ruling parties, political forces, and politicians. No civil service reform or legal regulation will be effective unless an appropriate set of rules governing the conduct of these political actors is established. The Civil Service Law provides a clear

example of this problem. In terms of their underlying principles, the civil service laws that have been implemented in Mongolia, both in the past and at present, have not been particularly poor. However, parties and politicians that win elections repeatedly amend these laws under the guise of legislative revision, eventually transforming them beyond recognition. Examining a single amendment in isolation reveals little. It is only by examining the amendments cumulatively that one can understand the underlying nature of the patronage-based appointment policies pursued by ruling parties, political forces, and politicians." (O1)

While experts did not explicitly code this mechanism as a discrete "typology" in the closed-ended questionnaire—since the instrument was designed around the pre-existing Kopecký-Mair-Spirova categories—its prominence in the qualitative interview data, and its distinctiveness from the four established categories, suggests it warrants consideration as either a Mongolia-specific extension of the typology or a broader theoretical category applicable to other post-socialist contexts characterized by high rates of legislative amendment.

5. Summary

Taken together, these findings support four principal conclusions. *First*, patronage in Mongolia's civil service is not a singular phenomenon but exhibits pronounced typological pluralism, with three of four established categories achieving unanimous expert recognition and the fourth achieving near-unanimous recognition—indicating that the Kopecký-Mair-Spirova framework, developed from European party-government contexts, retains substantial applicability to a post-socialist, semi-presidential setting, though with modified relative weightings across categories. *Second*, these typological forms are systematically stratified by administrative level and organizational domain, with agent- and apparatus-based patronage concentrated at senior administrative tiers and within enterprise management, and membership-based patronage concentrated at lower administrative tiers—a two-dimensional structure not fully anticipated by the original framework. *Third*, the relative prominence of typological forms has shifted over time in response to successive rounds of formal legal reform, with technocrat-based patronage emerging as reformers introduced competitive selection requirements, and a distinct legislative-amendment-based mechanism emerging as the primary adaptive response to the 2017 career-principle reform. *Fourth*, and most broadly, these findings indicate that formal legal reform in Mongolia has consistently altered the *form* through which patronage operates without correspondingly reducing its *incidence*—a pattern that carries significant implications, developed in the discussion that follows, for how anti-patronage reform is conceptualized and designed in post-socialist administrative contexts more broadly.

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