



**Machinery of government change in South
Africa's post-democratic public administration.**

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Machinery of Government Change in South Africa's Post-democratic Public administration

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'Government is first of all a set of organizations', Richard Rose (1988)

Introduction

South Africa's public administration machinery underwent extensive organisational remodelling following the country's 1994 democratic transition. The structure of the country's bureaucracy under white minority rule was inordinately complex¹, driven by the illusory aim of providing designated racial groups with the political and administrative machinery to service the needs of their constituents. Despite the transition to a non-racial state machinery following the end of white minority rule, the organisational dimension of state 'transformation' – in the South African lexicon – has been largely overlooked, with the literature focusing on a host of more politically-sensitive issues such as personnel restructuring to promote racial representivity, service delivery analysis, and maladministration and corruption. In an effort to address this gap in the story of state transformation, I trace the structural evolution of South Africa's state machinery in the democratic period. I give an illustrative account of the organisational composition and lifecycle of the state's public administration, with a focus on national machinery. I also provide a narrative analysis of the political and policy drivers that have shaped machinery change since 1994. I find that the national machinery has been on an expansive trajectory, although with discernible variation in intensity across different presidential incumbents. Macro-organisational change has unfolded in the absence of a clear strategic blueprint, and in conjunction with a coherent programme of public sector reform. This has resulted in state machinery which displays ineffectual performance, appears ill suited to co-ordinating evolving policy demands, and, in more recent times, has become more acutely vulnerable to prevailing patronage demands.

¹ JCN Mentz (1993) illustrates South Africa's complex race-based state machinery under *apartheid*.

Conceptualising state machinery change

The literature on machinery of government examines the size, configuration and changing constellation of organisational units which make up a state's structural apparatus. Analysing the structural makeup of the state has typically encompassed questions about organisational size to manage policy workload, degree of differentiation or specialisation, as well as the mix of centralised versus decentralised structures (Peters, 1988; Radin, 1988). Understanding the makeup, arrangement and evolution of state machinery provides an important means for assessing a state's policy delivery capacity (Verhoest and Bouckaert 2005). Yet, this also varies a great deal across countries compared to shared policy problems and prescriptions; making it difficult to advance hard and fast principles about a state's administrative architecture (Davis et al 1999, 8).

One way of approaching the difficulty in drawing conclusions about the composition and vectors of state machinery change is to consider a set of motives behind re-organisation. Radin (1988) offers an informative categorical scheme which appears to transcend comparative boundaries, whilst also acting as a gateway into country-level experience of machinery change. He argues that there are seven interrelated reasons that can explain changes in a state's organisational structure. I surmise that four² of these may be pertinent to the South African case, and consider their merits. These include:

- Re-organisation as a surrogate for policy change
- Re-organisation as a response to public demands for change
- Re-organisation that imprints the agenda of new [political] actors
- Re-organisation based on private sector values

The motive for re-organising government machinery as a surrogate for policy change responds to the risk of unattainable expectations, when adjusting the goals or parameters of policy is politically untenable. Changing the machinery through which policy is implemented becomes the easier option to mitigate this problem. In this sense, re-organising the implementation machinery obviates the more politically difficult task of either altering policy goals or curbing expectations (Radin 1988, 67). There is a certain cosmetic element to this strategy, of electing to re-organise the machinery as a consolation move when substantive amendments to policies might deal more effectively with achieving desired outcomes. But, it does allow governments to be seen to be taking action. This can also contribute to sharpening the divide between policy and implementation, including notions of 'good' policy and 'bad' implementation, which has been a common refrain in public commentary and assessments of the South African state.

² I exclude re-organisation as 'diffused innovation', as 'improving policy technology', and as a 'drive for stability and conflict avoidance'.

Radin also highlights how changing the implementation machinery can affect the shape and dynamic of a government's organisational hierarchy, shifting from more centralised to decentralised structural arrangements. A related effect of structural change is that it can induce a tension between more or less organisational specialisation and, in the former case, the challenges of maintaining central co-ordination over a more diverse bureaucratic machinery.

