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A TAXONOMY OF CIVIL SERVANTS ON STATE VIOLENCE IN A NEOLIBERAL BESIEGED AUTHORITARIAN STATE: REFLECTIONS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of civil servants in Zimbabwe under the intersecting pressures of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. It investigates how these forces shape their roles and perspectives, diverging from the Weberian ideal of neutrality, efficiency, and adherence to rules. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with ten civil servants across five government ministries, selected through purposive and snowball sampling. A thematic analysis of the data identified five typologies of civil servants: Patriotic Africanist, Neoliberal Compliant/Victim, Fence-Seater, Aloof-Knowledgeable, and Inarticulate. Findings reveal significant deviations from the Weberian model, with some civil servants aligning with state narratives while others exhibit ambivalence, cynicism, or disempowerment. The study underscores how the dual pressures of neoliberal economic policies and authoritarian governance distort the civil service's functioning, leading to political, ethical, and professional dilemmas. These typologies provide insight into how individuals navigate systemic challenges, balancing personal survival, professional ethics, and loyalty to the state. This research contributes to the broader discourse on governance and public administration, emphasizing the urgent need for reforms to restore neutrality, professionalism, and efficiency in bureaucracies operating under authoritarian neoliberal conditions. It highlights civil servants' complex and often precarious realities in such environments.

Keywords: Civil Servants, Weberian Bureaucracy, Authoritarianism, Neoliberalism, State Violence, Typology, Zimbabwe, Public Administration, Professional Ethics

1. Introduction

This study explores civil servants' evolving role in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of intersecting pressures from neoliberal economic policies and authoritarian state governance. These forces have fundamentally altered traditional bureaucratic expectations, as civil servants are no longer neutral administrators but actors navigating a complex interplay of political loyalty, personal ethics, and professional responsibilities (Butler, 2018; Harrison, 2018). By examining their diverse perceptions of state violence and neoliberalism, the study seeks to construct a typology of civil servants, offering a nuanced understanding of their roles within this challenging environment.

The motivation for this research arises from a broader global discourse on how neoliberalism and authoritarianism reshape state governance. Zimbabwe provides a compelling case study due to its unique socio-political context, marked by post-colonial struggles, entrenched political regimes, and significant economic instability (Mlambo, 2021; Ndakaripa, 2020). These dynamics make it a microcosm for examining how civil servants respond to and are shaped by these global and local pressures.

This paper argues that the interplay of authoritarianism and neoliberalism has eroded Weberian bureaucratic principles, creating moral, ethical, and professional dilemmas for civil servants. It challenges the notion of a monolithic, neutral civil service, illustrating how civil servants in Zimbabwe are shaped by their diverse experiences and perspectives under such systemic pressures. These findings contribute to broader debates on governance, shedding light on how civil servants' roles evolve in response to the contradictory demands of state control and global economic forces.

Data was collected using a descriptive qualitative approach, interviewing ten civil servants from five government ministries. Participants were purposively and snowball-sampled to ensure rich insights from individuals with varying levels of seniority, service duration, and access to sensitive information. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns and construct the typology of civil servants based on their attitudes toward state violence and neoliberalism (Adaman *et al.* 2018).

This paper contributes to the field of public administration by challenging the applicability of Weberian bureaucratic ideals in contexts shaped by authoritarian neoliberalism. The typologies generated provide a novel lens to understand civil servants' agency, dilemmas, and coping mechanisms in such systems. This analysis also expands the discourse on governance, illustrating the diverse ways State actors interact with and respond to systemic constraints (LeBas and Young, 2023). The following research questions guide the study:

- i. To what extent have post-2000 Zimbabwean civil servants deviated from the Weberian model in their ability to address political violence within an authoritarian and neoliberal state?
- ii. What typology of civil servants can be constructed based on their diverse perceptions of political violence and neoliberalism in an authoritarian state?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the conceptual framework and literature review, contextualizing the study within existing debates. Section 3 outlines the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. Section 4 presents the findings, including the typologies of civil servants identified. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for public administration and governance, and Section 6 concludes with recommendations for policy and future research directions.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, precisely a descriptive case study approach, to explore civil servants' diverse experiences and perspectives in Zimbabwe operating under the dual pressures of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. The qualitative methodology was selected to gain in-depth insights into the complexities of participants' lived experiences, focusing on their perceptions of state violence and the socio-political environment (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).

