

Dynamics of Patronage Politics and the Tendering Process at Zimbabwe's State Procurement Board

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Abstract

The significance of public procurement and its enormous contribution to high-quality service delivery in every country cannot be overstated. In terms of developing countries, genuine economic progress can be attained if public procurements are conducted without corruptive intent. The study investigates the impact of patronage politics on the tendering process at Zimbabwe's State Procurement Board. The magnitude of the impact was determined based on the administration of tender procedures, the permeability of governing frameworks, and the extent to which discriminatory politics obstructed tender awarding. Data was gathered through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. In that regard, the survey was able to distribute 25 questionnaires as well as conduct 15 interviews. According to the findings, transparency deficiencies in tendering processes have become widespread, shielding and snowballing tender corruption. The study makes several recommendations to alleviate the perpetuation of patronage politics, including effective and rapid ICT adoption to reduce human interface and its associated vices in tendering, detachment of political meddling as well as the implementation of punitive measures, and instilling integrity in the culture of tender processes to promote



ethical and professional behaviours among bureaucrats involved in the tendering process, among others.

Key Words: Patronage politics, tender process, public procurement, State Procurement Board, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

According to Hui, Othman, Omar, Rahman, and Haron (2011), political meddling by local politicians, other powerful stakeholders, and senior management has discouraged transparency, resulting in non-compliance in the area of public procurement. Odhiambo and Kamau (2003) suggested that the most corrupt practices in the public sector procurement embroil an interplay between public officers, usually subjected to the influence of powerful politicians and capitalists, solely inviting favoured firms, supporting certain organisations at the shortlisting stage, planning tender reports to support specific firms and discharging private data. Moreover, Chigudu (2014) contends that procurement in the public sector institutes the foremost tool for perpetuating patronage politics. Patronage politics also operate in regimes that incline one to be out of favour with the populace to make sure that only their narrowly-pinched and repeatedly ethnic communities have access to public funds through profitable public procurement contracts (Migai-Akech, 2005). In support of this view, Kimani (2012) argues that there exists a drift that associates the leadership of the country with legislative frameworks which govern procurement in the public sector that needs to be unknotted to obscure challenges encountered in procurement, whose roots can be sketched back to the political arrangement of power in the country.

Since the enactment of the Procurement Act in 1999 and the subsequent establishment of the State Procurement Board (SPB), the latter has faced a number of challenges. Among them is the infiltration of patronage politics during the tendering process, which results in the late completion of government projects and, as a result, poor service delivery and abuse of national resources in the country (Musanzikwa, 2013; Chimberengwa, Masuka, Gombe & Tshimanga, 2015). In contrast, despite some newspaper articles, raising the question of the effects of partisan politics on tendering procedures in Zimbabwe there is a conspicuous lack of proper and formal investigation of the subject. In other words, there are numerous research and literature gaps in Zimbabwe involving the awarding of



government tenders to politically connected individuals and companies who do not follow stipulated tender procedures.

This study reveals the extent of patronage politics in Zimbabwe's tendering process at the State Procurement Board. According to GAN Integrity (2022), patronage politics is the practice of distributing state resources as compensation for political and electoral support. State resources can include hugely profitable public sector contracts or a high-ranking position in the civil service. This study investigates the operationalisation, the efficacy of the guiding legislative frameworks, and the impact of partisan politics on the tendering processes at the SPB in Zimbabwe. As a result, it fundamentally raises the following questions: How is the tendering process managed? What are the legal frameworks that govern it? How much influence does partisan politics have on the tendering process? What are the difficulties encountered? What steps should be taken to strengthen the State Procurement Board's operations in Zimbabwe? The study therefore sought to answer these questions.

Conceptual Framework

Partisanship is defined as favouritism shown to members of one's own party, faction, sect, or cause (Free Dictionary). David-Barret and Fazekas (2016) note that partisan favouritism in public procurements represents a particular form of clientelism in which government contracts are traded for financial gain (kick-backs), either supporting political parties and their campaigns or serving as a private income for politicians. In light of this, Hicken (2011) defined clientelism as the particularistic allocation of state resources by political elites, in exchange for political support. In this regard, the tendering process in developing countries is, habitually, wedged by the proliferation of patronage politics within the government sector. Magaya and Chidhawu (2016) noted that unethical practices by procurement staff in discharging their duties result in tenders seeming to swing towards political elites.

A patron-driven political system favours the top leadership, resulting in the selective allocation of tenders, jeopardizing meritocracy and competence. In support of this, the World Bank (2015) believes that systematic favouritism in contracting is likely to discourage companies with weak political ties from entering markets, thus creating long-term consequences for economic development. Consequently, partisan politics intrudes on the expert management of the procurement process in general and the tendering process in particular. According to Ennsner-Jedenastik (2013), patronage is synonymous



with the patron-client relationship, which is defined as a mutually obligatory arrangement between an individual who has authority, social status, wealth, or some other personal resource (the patron) and another person who benefits from his or her support or influence (the client). In a more comprehensive definition, Ennser-Jedenastik (2013) defined the patron-client relationship as a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which a person of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client), who, in turn, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal service. In this regard, patron-client politics, creates a scenario in which the upper crust uses political clout to influence administrative decisions through the use of favoritism outside the bounds of the law.

