PIDE Series on Governance and Institutions

Public Service: Through the Eyes of Civil Servants

Nadeem Ul Haque and Idrees Khawaja

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ISBN 978-969-461-135-8

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Designed, composed, and finished at the Publications Division, PIDE.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

THROUGH THE EYES OF CIVIL SERVANTS

by

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Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of Pakistan's emergence on the world map, in 1947, Keynesian policies of activist government held sway over economic thinking in the capitalist world. The policy paradigm, established following the thinking of the time, was that the government had to lead development [Haque and Montiel (1994)]. The approach led to a long era of state-led development with role of the government considerably extended. The governments, in due course, discovered the political advantages of expanding public sector employment.

Poor development indicators after following decades of state-led development have forced a review of the approach. Considerable research over the nineties has shown that 'governance matters'. Numbers of countries have instituted civil service reform in this context. However the efforts to reform the civil service have been less than successful in developing countries. Quite often, the countries faced with macro-economic imbalances undertook the reforms upon advice of international lending agencies. Driven by budgetary considerations, these reform efforts focused on downsizing and procedural changes. No attention was paid to alter the outmoded incentive system which in many countries is now characterised by declining real wages, wage compression, a non-merit promotion and reward system.

Any civil service reform effort to be successful must accord center-stage to the stake holders—the people, who can either be the architect and beneficiaries of change or the losers and therefore opponent of change! The losers would obviously attempt to game the reform effort. Design and implementation of reform effort must be sensitive to these facts.

In Pakistan too, despite various attempts at reforming the civil services the common perception seems to be that the system essentially

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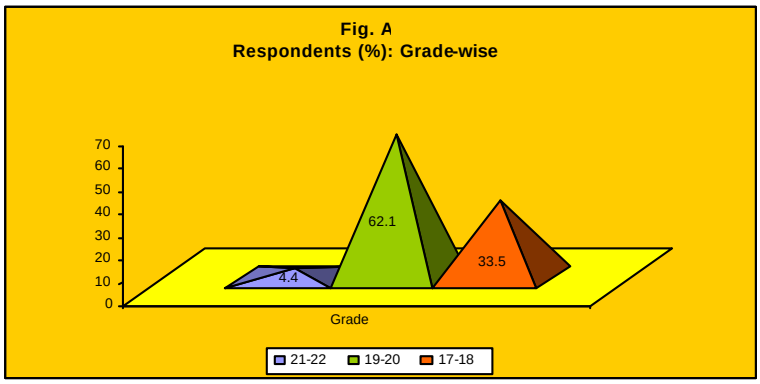
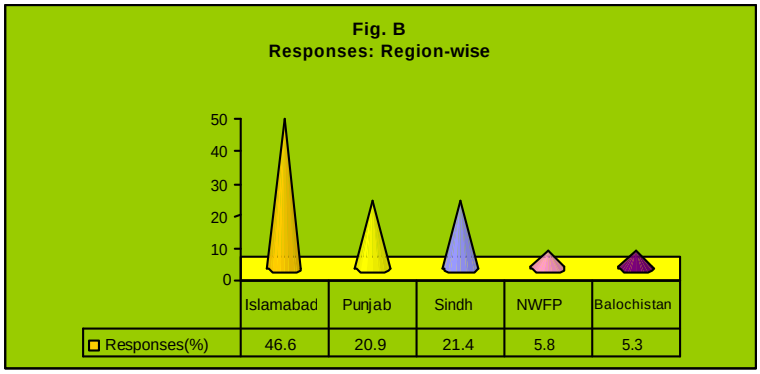
Acknowledgements: The authors are thankful to Dr Musleh-ud Din for the key role played in design of the survey questionnaire and leading the activities of the project team. Efforts of Mr Faheem Jehangir, Mr Waseem Shahid, Ms Saima Bashir and Ms Izzah Waqar in designing the sample, conduct of the survey and data analysis are also gratefully acknowledged. Help extended by internees *viz.* Mr Asim, Ms Fareeha and Mr Abid in conduct of survey is acknowledged as well.

remains similar to that inherited from the colonial past. Worse still, little is known about the perceptions of civil servants on various issues in civil service reforms. Against this backdrop, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) conducted a perception survey (methodology is given in Appendix 1) of civil servants seeking their views on recruitment, training, performance evaluation, job satisfaction, and relationship with the private sector. This report highlights the key findings of the survey.

A total of 206 responses (54 percent of the questionnaire sent) were collected. Grade-wise, Region-wise and Age-wise percentage of respondents are shown in Fig. A, Fig. B and Fig. C respectively.

CSP group wise feedback shows (see Table 1) that maximum response came in from the Secretariat group (21.4 percent), followed by the Audit and Accounts Services (16.5 percent), and the Police Group (14.6 percent). The least response was recorded for the Foreign Services (2.4 percent).