2.1. Data collection

Interviews were the primary method of data collection. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select ten participants from five government ministries, ensuring that individuals with rich, relevant experiences were included (Etikan *et al.* 2016). These participants were chosen based on criteria such as long service, office level, gender, and access to sensitive information, which were critical in understanding the subject matter comprehensively. Snowball sampling was

used to supplement purposive sampling to reach participants in politically sensitive, inaccessible environments (Naderifar *et al.* 2017).

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a balance between open-ended questions and focused discussions. This approach facilitated the collection of detailed narratives while ensuring alignment with the study's objectives (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Participants were anonymized through coding to ensure confidentiality and safety, given the politically charged nature of the research context (Liamputtong, 2007).

2.2. Thematic analysis

The data analysis employed a thematic approach, which involved systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within the interview data. Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for exploring qualitative data because it allows researchers to focus on the explicit content of participants' narratives and the underlying meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework:

- i. **Familiarization with the Data:** Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. This step was essential for identifying initial impressions and recurring ideas.
 - ii. **Generating Initial Codes:** Each transcript was systematically coded to highlight meaningful data segments related to the study's research questions. Coding focused on participants' perceptions of state violence, neoliberalism, and professional and ethical dilemmas.
 - iii. **Searching for Themes:** The codes were then grouped into broader themes representing significant patterns across the data. For instance, codes such as "state loyalty," "moral dilemmas," and "personal survival" were grouped under themes like "Patriotism" and "Neoliberal Victimhood."
 - iv. **Reviewing Themes:** The identified themes were refined by examining their coherence and relevance to the research objectives. Some themes were merged, split, or discarded during this process to ensure they accurately captured the data's essence (Nowell *et al.* 2017).
 - v. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme was defined and named to reflect its core meaning and relevance to the study. For example, "Patriotic Africanist" described civil servants aligned with the state's rhetoric, while "Aloof-Knowledgeable" captured those who chose deliberate detachment.
 - vi. **Producing the Report:** The final themes were used to construct a typology of civil servants and interpret the findings within the broader context of governance and public administration.
- Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board, ensuring adherence to research ethics and participant safety (Nowell *et al.* 2017). All participants provided informed consent before the interviews, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the politically sensitive nature of the research, additional precautions were taken to protect participants' identities, including coding and secure data storage (Naderifar *et al.* 2017). The study complied with the research guidelines.

3. Conceptual framework

3.1. Civil servant

The role of civil servants is central to state governance, embodying both traditional bureaucratic ideals and the realities of modern socio-political challenges. In the Weberian tradition, civil servants were seen as neutral, efficient, and rule-bound actors tasked with executing state policy impartially (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2021). However, in contexts like Zimbabwe, this ideal is distorted by the pressures of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. These forces erode neutrality and compel civil servants to navigate ethical dilemmas where personal survival often precedes professional integrity (Dube, 2021; Lodge and Wegrich, 2020).

Zimbabwean civil servants face a precarious balancing act, caught between loyalty to a regime that instrumentalizes governance for political control and the demands of neoliberal reforms that prioritize market efficiency over public welfare (Harrison, 2018; Ruhanya and Gumbo,

2022). These dynamics resonate with global patterns observed in other authoritarian states, where civil servants are simultaneously implementation agents and victims of systemic contradictions (Birch, 2022).

3.2. Weberian civil servant

Weber's ideal bureaucracy emphasized structure, hierarchy, and impartiality as the cornerstones of effective governance (Witesman, 2021). While this model remains influential, its applicability in post-colonial and authoritarian contexts has been increasingly questioned. In Zimbabwe, the Weberian model has been undermined by the politicization of public administration, where loyalty to the ruling regime often outweighs competence or adherence to procedural rules (Hodgkinson, 2019). The legacy of the liberation struggle, coupled with nationalist rhetoric, has further entrenched a system prioritizing political allegiance over bureaucratic neutrality (Raftopoulos, 2019; Mlambo, 2021).

Moreover, neoliberalism exacerbates these challenges, reshaping the civil service into a tool for enforcing economic reforms that often contradict the principles of public service and social equity (Brenner and Theodore, 2020; Harrison, 2018). This study interrogates how these intersecting pressures reshape the role of civil servants, challenging the Weberian archetype and highlighting the emergence of alternative typologies.