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2009), a tender is a written offer to contract goods or services at a specified cost. Similarly, tendering is a process whereby an organisation requests the supply of goods and services and awards the contract to the best offer according to predetermined criteria without negotiation (BPRA, 2010; Matto, Ame & Nsimbila, 2021). Moving on, Johnson and Flynn (2015) expound on tendering as basically a method of procurement usually done where goods or services involved are of high value. In this scenario, Weisher (2013) discusses tendering as purchasing whereby potential suppliers are invited to make offers of the price and terms which all acceptances shall be the basis of subsequent contracts. In light of this, Matto *et al.*, (2021) identified and dichotomized tendering into open and restricted tendering among the most common and widely used tendering methods. According to Matto *et al.*, (2021), open tendering procedures occur when all potential bidders from all corners of the globe are theoretically allowed to submit a bid. Participation is open to all, with no limitations or restrictions, and the procurement is advertised across the country. Where restricted tendering do pose some limitations and barriers to entry in the tendering race.

Zimbabwe's Legislative Structures that Control the Tendering Process

The constitution, as the supreme law of the land, establishes some guidelines for determining public procurement objectives that the public procurement system should strive to achieve. According to Tsabora (2014), Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution establishes the foundation for transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination in all government procurement processes. Section 315 of the Zimbabwean Constitution (Amendment No. 20



of 2013) and Chigudu, (2014) state that an Act of Parliament must prescribe procedures for the procurement of goods and services by the State and all institutions and agencies of government at all levels. This will enable public procurement to be done in a transparent, fair, honest, cost-effective, and competitive manner. It is clear that the constitution provides the fundamentals of public procurement, and thus serves as the guiding law for all procurements in the country.

According to Chigudu (2014), there are two key pieces of legislation that guide the procurement management of public institutions and these are the Administrative Justice Act (Chapter 10:28) of 2004 and the Competition Act (Chapter 14:28) of 1996. The Administrative Justice Act is primarily concerned with procurement procedural issues, whereas the Competition Act is more concerned with promoting competitive procurement. According to Chikomwe (2012), administrative authorities should provide written reasons for awarding a tender, as defined by the AJA. To be more specific, the Act should promote a fair and transparent tendering process. According to Chigudu (2014), all suppliers who submitted tenders should be allowed to witness the opening of the tenders and have the right to be informed of the price and other important terms of each tender that is opened. It is also worth noting that the Competition Act of 1996 is consistent with the general guiding principles of competitive bidding, which require suppliers to compete for a specific government contract. Procurement methods will now introduce procedural and basic requirements in order to maintain competition and reduce the possibility of procurement coordination abuse through bribery and favouritism (Chikomwe, 2012).

The tendering process is governed by Section 31 of the Procurement Act (Chapter 22:14) of 1999. According to section 31 (1) (a) of the Procurement Act, the invitation to suppliers to tender shall be published in the Government Gazette, where the procuring entity is the State; (ii) in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the procuring entity has jurisdiction or carries on business, where the procuring entity is not the State; and (iii) in a newspaper of wide international circulation or a relevant trade, technical, or professional journal of wide international circulation, where the procuring entity is not the State (Procurement Act, Chapter 22:14).



Comparative Literature and Experiences in South Africa

The influence of patronage politics on tendering processes is not a unique occurrence in Zimbabwe as many Third World countries, are or had similar experiences of political incitement in the awarding of public tenders. This section proffers a comparative analysis of Zimbabwe's position on public tendering with the experiences of South Africa so as to bring about appreciated feedback regarding tendering process studies.

South Africa

The conduct of tendering processes in South Africa is almost comparable but not undistinguishable *per se* from the Zimbabwean experience. Tendering process as argued by Ngobeni (2011) is central to the national government in South Africa, yet the country is one of the countries with the highest level of corruption rate in the world, of which tender fraud and corruption play a major part. The tendering procedure in South Africa is preeminently elucidated in stages just similar to the mode it is undertaken in Zimbabwe. Ngobeni (2011) explores the six stages that explain the tendering process in South Africa, which are: request for the invitation of tenders, calling for tenders, submission and receiving of tenders, and the opening of tenders, assessing of tenders and finally the awarding of tenders. For instance, in the phase of the request for the invitation of tenders, there is the preparation of bid specifications and the collation of bid documents. The Department in control of procurement assembles and provides bid provisions in a way that will allow fair and equitable deliberations from eligible vendors. It can thus be noted that the piling up of bid documents should conform to the appropriate Standard Bidding Documents (SDBs) and the General Conditions of Contract (GCC), issued by the National Treasury (Ngobeni, 2011). According to Fourie (2015), the documents must indicate accurate quantities, the requirements for certificate samples, or compulsory attendance at site inspections and explanatory meetings and must form part of the tender conditions. Furthermore, the second stage of the tendering process in South Africa, is where a call for tenders is done. Essentially at this phase procedures are taken in lighting the available tenders in the media. As opined by Fourie (2007) tenders are usually invited within the borders of the Republic of South Africa, and advertised in the Government Tender Bulletin (GTB), unless the Board decides otherwise. On the same note, the notice for calling for tenders usually mentions the closing dates as well as a closing hour for presenting tenders, meaning only tenders received on or before the closing date and hour are considered to