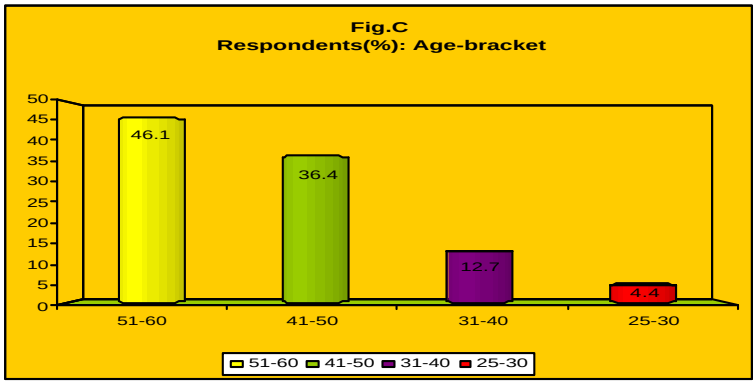


Table 1

Survey Response: Service Group-wise

CSP Group	Response	Percentage Response
Audit and Account Services	34	16.5
Secretariat Group	44	21.4
Police Services of Pakistan	30	14.6
OMG	22	10.7
DMG	23	11.2
Information Group	9	4.4
Commerce and Trade	13	6.3
Customs and Excise	12	5.8
Foreign Services of Pakistan	5	2.4
Other	14	6.8
Total	**206**	**100.0**

RECRUITMENT, POSTINGS AND TRANSFERS

Professional Recruitment Preferred

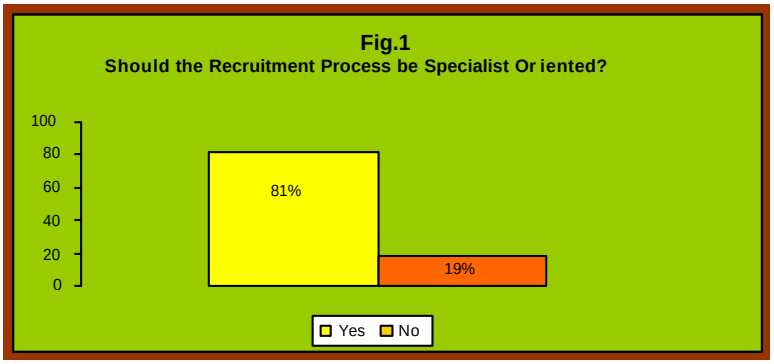
The current system is based on generalists while increasingly globalisation demands specialisation. Interestingly the respondents agree with the global trend for professionalisation by a large margin (Fig. 1)!

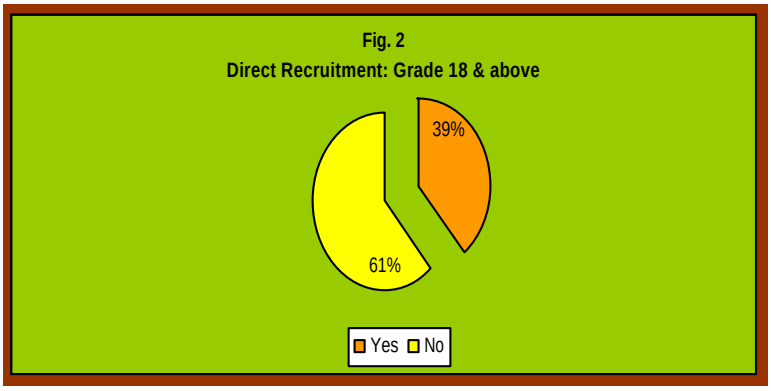
No Direct Recruitment at Senior Levels

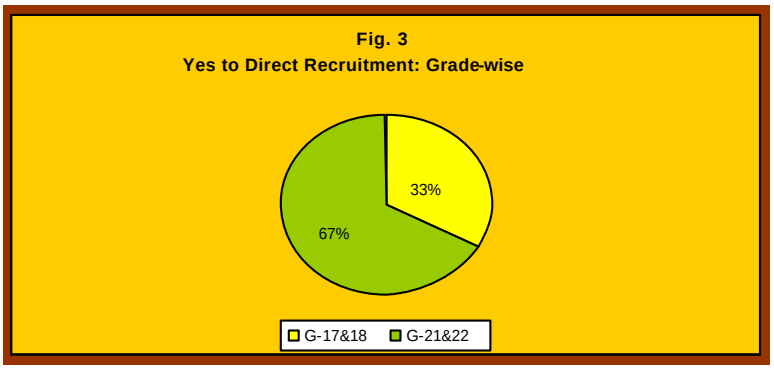
Despite desiring professional recruitment, respondents did not favour positions in civil service above grade 18 to be open to professionals (Fig. 2). These 2 results are seemingly contradictory. It would be almost unthinkable to hire professionals in grade 17 or below as their superior qualifications and experience will create an expectation

of a higher salary or a more responsible position. The response very simply shows a desire to protect a monopoly.

Interestingly, senior grades probably fearing less from open competition favour direct recruitment (Fig. 3).



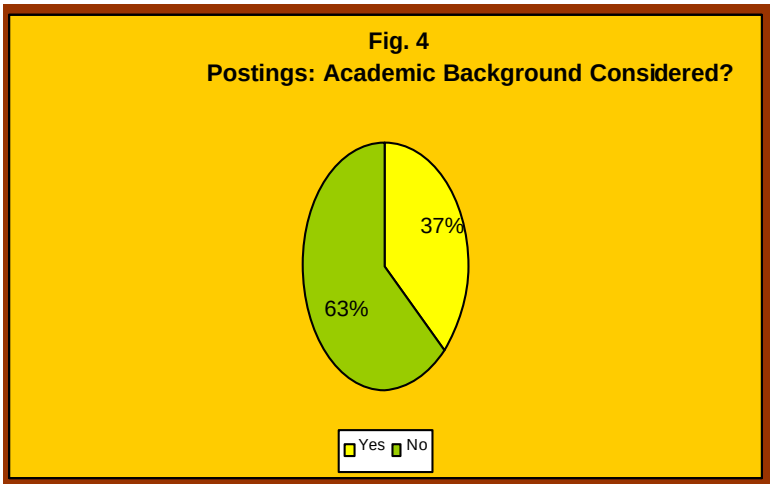




Obviously the junior grades (19-21) have more years and more slots where professionals might threaten them. The senior officials' response also probably indicates that work pressures demand a greater professional involvement. This result matches up more closely with our priors as well as with the result in Fig. 1.

