



# The impact of cadre deployment on governance and service delivery in South Africa

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## Abstract

The increase in the level of financial mismanagement, lack of strategic planning, and poor service delivery has been identified as a direct outcome of the ANC's cadre deployment culture. The policy has been widely exploited by politicians and other dishonest public office holders, whose major objective has been the creation of personal riches, which goes against the policy's initial aims. The policy has been defended by notable political leaders as a legitimate and acceptable practice. Members of other political parties have criticised cadre deployment as a practice that is disastrous to the national interest and one of the principal causes of corruption and maladministration. To pinpoint the effects of cadre deployment on South African governance and service delivery, secondary data were critically analysed. The study revealed that cadre deployment is responsible for poor service delivery in some local municipalities. The study concluded that to maintain the interest of the ruling party in society, cadre deployment is justifiable; however, the policy is to be revisited to ensure conformity with Section 195 of the Constitution.

**Keywords:** Cadre deployment; African National Congress (ANC); Democracy; Governance; Performance management; Services Delivery

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## 1. Introduction

Cadre deployment is the appointment of a loyalist to an institution by the ruling party of a government in order to improve public reporting channels and guarantee that the institution upholds the party's platform as determined by voters. In accordance with the definition of cadre deployment, the elected authorities must uphold the will of the people. According to Mlambo (2023), the African National Congress (ANC) believed that involvement through the deployment of cadres would protect the administration from any potential sabotage by the opposition parties. Installing devoted party members who at least had political credibility was the most efficient strategy to neutralize this threat. Sadly, the situation is the opposite. The South African public service, according to Adanlawo (2017) and Motsepe et al. (2022), is in crisis, while Rust (2017) has called it "in tatters." Mboneni (2023) and Nzo (2019) claim that due to the entrenched practice of cadre deployment, local government parastatals in South Africa are in a state of disorder, as seen in a report issued by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in 2009.

According to Tsolo (2020), numerous difficult circumstances that have an impact on local government management and governance were disclosed by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs report. Numerous towns throughout the county consistently fall short in their ability to organize their work efficiently, manage their projects deftly, and plan their budgets sensibly (Mlambo et al., 2022). This is due to a shortage of skilled professionals in technical areas. Schoeman and Chakwizira (2023) argue that officials have allegedly been appointed to positions for which they are not qualified. This is to say that more qualified employees are frequently neglected for promotions and general appointments. There is also an increase in the level of financial mismanagement, lack of strategic planning, inadequate human resource management, and inefficient labour legislation in local government (Berman et al., 2021). As a direct outcome of the ANC's cadre deployment culture, Chaka and Adanlawo (2023) note that South Africa's public services are struggling with concerns of poor performance. According to the authors, the ANC's plan "methodically puts dependability before legitimacy" and is therefore unacceptable (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2023). The nomination of public officials with political ties to districts and public services creates a barrier to the enhancement of public services (Thusi and Selepe, 2023).

The policy has been widely exploited by politicians and other dishonest public office holders, whose major objective has been the creation of personal riches, which goes against the policy's initial aims. When no formal qualifications are taken into account when hiring public workers and when no evaluations are done to determine whether a person is capable of holding a public office, criticism of the policy of cadre deployment is justified. Poor performance management in several government departments in South Africa has been a result of such inefficient routines. According to Mohangi and Nyika (2023), political agents that do not respect or understand the relevance of training and skills development programs as a method to improve performances in the public service engage in cadre deployment, which is the primary cause of the failures of such training projects.

It has long been shown that cadre deployment is unresponsive to the needs of the average person, who frequently resorts to service delivery demonstrations. The fact is that there is currently no clear legislative framework that directs the implementation of cadre deployment, except for the fact that it is a requirement of party policy. Though, the policy has been supported by notable political leaders (for example, President Cyril Ramaphosa), he has openly defended the issue of cadre deployment as a legitimate and acceptable practice

that also occurs in other democracies, such as Washington in the United States and Westminster in the United Kingdom (Xaba et al., 2024; Tshabalala, 2021). Members of other political parties have criticised cadre deployment as a practice that is disastrous to the national interest and one of the principal causes of corruption and maladministration occurring in government departments (Mchunu, 2023). Some of these other party members have proposed that the use of unqualified cadres must be exposed for the unfair and illegal discrimination that it is (Munzhedzi, 2021). This paper seeks to shed light on the degree to which cadre deployment eroded public confidence in public institutions and to pinpoint the effects of cadre deployment on South African governance and service delivery.

## 2. The deployments of cadre

Cadre deployment is a policy formulated by the African National Congress (ANC) government in an effort to concentrate democratic authorities within the ruling/controlling party. The ANC retains cadres in all significant sectors, including the diplomatic corps, notwithstanding the weaknesses in the system. Cook (2020) holds the opinion that President Jacob Zuma's use of diplomatic posts to handle domestic political issues could be detrimental to the nation's standing abroad. Since taking office in 2009, Zuma has used diplomatic appointments to sidestep political concerns or to reward allies.