3.3. Patriotism

Patriotism, in the Zimbabwean context, is deeply intertwined with the nationalist legacy of the liberation struggle. The state has instrumentalized this legacy to foster loyalty and justify repressive measures against perceived external and internal threats (Mare, 2020; Dendere, 2019). Harrison (2018) notes that this narrative is often framed as resistance to neoliberalism, which is portrayed as a continuation of Western imperialism. Civil servants, therefore, find themselves in a moral quandary, reconciling their professional duties with the state's patriotic rhetoric, which often demands unquestioning allegiance (Mlambo, 2021).

Globally, similar dynamics are observed in other post-colonial states, where nationalist ideologies justify authoritarian practices (Przeworski, 2020; Chatterjee, 2020). In Zimbabwe, this dual role of patriotism as a unifying force and a tool of control—highlights its complexity in shaping civil servants' attitudes and actions.

4. Weberian bureaucracy theory

Weberian bureaucracy offers a critical lens for evaluating the current state of Zimbabwe's civil service, highlighting the gap between its theoretical ideals and practical realities. This theory provides a normative framework to assess how the politicization of public administration, systemic corruption, and the erosion of professional ethics have compromised governance (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2021). By juxtaposing Weber's emphasis on neutrality, rule-based operations, and efficiency with the observed dynamics in Zimbabwe, the study underscores the extent to which authoritarianism and neoliberalism distort bureaucratic functions. Additionally, Weberian principles help illuminate the challenges of restoring trust in public institutions, a key concern in Zimbabwe's governance reform discourse. The study's exploration of civil servants' perceptions of State violence under authoritarianism aligns with Weber's insights on the dangers of bureaucratic domination when detached from ethical and democratic oversight (Witesman, 2021). By critiquing Zimbabwean civil servants' systemic pressures, the study advances the discourse on realigning bureaucratic structures with public accountability, professionalism, and equity principles. Thus, Weberian bureaucracy serves as a theoretical benchmark for identifying governance failures and a guide for envisioning change like the civil servant in Zimbabwe.

5. Literature review

5.1. Rise of authoritarianism in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's political evolution provides a compelling case study of how authoritarianism adapts to maintain control. ZANU-PF has skillfully employed a combination of electoral manipulation, state violence, and nationalist rhetoric to entrench its dominance, creating what Zamchiya (2020) describes as "competitive authoritarianism." These strategies are mirrored in other authoritarian contexts globally, where democratic institutions are subverted to sustain autocratic rule (Cheeseman and Fisher, 2021).

The militarization of governance, exemplified by the 2017 coup that ousted Robert Mugabe, underscores the centrality of security forces in Zimbabwean politics (Hodgkinson, 2019; Raftopoulos, 2019). This phenomenon reflects a broader pattern in authoritarian states, where the military plays a decisive role in shaping political outcomes, often at the expense of civilian oversight (Felbab-Brown, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is essential for contextualizing the experiences of Zimbabwean civil servants, who operate within a system where political survival often outweighs administrative efficiency (Ruhanya and Gumbo, 2022).

5.2. The securocrat state and military influence

The concept of the securocrat state captures Zimbabwe's militarized governance structure, where security forces maintain internal stability and act as key political players (Harrison, 2018; Hodgkinson, 2019). Ruhanya and Gumbo (2022) argue that the military's involvement in governance has transformed civil servants into pawns within a highly politicized system, limiting their ability to perform their roles impartially. This dynamic is further compounded by neoliberalism, which demands administrative efficiency, and authoritarianism, which prioritizes political loyalty (Birch, 2022; Yingyi and Hlungwani, 2023).

5.3. The role of nationalism and authoritarianism

Nationalism, as propagated by ZANU-PF, is a cornerstone of Zimbabwe's authoritarian resilience. This nationalist rhetoric, which draws heavily on the liberation struggle, positions the ruling party as the guardian of national sovereignty and portrays opposition forces as agents of neo-colonialism (Mlambo, 2021; Mare, 2020). While effectively consolidating power, this narrative creates significant challenges for civil servants, who must navigate the tension between professional ethics and ideological demands (Dendere, 2019). Similar patterns are observed in other post-colonial states, where nationalism is leveraged to suppress dissent and legitimize authoritarian practices (Bermeo, 2022; Przeworski, 2020).