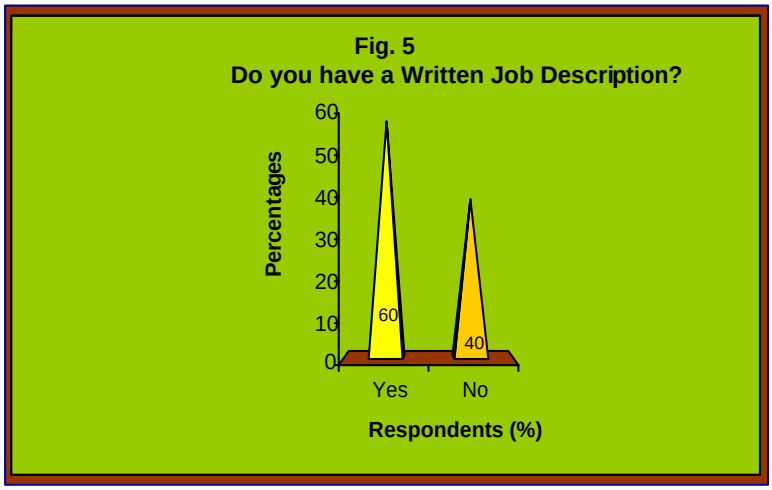
The Strangeness of Postings and Transfers

63 percent of bureaucrats noted that their background and experience did not matter for postings and transfers (Fig. 4). Why then such an emphasis on postings and transfers? It seems that transfers are certainly not being made for efficiency reasons. In keeping with the observations of several authors, it seems that rationale for these decisions is a combination of political pressure and rent sharing.



Do all Civil Servants have a Job Description?

Management gurus emphasise the need for a clear job description for all employees. Without a job description, performance cannot be monitored and hence merit and reward system cannot be established. It is interesting that 60 percent of the civil servants have their job descriptions clearly articulated to them. However, a large percentage of Respondents—as large as 40 percent—said that they do not have a written job description (Fig. 5). We need to go deeper and examine these job descriptions to see how clearly performance is warranted.



TRAINING

Training is a Perk

Training emerges as a major area of concern. We expected 'relevance to assignment' to be a major determinant of training. What emerged from the respondents was 'Seniority' and 'Connections' (Fig. 6). It seems training is being treated as a benefit rather than a necessity for doing a job. In understanding this issue, it must be borne in mind that training is conducted either internationally or in local capitals both of which are preferred destinations. Besides, there is a TA/DA component also that is associated with training.

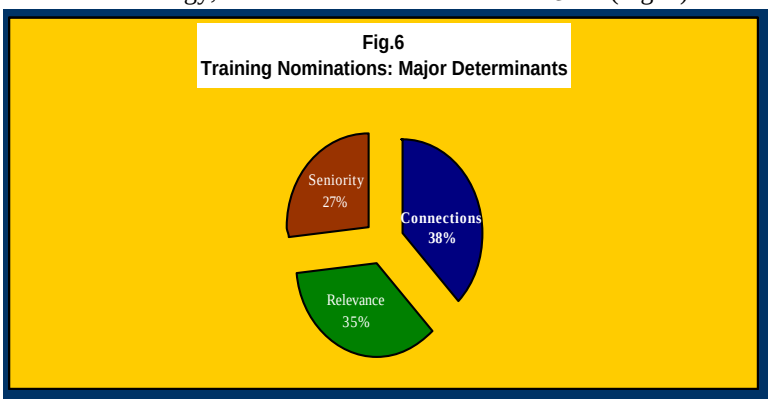
Foreign Training for the Powerful

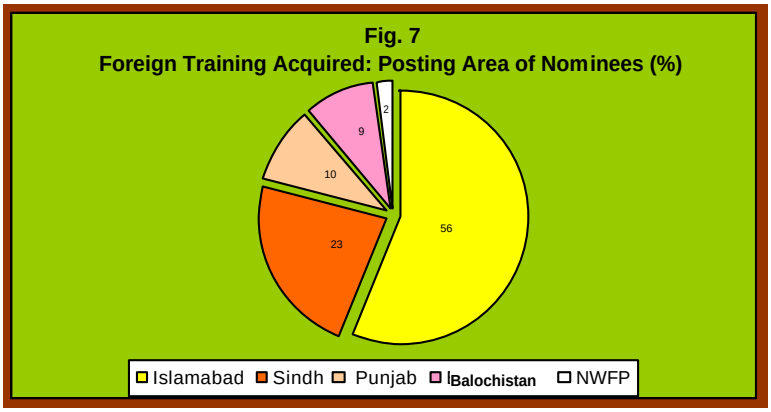
To explore the 'connections' finding further we analysed the training nominations in the context of posting area of the nominees. The survey reveals that those close to the power hub—Islamabad—receive more training than others (Fig. 7). This supports the 'connections' finding referred above.