avoid irregularities and corruption (Gildenhuys, 2002). However, Ambe and Badenhorst-Weiss (2012) contend that in South Africa, regardless of the reform processes in the public acquisition and the employment of supply chain management in public procurement processes, teething problems in the form of non-compliance with legislation and policies related to procurement and supply chain management, as well as tender indiscretions are still conspicuous. According to Livhuwani (2012), procurement personnel in South Africa tended to award contracts to unqualified service providers who bribed the public officials through monetary rewards. Furthermore, 'tenderpreneurship,' defined by Piper and Charman (2018) as the use of political contacts by business people to secure government procurement contracts (called tenders) often in exchange for reciprocal favours or benefits, is pervasive in South Africa, and the tendering process is dogged by private patron-client complexes hinged on networks involving capitalists and local-level gatekeepers in the party, rather than being an interdisciplinary process (Republic of South Africa, 2004).

Methodology

The study employed the mixed methods research approach since which combined both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. In light of this, the triangulation of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches produces a research outcome that is stronger than either method alone (Chilunjika 2018; Zimano & Chilunjika, 2019). This study's target population included employees at the Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (PRAZ) (which houses the State Procurement Board), including top management and general workers, as well as some selected individuals from the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), the Ministry of Energy and Power Development (MoEPD), and selected political affiliates from ZANU PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The study used document analysis, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires in collecting data. In this regard, 25 questionnaires were distributed, along with 15 interviews. Furthermore, the researchers conducted indirect or non-participant observations by observing tender proceedings that were broadcast on various broadcast platforms throughout the country. The news sites were engulfed with procurement scandals, making it easier for researchers to infer public tenders that were won on partisan lines rather than the actual competitive and transparent processes. Data were analysed using thematic, content, and Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20.

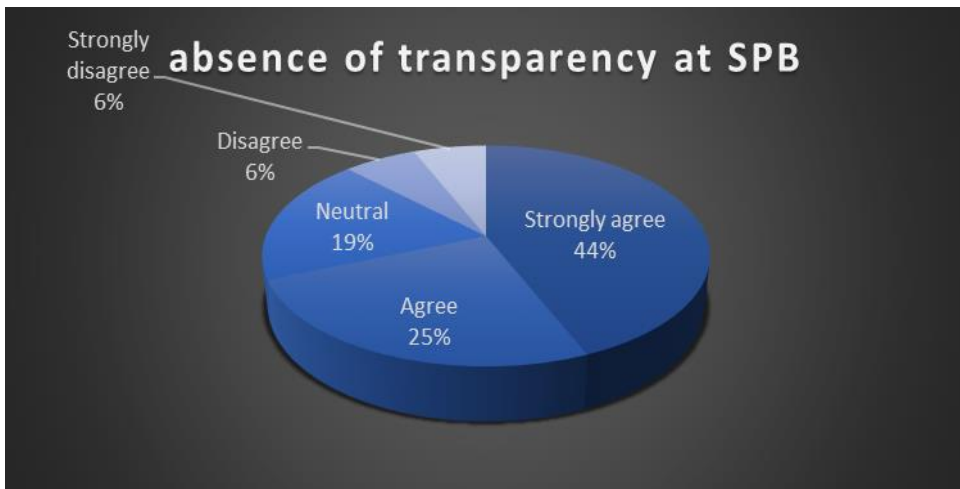


Discussion of Key Findings

Exploring the tendering process by the Zimbabwean SPB

This section explores the tendering process at the SPB with emphasis being placed on issues relating to transparency of the processes and systems. Transparency as indicated by Osei-Afoakwa (2014) enhances efficiency in the procurement system which eventually results in higher quality procurement. An ingredient that is deficient at SPB.

Figure 1: Absence of Transparency at SPB



As shown in Figure 1 above, 44% of the respondents strongly agree with the notion that tendering processes at the SPB were not conducted in a transparent manner, while 25% agree that tendering processes were not done transparently at SPB. In this vein, 19% of the respondents were neutral and six percent of the respondents disagreed with the notion that there is an absence of transparency at the SPB. Additionally, 6% of the respondents strongly disagree that there was no transparency at SPB. In aggregate terms, 69% of the respondents (44% strongly agree plus 25% agree) indicated that there was the absence of transparency at the SPB. 19% of the respondents were neutral therefore leaving the remaining 12% of the aggregate responses (6% strongly disagree plus 6% disagree) disagreeing with the notion that there is no transparency at the SPB. To this

effect, the findings indicate that the tendering processes at the SPB are not conducted in a transparent way depicting the nonexistence of transparency values in the conferring of public contracts in Zimbabwe.