Re-organising state machinery in response to public demands for change also enables governments to demonstrate immediate action, but unlike a surrogate for policy change, is employed when there is a greater likelihood that substantive policy adjustments can be effected. Radin (1988, 67, 68) notes that this is often attributed to crisis situations, where machinery change may be highly symbolic to public consumption, but may practically be employed as an interim or time-buying measure³ until state actors get a better handle on a policy problem, or to indicate that a policy issue is being given the necessary attention. Re-configuring the state machinery in response to public demands for change can also be viewed through a more corporatist lens, in response to the efforts of pressure groups which can more easily 'target' their policy agendas through reconfiguring ministerial/departmental portfolios (Peters, 1988: 33; Hood, 1979: 23).

Re-organising the state machinery in order to imprint the agenda of political actors recognises the appeal to new leadership incumbents of stamping their authority on the state (Radin 1988, 68). A key factor, in some of the comparative literature, behind departmental adjustments is the role of prime ministers as the executive head and convenor of cabinet, so the political prerogative and leadership style of these chief executives represent important explanatory variables (Aucoin, 1986; Pollitt's 1984 study of machinery change in the United Kingdom). The ability of new political actors to re-organise state machinery to bolster or reward partisans should also be considered part of a strategy to imprint their agenda (Hood, 1979: 23).

Finally, altering the state machinery based on private sector values aims to extract organisational efficiencies for more responsive public service delivery, by shaking up functionally complex, slow and costly bureaucracies (Radin 1988, 68). Although Radin's article predates the subsequent naming of this phenomenon as 'new public management', it otherwise reflects the sentiments of this doctrine, aspects of which called for the organisational break-up of state machinery into more specialised policy and service delivery entities. The machinery effects of instituting these kinds of private sector inspired reforms are well documented in the literature.⁴

³ Hood (1979, 7) also considers the cosmetic value of machinery change, as conveying the 'illusion' of substantive change with little direct connection to performance.

⁴ Examples include Boston's (1991) account of the Labour party's dramatic public sector restructuring of New Zealand's bureaucracy between 1984 and 1990; and Hamilton's (1990) analysis of the re-organisation of Australia's federal machinery in the context of wider public sector reforms.

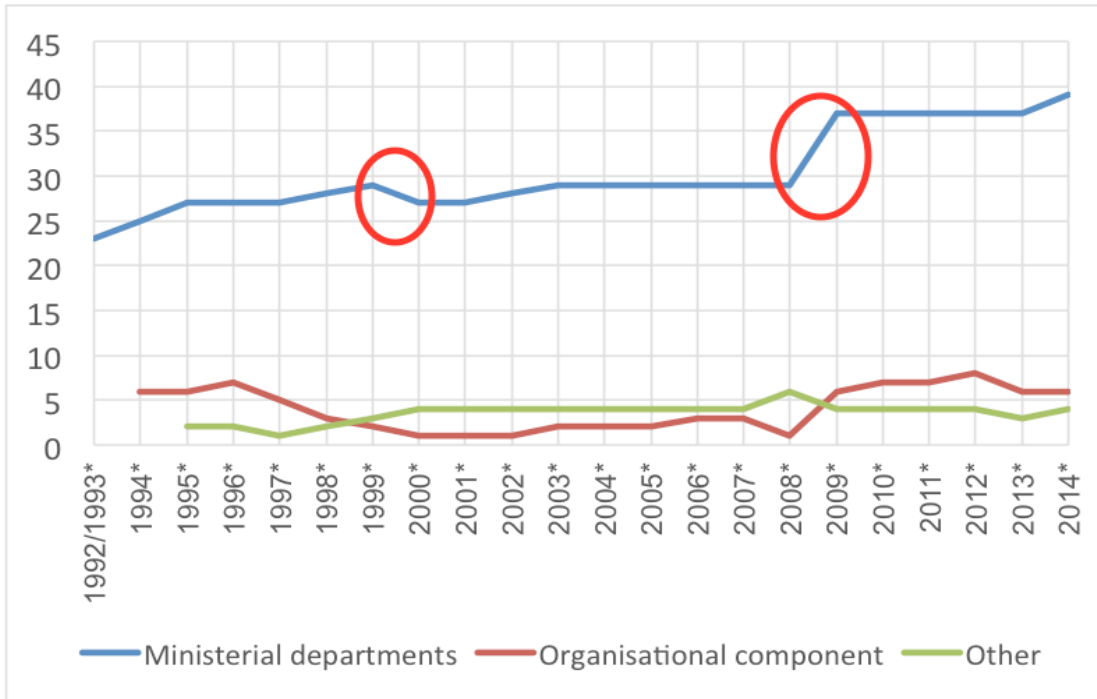
An accounting of state machinery change in South Africa