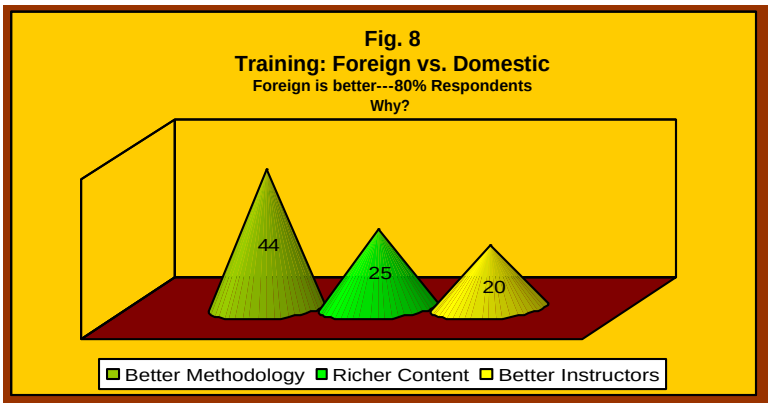
Foreign Training: Considered Better

Majority of the respondents gave the obvious answer that foreign training is superior to domestic training. The three major reasons for

the superiority of foreign training, according to respondents, include better methodology, richer content and better instructors (Fig. 8).







ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Meritocracy?

A large majority—57 percent respondents—said that there are no written criteria of performance evaluation (Fig. 9). The absence of well defined criteria not only creates room for nepotism but also adversely influences employee's efficiency.

Most international evidence points to professional markets which operate like tournaments requiring clear rules for competition with the winner being handsomely rewarded. In the civil service it seems non-market competition has led to the development of a fear of nepotism and other malpractices. We saw this how training is allocated and postings and transfers are done. Now this is further highlighted in that the majority of our respondents prefers a seniority-based system of promotion (Fig. 10). Clearly such a rule is preferable to complete arbitrariness. This result also points to the lack of faith among the respondents in the reward system of the civil service.

Flatter Service

Majority of the civil servants favour a flat organisation that is lesser hierarchy (Fig. 11). Blau (1969) and Lipsky (1980) argue that if an order runs counter to the interest of lower-level bureaucrats, the opposition will rarely be overt rather it will express itself in the form absenteeism, attitude and other subversive tactics. Given the pervasive red-tapism one feels reduced hierarchy will have a positive impact on efficiency.

Fig. 9
Performance Evaluation: Is there a Written Criteria?

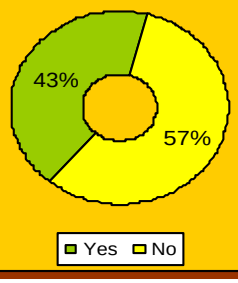


Fig. 10
Is the Seniority-based Promotion System Fair?

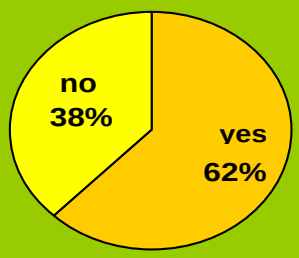
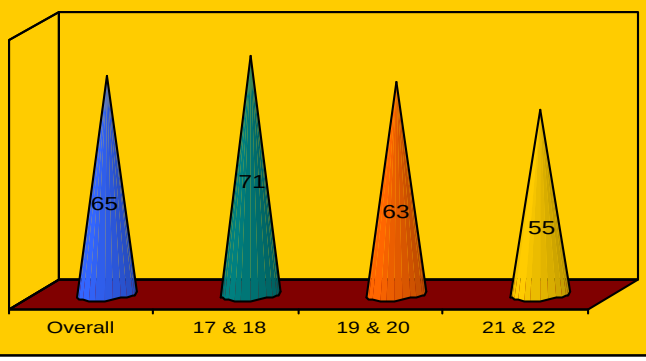


Fig. 11
Yes to Lesser Hierarchy (%)



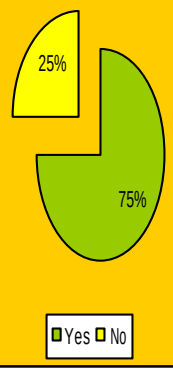
INCENTIVES

Should Perks be Monetised

Majority of the civil servants have favoured monetisation of perks (Fig. 12). Government housing and allotment of land to government officers at subsidised rates constitutes the two most important perks. Government housing is legacy of the colonial past when expatriate were provided housing facility. Employment in civil service promises the best of housing in every city [Haque and Din (2006)], besides this has created an artificial demand for large and spacious houses. Allotment of land to government officers at well below the market price is yet another form of perk and the civil servants continue to devise schemes to avail the benefit. Haque and Din (2006) argues that when perks constitute a major part of the compensation package then the protection of perks/rent-seeking game becomes a priority of the officers.

The monetisation of perks would relieve the officers of the need to indulge in rent-seeking game and thereby release their energies for more productive official work. Besides the compensation package would become transparent and understandable. This would facilitate mobility in and out of civil service that in turn should improve efficiency.

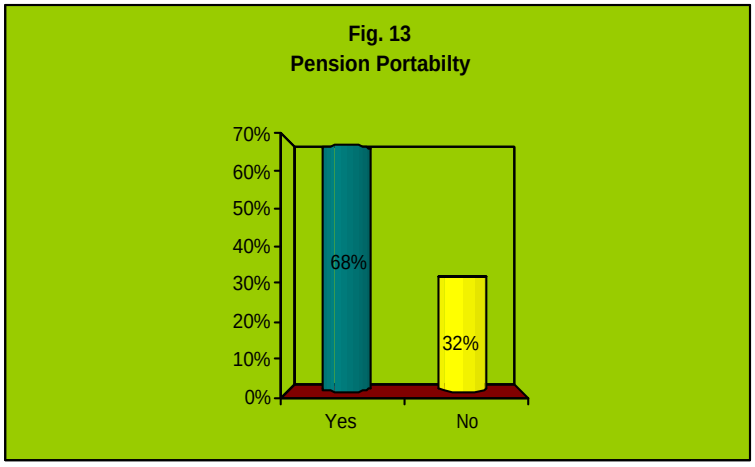
Fig. 12
Should the Perks be Monetised?