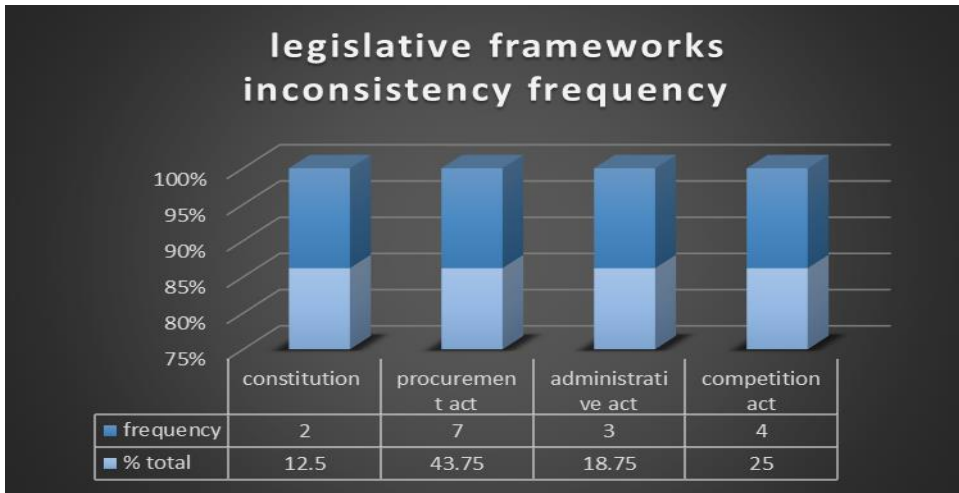
Similarly, the aforementioned findings resonate well with research findings gleaned from in-depth interviews, in which respondents argued about the lack of transparency in the conduct of the tendering process at SPB. Respondent A noted that: *“Transparency is so foreign in the conduct of tendering processes at the SPB. Sometimes we are just informed about the winner without really understanding how the actual tendering was conducted.”* In underscoring the significance of transparency, Caldwell, Roehrich, and Davies (2009) noted that transparency provides that all phases in the procurement process are fair and accurately documented. Similarly, Weishaar (2013:243) is of the view that “the concept of creating value in public procurement relates to government policy and returns against the tax paid by the taxpayer”. This infers that the public tendering process ought to be within the public sight and tendering proceedings should not be a preserve of the aristocrats, because the citizens (taxpayers) are equally entitled to see how their taxes are being disbursed and used by public entities. Hui *et al.*, (2011) argue that political meddling from the local politicians, other powerful stakeholders, and senior management has deterred transparency resulting in non-compliance. This is consistent with the researchers’ observation that the lack of transparency at SPB is typically propagated by politicians and procurement officials whose goal is to award public contracts without public scrutiny, thus ignoring the suggestion of transparency that all of an organization’s actions should be scrupulous enough to satisfy public scrutiny. As a result, this encapsulates the reality of a lack of transparency in the tendering process in Zimbabwe- a state of affairs that must be addressed with gravity. Furthermore, the research has discovered invaluable aspects associated with the tendering process at the SPB in Zimbabwe. Chikomwe (2012) measured tendering as an effective contracting method to achieve favourable outcomes for both public and private entities in determining the importance of tendering. Accordingly, the tender process, on the other hand, is an extremely politically delicate zone that necessitates high levels of ethical and professional conduct (Magaya & Chidhawu, 2016).



Examining Legislative frameworks governing the tendering process in Zimbabwe.

This section examines the legislative frameworks governing the tendering process in Zimbabwe.

Figure 2: Legislative frameworks governing state procurement



From the diagram above, the study identified the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Procurement Act, the Administrative Act, and the Competition Act as the legislative pieces that have a direct and indirect bearing on state procurement. From the questionnaire responses, 12.5% of the respondents were of the view that the Constitution is a legislative framework governing public procurement, with 43.75% of the respondents pointing to the Procurement Act [Chapter 22:14] of 1999, while 18.75% of the respondents were for the Administrative Act [Chapter 10:28] of 2004 and 25% for the Competition Act [Chapter 14:28] of 1996. These legislative documents are expected to provide a robust framework for tendering processes and procedures as they guide the transparent and efficient conduct of public procurement at the State Procurement Board. Nonetheless, despite the Zimbabwean government enacting a number of laws that govern the tendering process these laws suffer from comprehensiveness paucities as a result of their discordant state, making them spongy and susceptible to abuse. Conversely, the recently enacted

procurement laws may result in a value-added legislative framework that governs the tendering process in Zimbabwe.

The impact of partisan politics on tendering processes at SPB in Zimbabwe

This section explores how partisan politics has affected the tendering processes at the SPB in Zimbabwe.