South Africa's state bureaucracy underwent an unprecedented process of machinery change and consolidation following the country's 1994 democratic transition. In an effort to track the shape of this change, I present an accounting of shifts in the population of national government departments. This is based on a timeframe that runs from just before the start of the democratic period, 1992/3, through to the start of the current presidential/parliamentary period: 2014. Structural change was tracked 'horizontally' (Laegreid et al 2003), entailing organisational changes on the same level. The unit of analysis is national government departments, with particular emphasis on the sub-set of ministerial departments. I show changes in the total number of departments in existence over the period, plot the life cycle of departments, and record the number and type of change events. I then give a narrative analysis of the policy and political circumstances under which machinery change occurred, and consider the potential motives by employing Radin's framework as a guide. The primary source of tracking data on organisational change was a year-by-year listing of national departments in schedules to South Africa's *Public Service Act* (PSA), compiled in an annual publication produced by Juta and Co. Ltd., a South African publishing house.

Changes to the organisational makeup of South Africa's national machinery are shown in figure 1. This reveals three discernible sub-periods between 1994 and 2014, which correspond with three distinct governing administrations under the leadership of Presidents Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, and Jacob Zuma, representing the African National Congress (ANC) party.

The first sub-period under the Mandela presidency followed the country's democratic transition in 1994, and saw notable fluctuation and incremental growth in the number of ministerial departments until 1999/2000. The second sub-period under President Thabo Mbeki witnessed a consolidation and subsequent stabilisation in the number of departments, followed by a dramatic increase by 2009, when Jacob Zuma assumed the Presidency. The third sub-period was marked by a punctuated increase in ministerial departments which, although subsequently stabilising, increased further in 2014. The net effect of these changes has produced an organisational population which has experienced sustained yet uneven expansion over the period.

Figure 1: Change in the number of ministerial departments and other organisational entities



Source: Juta's Statutes of South Africa (various years); Penrose Publishers (Not dated)

Figure 1 distinguishes the general trajectory of change by ministerial department and other non-departmental bodies, listed in schedules to the Public Service Act (PSA). The PSA is the primary legislation regulating the structure and functioning of public administration in South Africa. Organisations designated as 'departments' comprise the largest share. I have employed a more restricted definition of national departments compared to that listed in Schedule 1 of the PSA. I confine these to organisations with direct ministerial oversight and representation in Cabinet (i.e. ministerial departments). These are usually preceded by the prefix: 'Department of', although there have been exceptions as well as re-classification to other categories listed in figure 1.