5.4. Neoliberalism and State Governance

The neoliberal restructuring of Zimbabwe's economy has profoundly influenced its governance. Privatization, deregulation, and reduced state intervention have shifted the role of civil servants from public service providers to enforcers of market-driven reforms (Harrison, 2018; Dube, 2021). While reflective of global trends (Brenner and Theodore, 2020), this transformation has unique implications in Zimbabwe, where the intersection of neoliberalism and authoritarianism exacerbates systemic inequalities. As Yingyi and Hlungwani (2023) note, these policies have deepened social divides, creating an environment where civil servants face increasing ethical and professional challenges.

6. Implications for civil servants

The dual pressures of neoliberalism and authoritarianism have profound implications for civil servants. In many cases, civil servants must enforce policies that conflict with their professional values and personal ethics, leading to a crisis of identity and purpose (Gallo, 2021). In Zimbabwe, for example, civil servants have been implicated in the enforcement of state violence against

opposition groups, a role that many find morally troubling (Harrison, 2018). This study seeks to explore these dilemmas in greater detail, examining how Zimbabwean civil servants navigate their roles in an increasingly authoritarian and neoliberal state.

The literature suggests that civil servants in such contexts can be categorized into distinct typologies based on their responses to state violence and neoliberalism. Some civil servants may align themselves with the state, viewing their role as a necessary defense of national sovereignty against external threats (Bilgiç, 2018). Others may adopt a more pragmatic approach, complying with state directives while privately harboring doubts about the ethics of their actions (Adaman, *et al.* 2018). Still, others may resist state policies covertly or overtly at significant personal risk (Nguyễn, Phelan and Gray, 2022).

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a detailed analysis of these typologies within the specific context of Zimbabwe. Literature underscores the complexities faced by civil servants operating within the intersecting frameworks of neoliberalism and authoritarianism. The dual pressures of these systems have transformed the role of civil servants from neutral administrators to critical actors in enforcing state policies, often at the expense of their own ethical and professional values. This literature review has highlighted the need for further research into the diverse ways in which civil servants navigate these challenges, particularly in authoritarian neoliberal states like Zimbabwe. The subsequent analysis in this study will build on these insights, exploring the specific experiences of Zimbabwean civil servants and the typologies that emerge from their interactions with the state.

7. Presentation of findings

The pivotal findings of this study are systematically categorized into distinct typologies that encapsulate the varied perspectives and lived experiences of civil servants in Zimbabwe. These typologies—The Patriotic/Africanist, The Neoliberal Compliant/Victim, The Fence-Seater, The Aloof but Knowledgeable, and The Inarticulate Civil Servant—illuminate the intricate ways in which these individuals navigate the complexities of their roles within an authoritarian regime shaped by neoliberal forces (see Table 1). Each typology is substantiated by analyzing their attitudes toward state violence and neoliberalism and their function within the governmental structure.

7.1. The patriotic Africanist civil servant

The study established that a group of civil servants strongly aligns with the state's narrative; they have been categorized as Patriotic/Africanist civil servants. The findings revealed that these groups of individuals believe that the African state must defend itself against Western neoliberalism, often through the use of state violence. As one participant articulates:

"I unapologetically reject the basis on which Western-led neoliberalism attempts to rationalize minimising the role of the state... because it would be the height of irresponsibility for the African state to leave its nation at the mercy of the same forces that colonized and plundered Africa."

Another participant also revealed that:

"I am always cynical about discourses of this nature because they tend to be based on (and driven by) Western notions of good governance, human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and all their purported altruistic motivations regarding the state's socio-political, economic and cultural organization. So, when I am asked how I view state violence in the context of a blatantly aggressive, hostile, and predatory hegemonic Western-generated phenomenon like neoliberalism, my instinct is to stand in favor of the African state's use of violence. This is because discerning postcolonial African leaders have long realized that this Western-driven neoliberal ideology tends to speak from both sides of its mouth."

Table 1. Typology of civil servants in Zimbabwe

Patriotic/Africanist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •- Supports state violence as a defense against Western neoliberalism. •- Views Western forces as imperialist and exploitative. •- Strongly nationalistic, prioritising African sovereignty in all respects.
Neoliberal Compliant/Victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •- Pragmatically accepts neoliberalism as an unavoidable global force. •- Criticises the state's use of violence as futile. •- Focuses on personal survival within the system.
Fence-Seater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •- Ambivalent, caught between conflicting loyalties to the state and awareness of neoliberal pressures. •- Recognizes the flaws in both the state and neoliberal forces. •- Feels trapped.
Aloof but Knowledgeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •- Deliberately detached from ideological conflicts. •- Focuses on personal survival and avoids political risks. •- Cynical about the outcomes of political engagement.
Inarticulate Civil Servant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •- Overwhelmed by the socio-political complexities. •- Feels disempowered and resigned to being a victim. •- Lacks a clear stance due to perceived helplessness.