Pensions

It is well recognised that job mobility enhances efficiency. Non-portability of pension increases the cost of job-change and therefore constrains job mobility. Majority of the civil servants favour pension portability (Fig. 13).

Non-portability not only hinders the efficient allocation of resources because the private sector fails to get the right person but the government also ends up with retaining a frustrated employee who is busy in count-down to the length of service required for pension-eligibility.



WHAT DO THEY THINK OF THEIR SERVICE?

Public Perceptions have Deteriorated

Ninety-three of the respondents share the perception that performance of the civil service has deteriorated over the years (Fig. 14). To investigate the deterioration issue further, we explored the extent of deterioration, a sizable percentage of respondents, thirty eight—to be exact think that the extent of deterioration is 'extreme' (Fig. 15), while another 39 percent have rated the degree of deterioration to be 'moderate'.

Yet they are Satisfied with their Jobs!

Majority of the civil servants are satisfied with their civil service job (Fig. 16). With salaries that have been declining in real terms, why?

Given the difference in incentive structure of various service groups we investigated the level of satisfaction according to service groups.

Percentage of satisfied workers in police group is much higher than others (Fig. 17). The result is not surprising, given the perks and Authority that the officers from police group enjoy, over and above, what employees from other service groups have access to. This leads us to conclude, that perks and power, rather than salary, determines the level of satisfaction. Could it be that perks and power translate into higher accumulations of wealth over time? Satisfaction is also high among the Foreign Service and Commerce and Trade groups both areas where there is a significant opportunity for an overseas assignment.

Fig. 14
Has the Performance of Civil Service Deteriorated Over the Years?

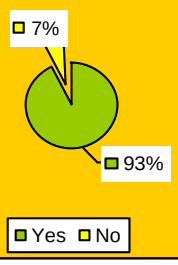
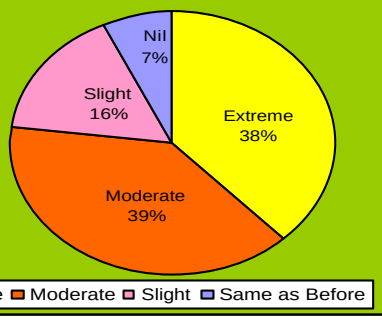
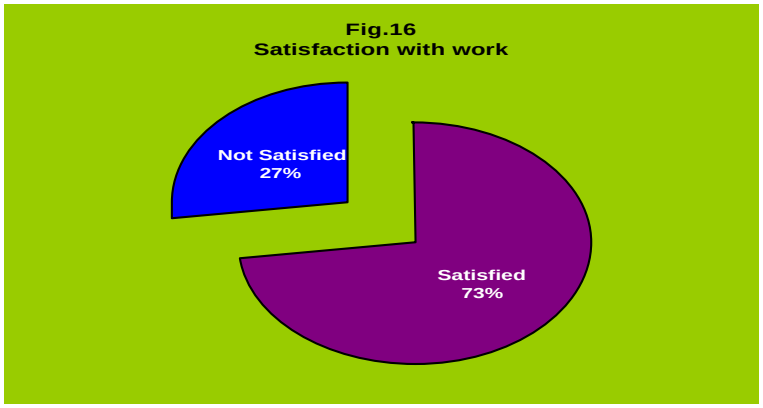


Fig. 15
Civil Servants Performance: Extent of Deterioration





WHY DO THEY STAY IN SERVICE?

Mobility?

Majority of the civil servants have expressed their intention to remain in service, at least for the next two years (Fig.18). This again supports the contention that, by and large, civil servants are satisfied with their job. However besides the satisfaction, other possible reasons for the civil servants preference to continue in their current occupation include, one, civil service experience may not be very valuable in the market. And two, non-portability of pension increase the cost leaving government.

Yet a surprisingly large number of civil servants want to go overseas. They seem to prefer that to either working for the private sector or other public sector organisations. Interestingly enough the demand for private sector jobs is very small. It could be because the private sector in Pakistan has not yet taken the leap from a family firm stage to corporate organisational structure.