The category, 'organisational component' (OC) is a separate scheduled grouping in the PSA, which comprises non-departmental bodies. Their number has shown greater fluctuation over the period, and similar to departments, saw a dramatic increase in number from 2009. This category, which changed to 'national government component' in 2008, appears to exhibit no legal, as opposed to categorical distinction, from national departments, based on the contents of the Act. However, organisational components differ from departments in a more practical sense. Firstly, OCs do not meet the standard of a department, or a body with direct ministerial oversight and representation in Cabinet. Secondly, OCs play an auxiliary role viz. national departments. For example, from 2008 they were listed with additional information: 'principal national department', which suggests that they perform a support role and operate in a hierarchical relationship to ministerial departments, enhancing the latter's organisational

tentacles and functional reach. The boundary between OCs and ministerial departments is however fluid, which probably explains the lack of legal distinction in the Act, resulting in cases where OCs have been re-classified to departments, and vice versa.

The 'other' category is a third grouping amongst the organisations classified as national departments in Schedule 1. According to figure 1, their number has also fluctuated but within a narrower band compared to OCs, and otherwise shows no clear trajectory of change. Unlike the distinction between national departments and OCs, there is no legal categorisation in the PSA for bodies that are neither ministerial departments or OCs, and so I have arbitrarily classified these organisations as 'other' if they did not fall into the category of OCs or otherwise meet the restricted definition of a ministerial department. Organisations designated as 'other' seem to represent a second tier of department, and also appear to consist of auxiliary structures that indirectly report to a Minister via a ministerial department, whilst not explicitly being listed as an OC. Having said this, re-classification between the 'OC' and 'other' categories is also common.

Another perspective on the trajectory of change is given in figure 2. From this vantage point, it is possible to track the life cycle of individual departments between 1994 and 2014. This follows an approach employed by Davis et al (1999) in their comparative assessment of machinery of government changes in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, between 1950 and 1997. They used a chronological flow chart to illustrate the life cycle and major change events in the history of individual departments. This was plotted on a timeline that also included the respective presidents in power at the time. I have used a simpler version of this chronological technique to show how the trajectory of population change across three governing periods translated into shifts at the departmental level. As with figure 1, the life cycle of national departments was tracked by comparing year-on-year listings in Schedule 1 of the PSA, published in *Juta's Statutes of South Africa*.

Figure 2: The life cycle of ministerial departments: 1994-2014

DEPARTMENT	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	<i>Period 1 Mandela Presidency</i>						<i>Period 2 Mbeki Presidency</i>						<i>Period 3 Zuma Presidency</i>								
Dept Agri	▶																				
Dept Agri Forest Fish																▶					
Dept Arts Cult Sci Tech	▶																				
Dept Arts Culture									▶												
Dept Science Tech									▶												
Dept Const Dev	▶																				
Dept Prov Local Gov						▶															
Dept Coop Gov																▶					
Dept Tradit Affairs																▶					
Dept Correc Serv	▶																				
Dept Education	▶																				
Dept Basic Educ																▶					
Dept Higher Educ Train																▶					
Dept Environ & Tour	▶																				
Dept Environ Aff																▶					
Dept Tourism																▶					
Dept Finance	▶																				
Dept State Expen	▶																				
Nat Treasury						▶															
Dept Foreign Aff	▶																				
Dept Inter Rel & Coop																▶					

DEPARTMENT	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
	<i>Period 1 Mandela Presidency</i>						<i>Period 2 Mbeki Presidency</i>						<i>Period 3 Zuma Presidency</i>									
Dept Health Welfare	→																					
Dept Health		→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Welfare		→	→	→	→	→																
Dept Social Devel							→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Home Aff	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Housing	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→							
Dept Human Settle																→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Justice	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→							
Dept Justice Const Dev																→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Labour	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Land Aff	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→							
Dept Rural Dev Land																	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Miner & Energy	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→							
Dept Miner Resources																	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Energy																	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Nat Intelligence	→																					
Nat Intell Agency		→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→							
State Security Agency																	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Pub Works	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
Dept Sport & Recrea	→	→	→	→	→	→																
Sport & Recrea SA																						→