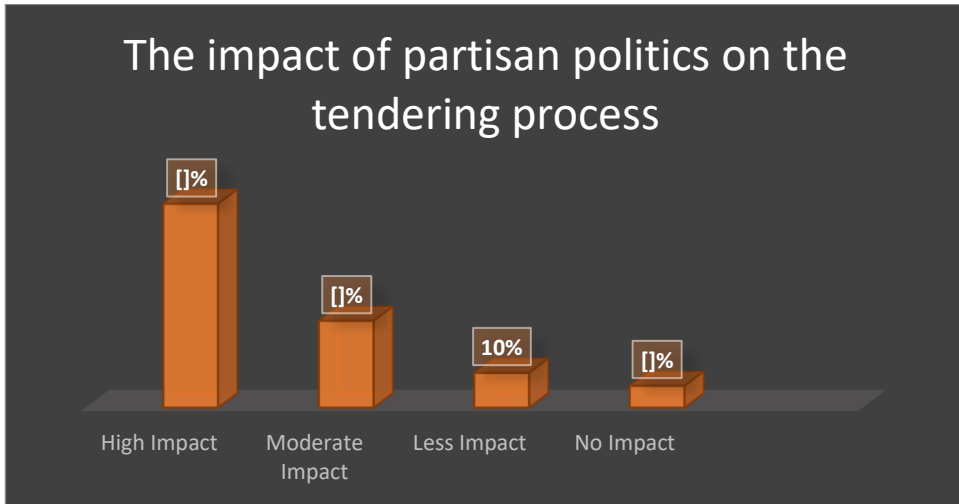


Figure 3: The impact of partisan politics on tendering process

The diagram above shows the impact of partisan politics on public procurement at Zimbabwe’s SPB. To this effect, 58.75% of the respondents were of the view that partisan politics has got a very high impact on the tendering processes at the SPB. To support this, Respondent X argued that: *If the government of Zimbabwe is to realize genuine economic gains from public procurement, the culture of awarding government contracts to individuals and companies whose backgrounds only benefit the incumbent government clientele needs to be changed.* This notion is further buttressed by Tinarwo, Mzizi, Uwizeyimana and Zimano (2019) who argued that, in most cases, access to public contracts in developing countries serves as a means of financing political parties and rewarding political party supporters. Similarly, BPRA (2010) confirms this by noting that, the current dubious empowerment wave has meant that very few Zimbabweans from one political party have benefitted from government programmes and tender processes on behalf of



all Zimbabweans. Glasberg and Shannon (2007) note that “the relationship between the government and the political party in the African context is so blurred that the ruling party tends to rely on the state resources to exert patronage as a way of maintaining party organisation and management.” In the elaboration of the above, partisan politics has inculcated a culture of non-compliance with the procurement laws. A system that is riddled with a weak compliance culture has more chances of having unethical conduct and one such is corruption (Masiyakurima, Chilunjika & Muzvidziwa-Chilunjika 2020; Muswaka-Zinatsa & Chilunjika 2020; Chilunjika, 2021). Through document analysis, the researcher discovered a myriad of instances where contracts were awarded to certain individuals and companies without going to tender because of their association with the governing party. For instance, the Dema Diesel Power Project confirms this, the study established that the contract was awarded to Mugabe’s son-in-law without going to tender, thereby discounting the country’s laws (Chilunjika, 2021).

Moving on, 25% of the respondents were of the view that there is a moderate impact of partisan politics on the tendering processes at the SPB. In this vein, Respondent G asserts that: *the SPB is doing its best to operate efficiently and not be affected by the politics of the day*. In light of this, the respondent feels that the tendering processes despite being exposed to partisan politics have not been affected that much. Ten percent of the respondents were of the view that partisan politics has less impact on the tendering process with 6.25% of the respondents noting that there is no impact of partisan politics on the tendering processes. Cumulatively 16.25% of the respondents underscored the notion that the SPB is insulated from partisan politics. To support this, Respondent H noted that: *since the SPB is operating within a robust framework of legislation, then it is expected to work professionally and it has successfully done so. So, to say that partisan politics is at the centre of the tendering processes at the SPB is maliciously false and frivolously far-fetched*. Such a position dispels claims about the irregularities and the operational inertia affecting the tendering processes at the SPB.

In highlighting the undesirability of partisan practices in public procurement, Ameyaw *et al.*, (2013) postulate that, the evaluation panels are sometimes pressured to disqualify the most competitive tenders and rather recommend favourites of politicians or those in authority. In this scenario, the whole process from the advertisements to the screening and awarding of tenders is superficially dogged by corruption and favouritism. To support this, there is a tendency by the SPB to allegedly place some cosmetic tender



advertisements in local newspapers informing potential suppliers of available government contracts. Such advertisements are tantamount to mere posturing. To this effect, Respondent C contended that: *What is the essence of placing tender adverts when they know very well that it is just, but a superficial posturing performance? Most of the time, advertising is done when the actual tender has been won afore the completion of the actual process.*" This is supported by Chiwanza (2013) who averred that all these adverts that we see being flighted in the press, it is all cosmetic. We know they would have already done the logistics to give the tenders to their people and they would have received their kickbacks. In agreement Magaya and Chidhawu (2016) admitted to the actuality of ornamental adverts at SPB, pointing out that mere formalisation of advertising compromise the processes for tender application. Likewise, Chigudu (2014) noted that advertising bids for a very short time so that just a few potential bidders get the opportunity reduces competition against their favourites who might have known about the coming advert well in advance is so prevalent. To further buttress this notion, Hyden and Venter (2001), argue that the publication of invitations to tender (particularly in the African context) in an attempt to broaden the horizons of circulation is merely a formalisation of the tender procedure. This demonstrates that tender advertisements in Zimbabwe are merely fictitious. Furthermore, it can thus be argued that winning a tender at SPB is based on the inclination of "who do you know." In order to increase one's chances of winning a government tender, one should be politically connected with the ruling party.