This sentiment is deeply rooted in a historical consciousness of colonial exploitation, as highlighted by the participant's reference to the continued economic and political dominance of Western powers in postcolonial Africa. The participant's perspective echoes the literature, which discusses how African leaders often employ anti-imperialist rhetoric to justify authoritarian practices while protecting national sovereignty (Mlambo, 2021). This typology reflects a deep distrust of Western intentions, seeing neoliberalism as a new form of imperialism that necessitates a strong, sometimes violent, state response (Butler, 2018).

The participants' views align with discussions in the literature on how neoliberal policies are often perceived as undermining state sovereignty and enabling the exploitation of African resources by multinational corporations (Harrison, 2018). The use of violence by the state, in this view, is seen as a necessary evil to protect the nation from external threats, drawing on a postcolonial nationalist discourse that positions the state as the protector of African sovereignty (Mare, 2020). This typology thus highlights the role of ideological commitment in shaping civil servants' attitudes towards state violence and their perception of Western influence.

7.2. Neoliberal compliant/victim

The findings identify a group of civil servants categorized as Neoliberal Compliant/Victims, who exhibit a pragmatic acceptance of neoliberalism as an unavoidable global force while expressing disillusionment with the state's authoritarian responses. These individuals navigate their roles by prioritizing personal survival within a system they perceive as dominated by overwhelming economic realities, often viewing state violence as a futile attempt to resist the inevitable influence of neoliberalism. One participant expressed this sentiment:

"Neoliberalism is the undisputed reality of today's world... it is delusional to imagine that there could be an alternative force to challenge neoliberalism." This view reflects a resignation to the dominance of neoliberalism and a recognition of the limitations of resisting it, a theme frequently discussed in the literature on global economic governance (Zamchiya, 2020). For this group, the state's use of violence is seen not as a legitimate defense of sovereignty but as a misguided attempt to resist inevitable change.

One participant's critique of the state's reliance on violence, noting that "the African state is mired in the delusion that it can use violence to push back against the tide of neoliberalism," aligns with critiques in the literature that view state violence as counterproductive in the face of global economic forces (Dendere, 2019). This typology also reflects the frustrations of civil servants who are aware of the state's shortcomings, such as corruption and inefficiency, yet feel powerless to effect change within a system entrenched and resistant to reform (Ndakaripa, 2020). Their compliance is often motivated by survival rather than ideological alignment, highlighting the complex interplay between personal pragmatism and systemic constraints (Ruhanya and Gumbo, 2022).

7.3. The fence-sitter

The study identified some civil servants. The findings reveal a typology of civil servants identified as the Fence-Sitters, characterized by their ambivalence and uncertainty in the face of conflicting pressures from both the authoritarian state and neoliberal forces. The Fence-Sitter typology represents civil servants caught between conflicting loyalties and influences. These individuals, aware of the flaws inherent in both systems, struggle to align with or reject either side entirely. As one participant noted:

"The conflict between neoliberal forces and the African state has always left some of us unsure which way to go."

Another participant explained,

"To my mind, this creates an identity crisis for the African state. Because having gladly inherited its colonial master's socio-cultural, political, and economic structures, it finds itself operating pretty

much like the West. The West loves to lecture the African state on human rights, democracy, the rule of law, etc. And why shouldn't they? By clinging to their systems, we give them the message that they are our mentors; we look up to them. In that sense, when the West pushes the neoliberal agenda in the African space, I do not understand why the African state would suddenly want to push that back."

This group is characterized by their ambivalence, recognizing the flaws and failures of the state and the neoliberal forces but unable to align with fully. The literature reflects this ambivalence, noting how civil servants in authoritarian contexts often struggle to navigate their roles' moral and ethical dilemmas (Bond, 2019). The reflection by participants captures the sense of being trapped between powerful forces, a sentiment echoed in studies that explore the impact of global economic policies on local governance (Dube, 2021). This typology reveals the psychological and emotional toll on civil servants, who are aware of the broader political and economic struggles but are incapable of influencing the outcomes (LeBas and Young, 2023). The Fence-Sitter is thus emblematic of the broader societal conflicts and the internal struggles of those caught within them.