DEPARTMENT	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014							
	<i>Period 1 Mandela Presidency</i>						<i>Period 2 Mbeki Presidency</i>						<i>Period 3 Zuma Presidency</i>															
Dept Trade Industry	▶																											
Dept Transport	▶																											
Dept Water & Forestry	▶																											
Dept Water Affairs																▶												
Dept Water Sanitation																					▶							
Defence	▶																											
Dept Milit Veterans																	▶											
Office of the President	▶																											
The Presidency						▶																						
SA Police Service	▶																											
Dept Safety Security		▶																										
Dept Police																▶												
Off Min Public Service		▶																										
Dept Public Service			▶																									
Dept Communications				▶																								
Dept Public Enterp				▶																								
Dept Perform Mon Eval																▶												
Dept Women Children																▶												
Dept Women																					▶							
Dept Econ Develop																▶												
Dept Small Bus Devel																					▶							
Dept Telecomm Postal																					▶							

In figure 2, departments are listed in chronological order of appearance in successive schedules of the PSA. A solid horizontal line with an arrow, set against a year-by-year timeline, is used to show the lifespan of a department in the period under study. The termination of a line denotes a major change in a department's operations, which could be due to a host of reasons that are outlined in figure 3. Unlike the chronological chart used by Davis et al (1999), which was used to track departments in three countries over several decades, I have not used symbols to represent major changes in the status of departments on their individual line. Instead, I have opted to terminate the line and show changes to a department's structure by including another line underneath.

Figure 2 shows the remarkable degree of organisational change in South Africa's bureaucratic machinery, in which only seven departments have been in continuous existence between 1994 and 2014. Figure 2 shows the extent of the restructuring which resulted in the rapid increase of departments in 2009 (period three, Zuma presidency). This cut across the functional spectrum, exhibiting a relative big bang effect in the initiation of new or restructured departments. The second period under the Mbeki presidency displayed a great deal more departmental stability, with the first period under the Mandela presidency showing mostly continuity in the transition to period two, with some but more limited departmental changes. While intra-period changes are more prevalent in period one compared to the two subsequent periods, they are also more dispersed, reflecting the more incremental year-on-year changes in departments during this time.

Figure 3 gives a breakdown of the types of changes sustained by departments over the study period. I employ a general classification scheme to denote change type which draws on work by Laegreid et al (2003, 9) on structural changes in Norway's state administration. In their research, the authors refer to specific categories of structural change to explain shifts in the population of civil service organisations. These include 'founding', 'dividing', 'merger', 'absorption', 'movement of organizations vertically and horizontally within the state apparatus'. I have adapted this scheme to describe the change events experienced by departments in South Africa, and tabulated the results across the three periods.

There were a total of 35 structural change events between 1994 and 2014. The spread of these events confirms the relative organisational stability of period two (6 events); the dramatic big bang organisational shifting which occurred in the first year of period three (15/20 events in total), and the more gradual spread of change in period one (9 events). There has been a propensity to experiment with new departmental configurations in the transition to new presidential incumbents, including in period one where the largest block of change events occurred at the beginning (1995, 4 events) and end/transition (1999, 3 events) of new administrations; whilst in period three change events were also confined to the transitional years of 2009 and 2014 respectively.

Figure 3: Departmental changes by number and type: 1994-2014

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	TOTAL	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	TOTAL	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	TOTAL	
TYPE OF STRUCTURAL CHANGE	<i>Period 1 Mandela Presidency</i>							<i>Period 2 Mbeki Presidency</i>							<i>Period 3 Zuma Presidency</i>										
Establishment/founding	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	5
Dis-establishment/ending	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Functional splitting/dividing	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
Functional consolidation/merger	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Absorption	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vertical movement	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Name change/functional alteration	0	1	1	0	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5	0	0	0	0	3	8
TOTAL STRUCTURAL CHANGE EVENTS	0	4	1	0	1	3	9	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	6	15	0	0	0	0	5	20	

The annotations in figure 3 confirm the general expansionary trajectory of the national machinery, where the most common forms of structural change have been the establishment/founding of new departments and the functional splitting or division of existing departments. Moreover, very little organisational contraction is evident, including dis-establishment, consolidation/merger or absorption, meaning that once a department is created, its organisational footprint continues into existence.