Additionally, the application procedures tend to be susceptible to political or administrative incitement and influence. For example, the former Zimbabwe National Roads Administration (ZINARA) Chief Executive Officer (Frank Chitukutu) was sucked into a US\$2 million scam involving the awarding of a road rehabilitation tender in Umguza, Matabeleland North Province (Chilunjika 2021). Tenders were advertised as a cover-up after the contract had already been corruptly awarded to Sibanda without going to tender (ZACC). As a result, it was observed that the legal framework governing the tendering process in Zimbabwe is purposefully left porous and permeable by legislators who wish to profit from rent-seeking behaviours. Takawira (2017) classified such behaviour as legislative corruption, which seeks to weaken procurement laws in order to benefit government contracts. In support of this, Jain (2001), as cited in Takawira (2017), observes that legislators can be bribed by interest groups to enact legislation that alters the economic rents and/or value of specific assets. This legislative corruption weakens



accountability and transparency systems, mechanisms and processes of public procurement.

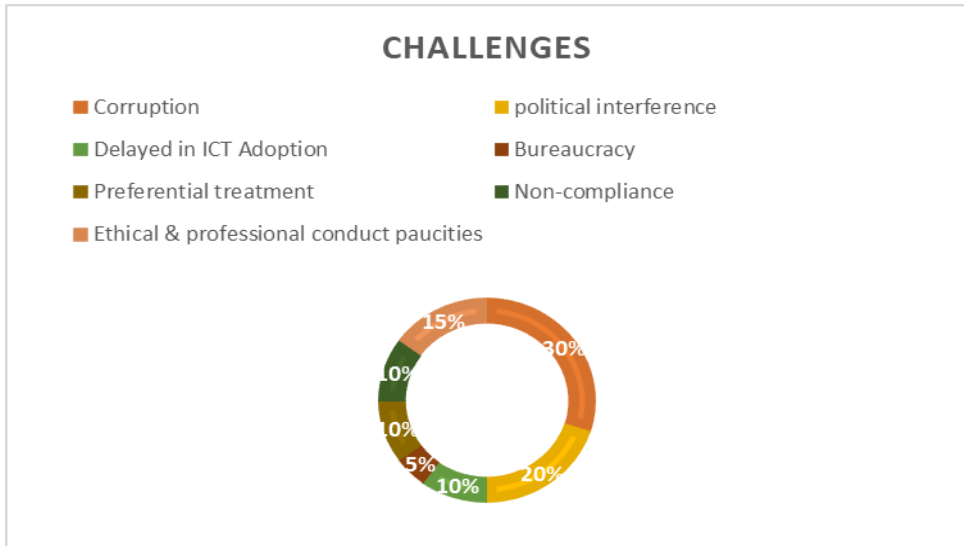
According to Magaya and Chidhawu (2016), the main reasons for the observed low accountability and transparency are personal interests and partisan politics. In this regard, affiliation and clientelism politics tend to worsen the ineffectiveness and inefficiencies in the tendering processes. As rewards for loyalty are offered, problems arise in tendering practices. In this regard, when a devoted person is indicted for corruption, devotees of the ruling party immediately justify their protégé by labeling those calling for accountability as sell-outs, racists, divisionists, tribalists, non-patriotic, and anti-ruling party. Raymond (2008), echoing the same sentiments of partisan politics' infliction on the tendering process, affirms that ministers and political parties receive covert disbursements in government procurement, thereby violating and undermining the procurement laws. However, in his advocacy for nonpartisan awarding of government tenders, Musanzikwa (2013) stated that only deserving companies, regardless of nationality or political affiliation, should be given tenders.

Challenges faced in conducting the tendering process at the SPB in Zimbabwe

Since public procurement is not conducted in a vacuum, it is equally dogged by a myriad of challenges (Chigudu, 2014; Dzuke & Naude, 2015; Dzuke & Naude, 2017). In this vein, this section explores the challenges faced by the SPB in conducting the tendering processes in Zimbabwe.



Figure 4: Challenges faced in conducting tendering process



The diagram above is a presentation of the challenges faced in conducting tendering processes at the SPB. The study observed that corruption, political interference, lack of ethical and professional conduct, preferential treatment, delayed ICT adoption, non-compliance with the procurement regulations as well as bureaucracy are the main factors encumbering sound public procurement at the SPB in Zimbabwe.