7.4. The aloof but knowledgeable

The findings highlight a distinct group of civil servants categorized as Aloof but Knowledgeable. They consciously detach themselves from the political and ideological conflicts that define the state's interactions with neoliberal forces. Despite their deep understanding of the complexities and risks, these individuals prioritize personal survival and distance themselves from the fray. They view active engagement as perilous and ultimately unproductive, opting instead to remain observant and uninvolved in the contentious dynamics between the state and external pressures. They are characterized by a deliberate detachment from the ideological and political conflicts that pervade the state and society. As one participant succinctly put it, "My position regarding the conflict between the African state and the forces of Western-led neoliberalism has always been clear – stay out of it; you get your fingers burnt, and the world will continue with business as usual." This perspective reflects a deep awareness of the stakes involved in political conflicts and a conscious decision to avoid engagement, recognizing the futility and personal risk associated with taking sides (Ruhanya and Gumbo, 2022).

The literature supports this typology by highlighting how some civil servants remain aloof in environments where state violence and repression are common, focusing instead on their personal and professional survival (Hodgkinson, 2019). This detachment is often accompanied by cynicism about the political process, as seen in the participant's remark about the futility of fighting in ideologically driven battles where both sides are "power-hungry monsters." Such a stance can be considered self-preservation in a highly volatile and dangerous political landscape (Bond, 2019).

Moreover, the Aloof but Knowledgeable civil servant is often aware of the broader historical and global context in which these conflicts occur but chooses to remain a passive observer rather than an active participant. This perspective is informed by a recognition that, historically, such conflicts have little regard for individual lives, reducing participants to mere statistics in the grander schemes of power and control (LeBas and Young, 2023). Therefore, staying aloof reflects a deep understanding of the risks involved and a calculated decision to avoid the personal costs of engagement (Dendere, 2019).

7.5. The inarticulate civil servant

The participants also demonstrated a typology of Inarticulate Civil Servants, characterized by their overwhelming sense of disempowerment and inability to articulate their positions within the socio-political landscape effectively. Often burdened by their environment's complexities and harsh realities, these individuals express a profound resignation to their circumstances, feeling that their voices and actions are inconsequential in the state's authoritarian and neoliberal dynamics. As one participant described:

"What do I think about the African state's use of violence in its effort to resist neoliberalism? I cannot quite say that because we ordinary people always make the ultimate sacrifice."

This typology reflects a profound disempowerment and frustration, where civil servants feel that their opinions and actions are inconsequential in the face of overwhelming systemic forces (Mlambo, 2021).

The literature describes such individuals as being caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and powerlessness, where their experiences of hardship render them voiceless in political discourse (Zamchiya, 2020; Dube, 2021). This resignation is further exacerbated by the perception that neither the state nor the neoliberal forces offer real solutions to their plight. The participant's lament that "we have always been victims, and that is what we will always be" captures this typology's deep-seated despair and cynicism. It also highlights the broader social and economic conditions that contribute to the inarticulate stance, as civil servants are often more concerned with daily survival than engaging in abstract political debates (Dube, 2021).

Furthermore, the Inarticulate Civil Servant typology reveals how systemic violence, and economic exploitation can strip individuals of their agency and voice, reducing them to passive sufferers of the socio-political environment. This aligns with the literature's discussion on how prolonged exposure to state repression and economic hardship can lead to a sense of helplessness and disengagement among the population (Ruhanya and Gumbo, 2022). For these civil servants, the complexities of neoliberalism and authoritarianism are too overwhelming to articulate, leaving them resigned to their fate as perpetual victims of the system (Ndakaripa, 2020).

8. Discussion

The findings of this study uncover how civil servants in Zimbabwe are shaped by the dual forces of authoritarianism and neoliberalism, which have reconfigured governance globally in the 21st century. Zimbabwe's civil service, far removed from Weber's ideal of neutrality, efficiency, and rule-based operation, now functions in a space defined by ethical dilemmas, professional compromises, and personal survival. The identified typologies—Patriotic Africanist, Neoliberal Compliant/Victim, Fence-Seater, Aloof-Knowledgeable, and Inarticulate—highlight how civil servants navigate this fraught terrain, reflecting broader patterns in authoritarian neoliberal states worldwide (Butler, 2018; LeBas and Young, 2023).