Although the establishment of departments either anew or through functional splitting account, collectively, for the largest share of change events (15), this is followed closely by changes involving departmental name changes/functional alteration, which accounted for the single largest type (14 events). Although this particular type of change does not directly affect the population size of the national machinery, it may otherwise be significant for gauging the level of policy or functional stability within the machinery. This type of change represented a variety of reasons.

In some instances, name changes/functional alterations seemed to signal a policy re-orientation in a department's mandate. In other cases it was unclear how name changes affected the functional mandate of a department: Department of National Intelligence Services to National Intelligence Agency (1995), the Department of Safety and Security to Department of Police (2009), the Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation to Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. In other instances, a change from the Office of the Minister for the Public Service and Administration to the Department of Public Service and Administration (1996) seemed to represent an organisational upgrade or departmentalisation of an existing ministerial structure. These might collectively be described as efforts to re-brand the machinery to convey a renewed commitment to existing policy issues, or to change the narrative of how the machinery responds to, and public perceives these issues. In other instances this type of change appears to have had a more substantive effect on the functional activities of departments, in either expanding or re-prioritising their existing policy activities.

In the next section, I will give a narrative account of the policy and political circumstances behind machinery change in the three presidential sub-periods.

Periodising state machinery change

Period one (Nelson Mandela presidency, 1994-1999): incremental expansion of the national machinery in a strategic vacuum

The first period of organisational change accompanied South Africa's transition to a non-racial democracy, and witnessed extensive organisational re-modelling between 1994 and 1996. This entailed the alteration, disbandment and creation of new departments. The net effect produced an expanded population of national departments. The thrust of what was meant to be a public sector

'rationalisation' drive, at least at the national level⁵, was therefore blunted by pressure to maintain continuity of public service delivery and preserve a stable organisational platform to scale up delivery to groups disenfranchised under *apartheid*. McClennan and Orkin (2009) have described the period 1994 – 1998/99 as the 'policy state'⁶, defined by wide ranging policy review and formulation, adaptation to a changed context, and making civil service training more needs and value-oriented. The motive for change appeared particularly sensitive to pent-up public demands. For example, splitting the Department of Health and Welfare to form two new departments to focus on each sector reflects the enormous upscaling of services demanded in both after 1994. This is evident in the significant budgetary allocation these two sectors continue to consume. The creation of departments responsible for Communications, Public Service and Administration and Safety and Security signalled the introduction of new policy and related oversight fields. In addition, pressure to expand the machinery was also arguably tied to prevailing political considerations, including inter-party power-sharing to secure a new constitutional order.

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (WPTPS), published in 1995, was the first major policy statement to outline a new set of values and objectives to guide post-apartheid bureaucratic change. The WPTPS employed the term 'rationalisation' to frame its discussion of organisational restructuring, which constituted one of the priorities for administrative transformation. The document is however perfunctory and ambiguous about the optimal size of a transformed organisational architecture, placing more emphasis on the process of organisationally integrating the country's various race-based structures into a unified system, than tying this process to any discernible end-goal. However, the rationalisation process elsewhere appeared to reflect normative aims, and exhibit sensitivity to prevailing circumstances, such as 'efficient' service delivery focused on 'integrated development', and a commitment to fiscal restraint and reduction in public expenditure. Any assumption that this might curb expansion in the number of organisational structures, at least at the national level, did not materialise in practice.

The White Paper effectively deferred the size and strategic configuration of the national department population. Its reference to a 'leaner' and presumably organisationally smaller public service, subject to fiscal constraints, was also jettisoned. It was evident in the discussion of rationalisation that the White Paper was seeking a delicate if not impossible balancing act between actions that 'promote efficiency, effectiveness and an unhindered continuation of services'. The latter signaled the significant pressure to expand the scope of the bureaucracy's activities in a non-racial democratic scenario. Another explanation for the apparent inconsistency between the language and outcome of organisational rationalisation is what seems to be the White Paper's conflation of structural and personnel changes. Much of the discussion about creating a leaner and more fiscally manageable administration is couched in human resource terms, including a reduction in the wage bill, and re-appraising post and staffing levels.