The successes and setbacks of deployed cadres, as well as the party's control over deployed cadres, show how cadre deployment actually plays out in practice. The definition of the roles and obligations of senior public employees in a democratic democracy, according to Zondi et al. (2023), has long been a topic of controversy. Since the advent of public administration, it has been and continues to be a central theme in literature. In the public sector, local government administration, and independent state institutions, party loyalists are sent to carry out the wishes of the ruling party (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2022). This system has solidified the ANC's hold on power and produced a close-knit group of party cronies who benefit from the benefits of office.

## 3. The influence of cadre deployment on performance management and accountability

In the public sector, according to Awan et al. (2020) and Ingrams (2018), performance management performs a variety of crucial tasks, some of which include providing assurances of effectiveness, adaptability, and competency. Olguín Muñoz (2023) contests the idea that performance assessment is crucial for providing better services. A similar point is made by Sekgala and Holtzhausen (2016), who emphasize that performance reviews are required in public affairs. Regarding all matters relating to the provision of services, public authorities must be accountable to the people. According to Chaka and Adanlawo (2022), performance reviews of public officials must be the primary approach used to determine if they are qualified for the positions they hold and to support their authority.

There have been several political protests regarding the provision of services, some of which have turned violent and pose a threat to the government (Mothelesi et al., 2022; Breakfast et al., 2019). The root of the problems has been associated with cadre deployment, whereby deployed cadres in some way find it difficult to deliver mandated services as required because they lack the skills and expertise required for such a role. According to Shava and Chamisa (2018), the deployment of cadres exacerbated issues related to corruption, inadequate procurement procedures, extravagant expenditures, and the deteriorating state of local

government. Since municipal governments are the closest to the people and are tasked with supplying necessities for the people's wellbeing, the policy of cadre deployment has been a worrisome issue at the local level. The policy has been backed by government officials while opposition party members oppose it and declare it illegitimate.

Numerous South African municipalities were destroyed by massive rallies, marches, demonstrations, and violent conflicts, particularly in Black and Colored townships, from 2004 until 2018 (Mukhari, 2019). In townships all around South Africa, a wave of service delivery protests erupted over poor housing and insufficient public services. Due to a lack of amenities, residents of townships turned to violent protests to express their wrath and discontent. In some cases, they ask that their towns be removed from such municipalities (Mayekiso, 2023; Ndoni-Andrews, 2023). According to Mlambo (2023), the persistent service delivery protests give South Africa a bad reputation both domestically and globally. The demonstrations create the impression that the government is not providing basic services to the populace, especially the impoverished, at the local government level.

Fung (2015) states, "Service delivery suffers because people are put in positions based on their devotion to party leadership rather than their honesty and capacity. When we have a system that promotes cadre deployment over national interest, we have a serious problem. Investigations into the professionalization of local government, in the meantime, reveal a connection between poor service delivery or poor performance and the subsequent outbreak of violent protests, on the one hand, and a poor or lack of competence to provide, on the other. Cronyism, nepotism, and political intervention in municipal selections only serve to compound this. The issues as they have been recognized suggest that one of the solutions is to fill towns with skilled workers. This entails professionalizing the system by replacing the cadre deployment practice with the appointment of persons with skill, experience, and knowledge (Nkomo and Adanlawo, 2023; Kaizer, 2022).

For the government, especially district municipalities, to perform their required duties, the people chosen to work should be qualified to do so and not just party loyalists. For citizens to enjoy the dividends of democracy, it is essential for those appointed to be committed and serve the government with competence. It is crucial that they possess the appropriate training and credentials.

#### **4. The relevance of cadre deployment to local government**

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) states that greater administrative reform is required for transformation in developmental local government in order to equip municipalities to face the substantial obstacles of social, economic, and material growth in all spheres. Such a procedure is ineffective unless management, organized labour, and other interested parties accept a common objective and work together to achieve it. According to Chapter 6 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000), municipalities must have a performance management system to encourage a performance management culture among political structures, political office holders, council members, and administration. The municipality's affairs must be managed in a cost-effective and responsible manner (Madumo and Koma, 2019). The link that should exist between a local government and the residents is taken away from the civil service via cadre deployment. People lose the connection to local authority they should have when officials are simply appointed by decree of the central party office and their power is not anchored in the local constituency. People do not think they have a right to voice their opinions on what the local government is doing as a result.

Because of this, policy administrators just carry out the orders of the national leadership for fear of losing their deployments, rather than becoming fully ingrained in the community. Although some progress has been made in providing housing and basic infrastructure, the rate at which this has occurred has been incredibly slow, according to an analysis of how local government has performed over the past ten years. Corruption and inequality in local governments appear to have increased dramatically under the ANC's reign. To rectify the problem, numerous alternatives have been put forth with limited effectiveness. Cadre deployment, which leads to the hiring of unqualified employees, stays at the core of a failed transformation. Likewise, the platforms for local public participation have also been severely degraded and rendered ineffective by municipal politics. Additionally, the legal framework that oversees municipalities is too rigid, with municipal officials complaining that it is too complicated, onerous, and burdensome and that it imposes too many requirements that take officials' focus away from meeting citizens' needs.