Recent studies emphasize that authoritarian neoliberalism thrives by concentrating power while enforcing market-driven policies exacerbate social inequalities (Bruff and Tansel, 2019; Fabry, 2018). This governance model paradoxically uses coercion to maintain order while promoting economic liberalization that undermines public welfare. In Zimbabwe, nationalist rhetoric underpins this framework, often portraying neoliberalism as an imperialist threat. The Patriotic Africanist civil servant embodies this ideological alignment, legitimizing state violence as a defense mechanism. Similar dynamics are evident in states like Turkey and Hungary, where nationalist narratives intertwine with neoliberal policies to consolidate political power while suppressing dissent (Aydın, 2021).

The Neoliberal Compliant/Victim typology reflects the pervasive sense of resignation among civil servants who pragmatically accept neoliberal policies while grappling with the ethical compromises this entail. This mirrors trends in other states where public servants balance their roles as policy implementers with their disillusionment over systemic failures (Ryan, 2018). For instance, in South Africa, studies reveal that civil servants tasked with enforcing neoliberal policies often find themselves complicit in perpetuating inequalities, leading to a moral conflict similar to that experienced by their Zimbabwean counterparts (Dube, 2021).

The Fence-Sitter and Aloof-Knowledgeable typologies reveal deeper fractures within the civil service, marked by ambivalence and detachment. Fence-Seaters embody the psychological toll of navigating conflicting loyalties to the state and neoliberal pressures, resonating with global accounts of civil servants feeling trapped between professional duties and political survival (Nowell et al. 2017). On the other hand, Aloof-knowledgeable civil servants reflect a strategic

withdrawal, a form of resistance that prioritizes personal survival over engagement with an inherently flawed system. These typologies underscore how authoritarian neoliberal regimes create a culture of disillusionment, further eroding public sector morale and effectiveness (Harrison, 2018).

Lastly, the Inarticulate typology sheds light on the societal conditions that disempower civil servants. Prolonged exposure to political repression and economic instability leaves individuals overwhelmed and voiceless, a phenomenon documented in several post-authoritarian states. In Zimbabwe, this manifests in a civil service characterized by passivity and a diminished capacity for critical engagement, raising concerns about the long-term implications for governance (Zamchiya, 2020).

These findings align with recent global analyses, which argue that the convergence of neoliberalism and authoritarianism undermines traditional governance structures, leaving civil servants at the mercy of systemic contradictions (LeBas and Young, 2023). Restoring Weberian neutrality, efficiency, and accountability principles in such environments requires addressing structural issues like political interference, corruption, and institutional fragility. Without such reforms, the civil service risks becoming a perpetrator of inequality and repression rather than a neutral executor of public policy.

9. Conclusion

This study reveals how civil servants in Zimbabwe navigate their roles under the intertwined forces of authoritarianism and neoliberalism, resulting in a significant departure from the Weberian ideal of a neutral, efficient, and rule-bound bureaucracy. By constructing typologies—Patriotic Africanist, Neoliberal Compliant/Victim, Fence-Seater, Aloof-Knowledgeable, and Inarticulate, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how these individuals grapple with ethical dilemmas, professional compromises, and systemic constraints. These typologies serve as a critical framework for examining civil service dynamics in states undergoing similar political and economic transitions.

The implications of these findings are profound. They highlight the urgent need for governance reforms to realign the civil service with neutrality, professionalism, and accountability principles. Structural issues, such as systemic corruption, political interference, and economic instability, must be addressed to ensure that civil servants can fulfill their roles as impartial executors of public policy. Reforms should also foster resilience among civil servants, providing them with the tools to navigate ethical challenges and critically engage with their professional responsibilities.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on governance and public administration by situating Zimbabwe's civil service within global trends of authoritarian neoliberalism. Similar patterns are observed in other regions, such as Turkey and Hungary, where nationalist rhetoric and neoliberal policies converge to reshape state governance (Aydın, 2021; Fabry, 2018). Comparative studies could expand on these typologies, examining how local socio-political contexts mediate the experiences of civil servants in diverse settings.

The study underscores the centrality of civil servants in shaping and responding to governance systems. Restoring the integrity of the civil service is critical for promoting effective, equitable, and accountable governance, particularly in states grappling with the challenges of authoritarian neoliberalism. Future research should prioritize understanding the lived experiences of civil servants, not only as policy implementers but as critical actors navigating the contradictions of modern state governance. Addressing these challenges is pivotal for ensuring that governance systems prioritize public welfare over state control, fostering trust and resilience in public administration.

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