On face value the WPTPS fell short of offering a coherent strategy for organisational restructuring, although a more nuanced view suggests that the lack of coherence was a product of the White Paper's framing of rationalisation. The White Paper views rationalisation in more retrospective terms, which was probably in keeping with the imperative to unify a fragmented and

⁵ When changes in provincial and local government structures are taken into account, rationalisation did produce a significant reduction and consolidation in the number of organisational structures.

⁶ This label was used in the context of management development initiatives in the public service

racially stratified bureaucracy. This overshadowed and, together with the inordinately complex process of rationalising personnel, obscured efforts to prospectively determine an optimum organisational size and shape for the national machinery. But this does not adequately explain why rationalisation, in organisational terms, ended up not being rationalisation at all.

A Presidential Review Commission was convened only two years after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, with a mandate to investigate the early outcomes of administrative transformation. It was tasked with reviewing the structure and functions of each ministry and department at national and provincial levels. Its creation so soon after the initiation of large-scale organisational restructuring points to the magnitude and limited duration of the process, which effectively had to be concluded by 1996 (PSC 1997, 37). More critically however, it suggests that strategic considerations were in reality overtaken by operational continuity and political necessity. Essentially, the WPTPS seems to have deferred the formulation of a strategic blueprint for organisational change, an argument bolstered by the fact that its existence can be traced to the very recommendations of the WPTPS.

The Commission's approach to organisational review seemed to weigh more heavily on economic than political grounds. For instance, it employed language such as 'cost effective'; the 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' of service delivery; recognising a need to undertake re-organisation within 'macro-economic constraints'; and proposing organisational audits to determine 'optimal' staffing levels (PRC 1998, 19). The Commission (1998, 53) did however show that it was acutely aware of the political and operational circumstances confronting rationalisation. This included reserving ministerial and associated offices for members of minority parties, as well as members of the governing ANC and its alliance partners; and the argument that a large number of ministers and departments could enable the government to give focused and specialised attention to prevailing policy issues. This was also in keeping with Nelson Mandela's leadership style, which was characteristically inclusive, conciliatory and consensual. The scope of the policy demands facing a new ANC-led government together with prevailing political imperatives combined to produce a population of national departments which, as noted in figure 1, increased after 1994. But with the passage of time, the PRC felt able to offer a more pointed critique of the status quo, including a 'substantial' reduction of ministries and departments (*ibid.*)

The PRC's proposals for reducing the size of the national bureaucracy were bold, and can be separated into three options: the most significant of these was the integration/merger or combination of existing departments based on the desirability of functional complementarity, notwithstanding comparative lessons that organisational consolidation could displace rather than eliminate departmentalism tendencies (see Hamilton 1990). Options two and three were more conservative, including rendering some departments defunct by shifting functions to a larger and more capacitated Office of the President, and phasing out departments whose role was deemed redundant. The PRC's (1998, 61) critique also had an economic orientation, arguing that integration could result in more economical use of scarce management personnel. Hindsight would acknowledge the wisdom of the PRC's concern, given extensive vacancies of senior public servants being reported by most national departments years later (Naidoo 2008).