## 5. Legislative framework of cadre deployment

According to Thusi and Selepe (2023), the Municipal Systems Act (MSA) and the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) are the two fundamental bits of regulation in municipal administration. The essential objectives and ideas that guide local government management are outlined in the MSA as an addition to the provisions of Section 195(1) of the Constitution. It states that a municipality's administration must be set up such that it can respond to the needs of its citizens and cultivate a culture of public service and responsibility among its staff that is devoid of prejudice and fear.

According to Bizana et al. (2015), both citizens and state organs are bound by the Constitution's inherent power. The statement is in line with the theories of Gildenhuis and Knipe (2000), which assert that the Constitution's goals are to establish the authority and duties of the government and to plan the nation's actions. Every cadre is sworn to uphold and defend the party leadership's will wherever they are deployed, even if it means breaking the law and the Constitution (Hove, 2019). This concept is unique to political organizations (like the ANC) and is rooted in the Leninist history of democratic centralism.

According to Casal Bértoa (2017), political scientists in democracies and around the world have long debated the effects of a dominant party system on the efficient consolidation of democracy. Concerns about the possibility of a declining response from the government to public opinion, a loss of accountability, an overall erosion of democratic principles, and the development of authoritarian methods of rule arise in a context where one party dominates the political landscape and faces little prospect of electoral defeat. The fundamental issue with cadre deployment is that it lacks transparency and accountability.

## 6. The problem of cadre deployments

The actual implementation of the cadre deployment policy presents challenges for the state, the opposition political parties, and the ruling ANC. According to the Democratic Alliance (DA) (2010:2 of 10), cadre deployment is a strategy of assigning top ANC officials to positions of authority and influence in the public sector. Legislative and policy proposals that aim to consolidate power and give the national government more control is the official manifestation of the ANC's renewed ambition to rule all spheres of public life and create party hegemony over South African civil society. Thusi and Selepe (2023) and Adanlawo and Rugbeer (2021)

claim that fresh proof of political interference in the hiring of municipal employees was uncovered in a recent court case in the Eastern Cape. In *Mlokoti v. Amathole District Municipality*, it was argued that a less qualified applicant was chosen for the position of municipal manager rather than one who had the required qualifications. Both the Amathole District Municipality Council and the regional ANC organization received criticism for working together to create a distorted deployment strategy.

This policy led to the appointment of a less qualified person as municipal manager despite the presence of an outstanding candidate; capable people are routinely passed over for political appointments. Kraft and Furlong (2019) claim that the state is currently having difficulty carrying out some of its fundamental responsibilities, including protecting its citizens from crime, providing better education and health care, generating enough power, and providing critical services. As a result, cadre deployment committee operations are primarily concerned with advancing the interests of the ruling party rather than those of the general public. To encourage loyalty and service delivery, the ANC has placed some of its members in important positions in the public sector.

## 7. Conclusion

This study concluded that to maintain the interest of parties in a society, cadre deployment is justifiable; however, it has been argued that it is responsible for ruining the capability of HR departments to perform successfully due to political manipulation of public officials. Also, the local municipalities under the ANC are unable to render essential services due to corruption. The deployment of party cadres who lack the qualifications and competence necessary to hold major positions is believed to be responsible for poor service delivery. According to Ngcamu and Mantzaris (2023), the fundamental issue with cadre deployment is that it is neither accountable nor transparent. It has long been shown that it is unresponsive to the needs of the average person, who frequently resorts to service delivery demonstrations because the current cadres are unconcerned with their needs. Zulu et al. (2022) claim that the ongoing use of cadre deployment has frequently led to underperformance of the deployed, poor service delivery, and public protests by disgruntled people.

The ANC-led government's cadre deployment program has a negative effect on service delivery, according to the literature that is currently available on the topic. It has been found that in order to be given consideration for deployment, one must be associated with important party members who have political clout with the higher echelons of the party. It seems that party loyalty comes above professional expertise when it comes to deployment. The same procedure is used when government bids are awarded to bidders that disregard procurement regulations. According to Mayekiso (2023), "everyone knows that you need to be tied to the mayor, to some senior official, or to be a party activist in order to gain a post in the municipality."

For the local governments and every other arm of government to perform effectively, the policy of cadre deployment is to be revisited. Although the separation of politics and administrative practices might be difficult. The ANC-led government needs to sort out public opinion in order to determine whether the cadre deployment policy, which is thought to have contributed to skill shortages and pitiable service delivery, needs to be amended. In order to ensure conformity with Section 195 of the Constitution, party cadres employed in public administration and other state institutions must also have their skills and qualifications assessed. Also, district municipalities should conduct a skills audit with all municipal employees in collaboration with the provincial department of local government to address the imbalance brought by cadre deployment. This study supported

the idea that political and administrative decisions should be kept apart. Politicians will continue to have an impact on administrative decisions in the public sector if there are insufficient checks and balances in place. This will have greater implications for society as a whole. Empirical research that looks into the extent to which cadre deployment contributes to declining service delivery in South Africa is recommended for future study.

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