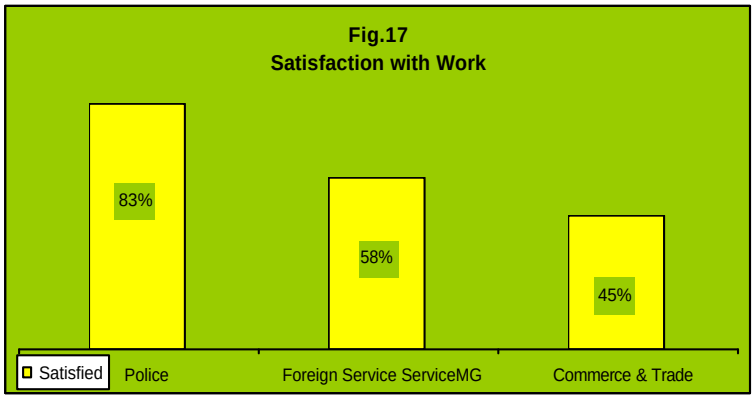
Power and Privilege

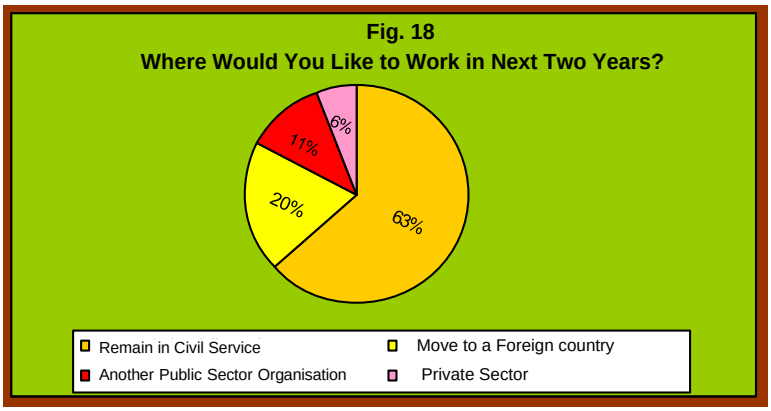
Given the officers clear preference to remain in civil service, it is worthwhile to find out the causes of this preference. In this context we asked them, what influenced your decision to pursue civil service? They were required to rate characteristics like job security, social status and perks etc. *Job security* is the foremost reason indicated by as much as 59 percent of the respondents. *Money* which is considered to be the strongest motivator in Psychological literature

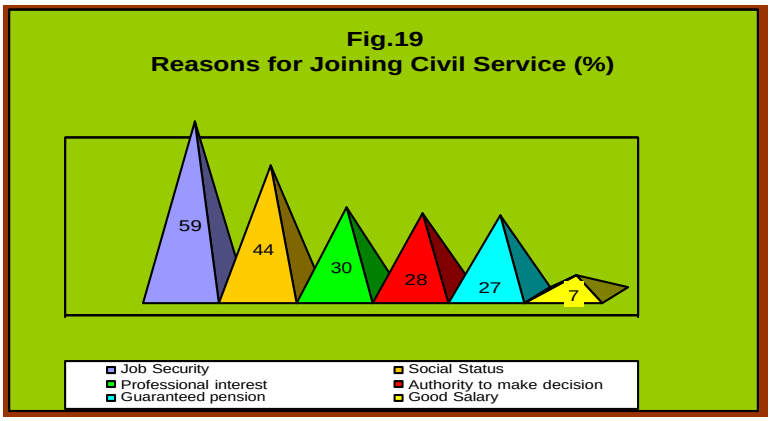
has been indicated by only 7 percent as the main reason for joining the civil service.

Financial reward figures very low in the incentives for joining government. Power and status are at a premium (Fig. 19). When combined with the rating developed by the Transparency International, this finding suggests that the power and status are easy routes to rents. It is not surprising then that they prefer a closed system along with security of tenure. It is then a matter of protecting the rents of the system for the club.

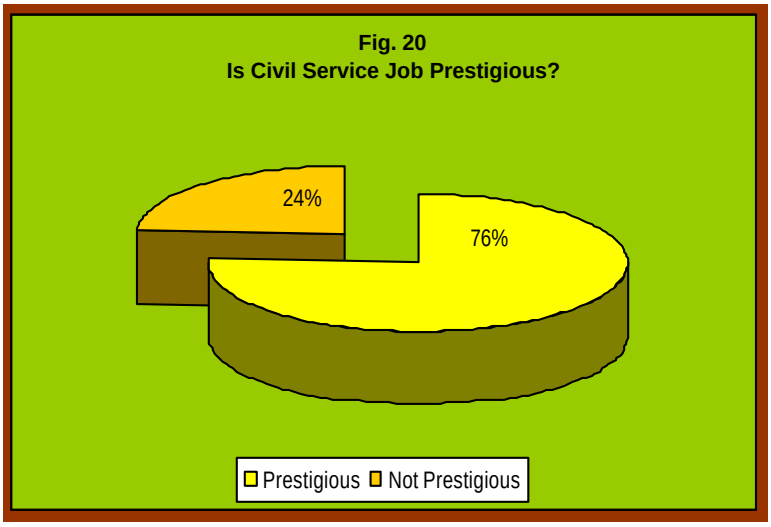
In any case the 'clubby' nature (closed system, tenure, non, merit promotions) of the system seeks to select and maintain those who a have proclivity towards the preservation of rent. The entry of a professional in this system could upset this rent-seeking.







Prestige seems to be also an important consideration for civil servants. It is easy to see how in an elite system like Pakistan prestige, power and social status all go together. And membership to the elite has its advantages in a rent seeking society. Not surprising then that prestige should be desired. (Fig. 20).



CIVIL SERVICE AND SOCIETY

Public Perceptions

Civil servants are almost equally divided over the issue as to how the general public thinks of them (Fig. 21). 51 percent of the civil servants feel that general public carries a disapproving attitude. This is a large number and worth further investigation.

The finding indicated in Fig. 21 is despite the civil servants perception that their authoritative attitude has changed for the better over the years (Fig. 22). Of course this question needs some corroboration from a public survey about civil servants. Otherwise it should be interpreted bearing the self-serving nature of the answer.

Fig. 21
Does the General Public Carry a Good Perception of Civil Service?