Corruption

Thirty percent of the respondents were of the view that the major challenge facing the SPB is corruption. Corruption is one of the most pervasive challenges faced in the conduct of tendering processes at SPB. In support of this Respondent, D highlighted that: *“the levels of corruption at the SPB are so appalling and tender procedures in Zimbabwe are dogged with corruption, with government officials in charge of tender designations, as well as intense lawmakers in the various lines of services, profiting from kickbacks and gifts.* Ameyaw *et al.*, (2013) agree that the tender evaluation stage of the procurement process is the most vulnerable to corrupt practices. Accordingly, Takawira (2017), argues that corruption has actually enhanced and consolidated politicians' careers, giving them unprecedented discretionary powers to cause more damage. For instance, Wicknell Chivhayo's Intratrek, a power supply company that was awarded a government contract



by politicians without going through a competitive bidding process, has become a contentious tender scandal issue in Zimbabwe. It was alleged that Chivhayo is related to the Mugabe family, which is why the tender was awarded to his company without a competitive bidding process. This study's research findings tally with the previous empirical discoveries by Musanzikwa (2014), who agree with Shaw (2010) that corruption is a serious challenge in public procurement, and thus it impedes transparent tendering processes at SPB in Zimbabwe.

Political Interference

Twenty percent of the respondents were of the view that the SPB has been affected by political interference. Political interference has been identified as a significant challenge affecting the tendering process. Figure 4 above shows that 20% of the respondents were of the view that political interference is negatively impacting the tendering processes at the SPB in Zimbabwe. In the same vein, Respondent L noted that: *Too much political interference is prying with the independence of the Procurement Board to autonomously award tenders without having the politicians influencing the process.* Accordingly, Dza, Fisher and Gapp (2013) discovered that political interference in the procurement process is a barrier to successful public procurement implementation in Africa. In most African countries, politicians influence the tender process by insisting that specific contracts be awarded to individuals or companies of their choosing (Dzuke & Naude, 2017). In line with the research findings, the researchers discovered that excessive intervention of public officials in the administrative affairs of the public sector has left the SPB vulnerable to political prying, thereby affecting the tendering process.

Lack of ethical and professional conduct

The study also identified a lack of ethical and professional conduct as another challenge affecting public procurement at the SPB. This notion was supported by a 15% response rate. In this scenario, ethical and professional conduct paucities have been one of the primary challenges faced in conducting tendering processes at the SPB in Zimbabwe. Respondent J contended that: *It is not a secret that the way the tendering process is being conducted in Zimbabwe is a clear indication that the country still lags behind in terms of upholding the necessary ethical and professional values in the public sector.* In line with these observations, Magaya and Chidhawu (2016) argued that the palpable failure to uphold these professional ethics can be attributed to political predation in the form of a patronage system. Accordingly, Mupanduki (2012), postulates that in order to be



competitive, private companies usually grease high-ranking officials in procurement, resulting in a patronage system based on who you know and who you are close to. Senior officials and political leaders use public office for personal gain, which has weakened the incentive to remain truthful (Pillary, 2004). As a result, such a high politically induced environment makes adhering to expected ethical standards difficult for officials involved in public procurement activities.

Furthermore, a number of senior officials and political leaders in Zimbabwe have been implicated in some procurement scandals for national projects (Sandada & Kambarami, 2016), thus showing the severity of unethical practices in public procurement in Zimbabwe. According to Carter (2000), as cited in Sandada and Kambarami (2016), unethical behaviour displayed by procurement professionals can have a negative impact on procurement performance, competitiveness, and compliance. Additionally, evaluation team members' lack of knowledge of procurement ethics has resulted in poor procurement decisions and officers' inability to distinguish between right and wrong, resulting in the development of corrupt tendencies (Musanzikwa, 2013). This supports the interpretation that when public procurements are not handled in an ethical and professional manner, tenders are awarded to clumsy, inexperienced, and unfit bidders, resulting in poor service delivery. Such a situation will scare away potential competitive bidders because the procurement environment will be unbalanced, posing a challenge in conducting the tendering process in Zimbabwe.

Preferential treatment

Ten percent of the respondents were of the view that preferential treatment has also played a notable role in affecting public procurement at the SPB. This is a clear demonstration that preferential treatment for certain suppliers has an impact on the smooth operation of the tendering process. In view of this, Respondent K was of the opinion that: *When suppliers are going through the tender application it seems as if some of them are so special that they deserve to be treated in a unique way. To me, it is a clear indication of discrimination because all bidders are entitled to equal treatment and no form of discrimination should be allowed worse still on the basis of political affiliation.* Such practices have seen some bidders being given a distinctive treatment when it comes to the handling of tender proposals. It was observed that preferential treatment begins during the submission process when a group of politically connected individuals submits proposals without being subjected to the same procedural demands as other mere



suppliers. In this sense, one's political relationship determines how one is treated by the tender administrators. Chigudu's (2014) proposal that all suppliers who submitted tenders should be allowed to witness the opening of the tenders and have the right to be informed of the price and other important terms of each tender opened on a regular basis falls short because only a few first-rate suppliers are allowed, particularly from the ruling elites. On the other hand, the establishment of a legal system in public procurement is theoretically intended to thwart preferential procurement tendencies (Christopher, 2005). As a result, preferential treatment, as evidenced by research findings, is one of the challenges encountered during the tendering process.