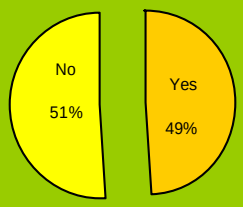
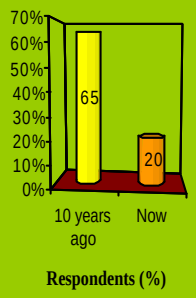


Fig. 21
Attitude of Civil Servants towards General Public is Authoritative



Political Interference in Civil Service

Majority of the respondents have confirmed the general perception that political interference in the affairs is common (Fig. 23).

Policy Formulation: Consultation with Stakeholders

Majority of the civil servants responded that the private sector is consulted while framing policies that affect the sector (Fig. 24). However the fact that a sizable percentage of civil servants think otherwise perhaps implies that consultation rather being a principle is left to the discretion of the civil servant.

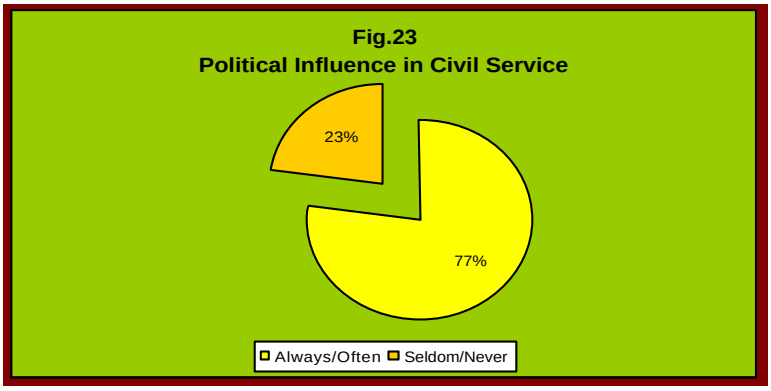
CORRUPTION

Are they Corrupt?

Majority of the civil servants hold the opinion that bribes have to be offered to get things in civil service (Fig. 25). This being the general perception as well, the finding would not surprise anyone however the fact that this comes from the beneficiaries of corruption reinforces popular perception.

What about Accountability?

Majority of the respondents servants share the perception that civil servants are not held accountable in cases of corruption reported against them (Fig. 26).



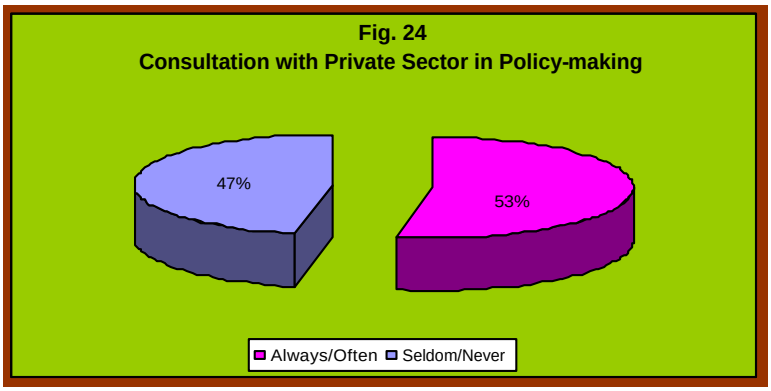


Fig. 24
Consultation with Private Sector in Policy-making
47%
53%
Always/Often
Seldom/Never

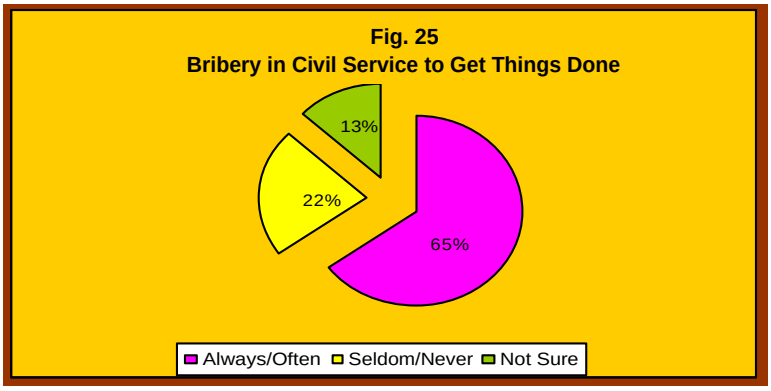


Fig. 25
Bribery in Civil Service to Get Things Done
13%
22%
65%
Always/Often
Seldom/Never
Not Sure

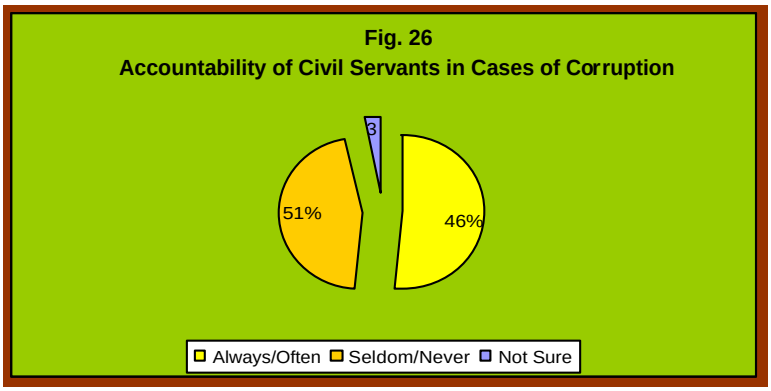


Fig. 26
Accountability of Civil Servants in Cases of Corruption
3
51%
46%
Always/Often
Seldom/Never
Not Sure

CONCLUSION

What have we learnt from the survey?