Delayed ICT adoption

Similarly, 10% of the respondents indicated that delayed ICT adoption has further affected public tendering processes at the SPB. It was observed that the SPB has been slow in the adoption and incorporation of information technology into Zimbabwe's public procurement systems. Importantly, the technological management of data is becoming more and more imperious than before, especially in the public sector where paperwork is customary. Nevertheless, findings from this research study highlighted that the SPB has been dogged by delays in the adoption of ICTs. Respondent K argued that: *a potential supplier can take several weeks to complete the tender registration process as heaps of files appeared burdensome to work on them under a restricted timeframe*. Thus, in spite of the availability of desk computers, large mounds of hardcopy files are still dictating the administration of the tendering process at SPB, thus the slow ICT adoption of information technology by the country's procurement body is encumbering a smooth and modern running of tendering procedures in Zimbabwe.

Non-compliance

There have been reports about the SPB flouting the prescribed procurement regulations. In this scenario, non-compliance with the tendering processes and procedures was highlighted by 10% of the respondents as one of the challenges faced by the SPB. The study established that a number of government contracts are awarded to specific individuals and businesses without even completing the tendering process. Pindula News (2017) elaborated on the notion of perpetuation and legitimisation of the practice of non-compliance during the conduct of the tendering processes. For instance, as reported in the Pindula News (2017) the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Development Joram Gumbo is alleged to have ordered the Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe to



unprocedurally award the US \$33,3 million contract without going through the tender process. The contract for the supply and installation of an aerospace management system was awarded to Indra Sistema and Horut Espema South Africa. In addition, Magaya and Chidhawu (2016) noted that due to political predation and intrusion, the Airport Road tender was awarded to Augur Investments without an open tender process. Thus, this slew of non-compliance instances clearly confirms that contributing role of this factor to the SPB's lack of an effective and efficient tendering process in Zimbabwe.

Bureaucratic red tape

Lastly, 5% of the respondents were of the view that bureaucratic red-tapism has also been a major impediment to the effective and efficient tendering processes at the SPB in Zimbabwe. Bureaucracy and the subsequent delays associated with it have also impeded on the smooth conduct of the tendering processes since the procurement process has been made so time-consuming and clumsy. The procurement process has been marred by the existing rigid procedures that must be followed at the outset before the unabridged process can be completed. Respondent P argued that: *because of red-tapism, it can take you several weeks and months to go through the whole tendering process. Worse still, some administrators responsible for government tenders are making sure that the process is done as hastily as possible to individuals who smack them with kickbacks.* In light of this, Chikomwe (2012) argues that ticking off the entrenchment of bureaucracy in the SPB's operations creates some delays in the processing of procurement requests. In the same vein, Jain (2001) claims that bureaucracy typically leads to bureaucratic corruption, which is a situation in which the public is required to pay bribes to bureaucrats in order to access certain government services that are normally entitled to them or simply to expedite a bureaucratic procedure. As such, bureaucracy impedes the smooth conduct of the tendering process at the SPB in Zimbabwe. Additionally, Dzukey and Naude (2017) noted that the lack of understanding and incorrect interpretation of procurement principles, procedures, and, regulations on the part of the prospective suppliers of services further prolongs the public procurement process in a significant way.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The goal of this study was to dissect and unpack the extent and depth of patronage politics in Zimbabwe's SPB tendering processes. The study was motivated by a lack of research on patronage politics and its effects on public procurement administration. According to the



study, a lack of transparency and a comprehensive legislative framework has created an environment that encourages tender corruption. The study concludes that partisan politics continue to dictate on the tendering process in Zimbabwe, as public contracts appear to favour politicians and those with a patron-client relationship with the office-bearers. However, the study did not exhaustively uncover all the issues pertinent to the management of public procurement in Zimbabwe. As a result, future researchers should consider carrying out more research on the effectiveness of ICT adoption in public procurement management. Furthermore, future research should concentrate on Zimbabwe's anti-corruption efforts and their role in combating public procurement corruption, as combating corruption in the awarding of government contracts is the foundation of establishing a successful public procurement system.

To improve the conduct of public procurement at Zimbabwe's SPB, policymakers should consider the following key recommendations:

- ***Detach from political meddling and improve the implementation of punitive measures:*** The government should be empowered to discourage or punish other forms of political interference in the procurement process if it demonstrates its determination to religiously implement the precincts of public procurement Acts. In addition, there is need for the swift adoption and implementation of punitive measures for perpetrators of corruption and other related unscrupulous tendering practices at the SPB.
- ***Effective and rapid ICT adoption:*** The SPB should revamp procurement by implementing ICT effectively which serves as a reliable tool to reduce human interaction during the tendering process. This saves on time while also lowering bureaucratic barriers, which frequently lead to tendering members engaging in rent-seeking behaviour, requesting kickbacks, or political favours from suppliers in order to expedite their tender application process.
- ***Instilling a culture of professionalism and ethical public duty (Batho Pele principle - lessons from the South African model):*** Public officials responsible for the tendering processes should be educated on the importance of ethical and professional values on a regular basis. This can be accomplished by organizing local and international workshops where procurement practitioners can improve their understanding of procurement ethics.



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