Civil servants are demoralised; they acknowledge that the service is corrupt and that their public approval rating is low. There is also awareness among the civil servants that corruption may be a serious problem. In addition there seems to be no trust in the accountability process, i.e., corruption is not penalised.

Interestingly the civil service appears to have little faith in their human resource management! While acknowledging the benefits of meritocracy, they continue to prefer seniority-based promotion and reward system. Written job descriptions as well as criteria for performance evaluation are generally not used. Similarly 'connections' are perceived to be the major determinant of nominations for training especially foreign training. Background and abilities are not regarded as important for assignments and training.

The survey also confirms that the civil service fears that their independence has been curbed through repeated political interference.

Fear of competition is clearly evident even when they recognise that merit and professional competence are important. While the grade 22 respondents with no more promotions to look forward want to open out recruitment, the junior grades wish to restrict the entry of professionals to the grade 17—a clearly incredible proposal.

The motivation for joining the civil service is clearly not money. Power prestige and status are cited as the main reasons for joining the service. This does not quite gel with what we learnt earlier that the service is held in low esteem by the public and it is perceived to be corrupt. Moreover, the low ranking of money for joining the service appears to be quite incredulous given the low real monetary salaries. The only interpretation that lends it self to explaining these responses is that power and money may be highly correlated and the main motivation for joining the service. This would also explain why they value job security and a closed civil service system.

Despite low salaries, the majority is satisfied with their civil service job. Police-probably because of the power—Foreign Service and Commerce and Trade—probably because of choice foreign postings—record relatively higher level of satisfaction. Majority of the officers would like to stay in civil service.

On their benefits, a majority favours portability of pensions and monetisation of perks. Portable pensions cut down the cost of switching jobs and hence encourage mobility. However, we also see that be-

cause of job security and power, civil servants do not show a preference for mobility.

The preference for monetisation is interesting in that while the survey shows a preference for it, when it is proposed it is always rejected as it was recently by provincial administrations. Perhaps this is because perks are mostly a non-transparent method of payment; entrepreneurial and well-networked individuals seek to maximise them. If this is true perks will be quite unequally distributed among the public servants with the more well-connected and aggressive individuals being able to collect more perks. Given this it would be hard to find a value at which monetisation would be acceptable to all in place of perks. This may explain why a majority prefer monetisation but yet in reality it may not happen!

Appendix

METHODOLOGY

The survey focuses on nine 'Civil Services of Pakistan (CSP)' groups, viz. Audit and Accounts Services; Secretariat; Police Services of Pakistan; Office Management (OMG); District Management (DMG); Information; Commerce and Trade; Customs and Excise; and Foreign Services.

As a first step, lists of all the CSP officers were collected from the relevant departments/organisations and compiled. Before initiating the sampling procedure, all the lists were thoroughly examined and updated. It was a challenging task for the team to update the list and to trace all the civil servants through telephone calls and fax, however, it was done in quite a professional and organised manner.

Questionnaire Design and Pre-testing

The questionnaire was designed, at the *Development Strategies and Governance* section of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad. To formulate the questionnaire, the survey team met numerous times to identify the issues related to civil services of Pakistan. At the final draft stage, a panel of distinguished civil servants and researchers was called to offer their comments regarding the survey questionnaire and the research methodology. The participants at the panel meeting offered several suggestions and comments on the questionnaire and the proposed research methodology which were duly incorporated. Thus, the questionnaire was refined and finalised through a consultative process. Before initiating the survey, pre-testing of the

questionnaire was carried out for healthier feedback. Three teams, of two members each, were formulated and trained for the pre-testing task. Each team interviewed civil servants to fill-in the questionnaire.

Sample Design

When sub-populations (Stratum) vary considerably, it is advantageous to sample each subpopulation independently. Stratification is the process of grouping members of the population into relatively homogeneous subgroups before sampling. In general the sample-size in each stratum is taken in proportion to the size of the stratum (i.e. proportional allocation). The stratified random sampling technique has been adopted in the study.

A sample of 382 civil servants—ten percent of the universe, from the above mentioned civil services groups were proportionally allocated, amongst the three strata viz. straum 1 (i.e. grade 17-18), stratum 2 (i.e. grade 19-20), and stratum 3 (i.e. grade 21-22). Each of these groups constituted a separate stratum. After determining the size of the sample for each service group, at second stage, each stratum was divided into sub-strata according to grades[1] and estimated sample was proportionally allocated to these sub strata. Finally, random sampling technique was applied within each sub-stratum. Sample selected as per foregoing methodology includes 156 civil servants in sub-stratum 1, 193 in sub-stratum 2, and 33 in sub-stratum 3; to form a total sample size of 382 civil servants.

Data Collection

For the collection of primary data from civil servants all over Pakistan, as a first round, the survey questionnaires were sent to all the civil servants through courier service. This was followed up by phone calls and faxes to get an early response. The survey team tried its level best to ensure maximum response.

It was the outcome of these efforts that the responses were mainly received through postal service, however, visits were also arranged to capture realistic reflection from the civil servants in one-to-

[1] 'grades' refers to the government/public sector 'Basic Pay Scale (BPS)'. Three divisions (stratum) on the basis of grades, i.e. (1) BPS 17-18; (2) BPS 19-20; and (3) BPS 21-22, were identified to evaluate diversified results the perception survey.

one (personal) interviews.[2] Postal responses constitute around 70 percent of the total responses.

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[2]Visits to NIPA Karachi, NIPA Lahore, NIPA Peshawar, and NIPA Quetta were also arranged to have focus group discussions.