Period two (Thabo Mbeki presidency, 2000-2008): consolidation of the national machinery and a continuity of strategic dissonance

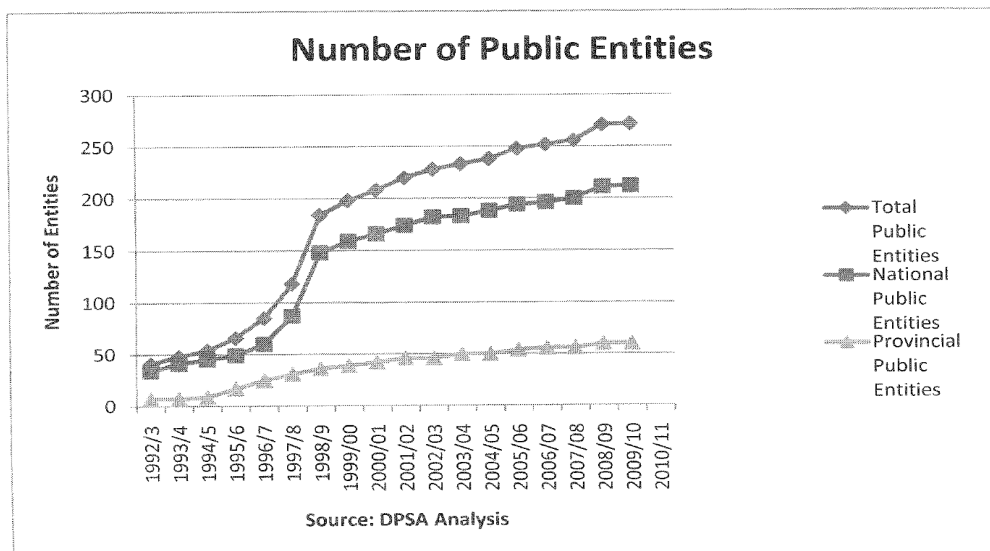
In contrast to the preceding period, the presidency of Thabo Mbeki saw only moderate alterations to ministerial departments with virtually negligible expansion, which essentially consolidated changes from the previous period. Booyesen's (2011, 369) characterisation of the Mbeki state as a 'period of fine-tuning' driven from the top, seems an apt description of the machinery over which he presided.

The Mbeki period was marked by political centralisation spearheaded by expanding the Office of the President and strengthening cabinet co-ordinating and policy oversight functions (The Presidency 2001). Gumede's (2007) account of Mbeki's attempt to 'modernize' the ANC in government suggests that it was based firmly on the incumbent's predilection for re-asserting policy control over the party and government machinery. Drawing on the modernisation efforts of other social democratic parties such as New Labour in the United Kingdom, Mbeki's capacity to effect control was bolstered by expanding and formalising oversight and co-ordination capacity in the Office of the President, which from 1999 departmentalised into the Presidency. One explanation for the level of organisational stability seen in the Mbeki machinery is that it suited and indeed facilitated the incumbent's penchant for tightening control over government policy, by moderating change and expansion.

Mbeki's efforts also display 'whole of government' (Christensen and Laegreid 2007) attempts to re-assert centrally orchestrated cohesion in government policy making, by instituting the 'clustering' of cabinet departments. However, the conventional response of whole of government interventions in countries which instituted public sector reforms was designed to re-assert political accountability from the centre over a more fragmented public sector machinery. This was not, though, a feature of the South African case. Whole of government measures were elsewhere implemented to address the accountability challenges of disaggregating conventional government departments by hiving off functionally-specific activities into executive agencies, and retaining leaner policy making departments. But, there has been little observable disaggregation in the internal structure of South Africa's national departments, which continue to resemble traditionally multi-functional entities. Instead, there has been a continuity of conventional departmental forms alongside a dramatic expansion in the number of non-departmental 'public entities', which merely mimic 'agencification' under public sector reform (see figure 4)

Figure 4: Growth in the number of 'public entities' in South Africa

Figure B: Growth in National and Provincial Public Entities



Source: Figure shared with the author by the Department of Public Service and Administration, 2011

The unconventional growth in public entities is also consistent with other analyses. Cameron’s (2009: 924) review of public sector reform/New Public Management in South Africa argues that agencification occurred in an ideological vacuum, where it was not primarily driven by efforts to cut costs, improve efficiency or enhance service quality, in keeping with the disaggregation motive. Instead, it represented a convenient means of circumventing existing organisational red tape. More pointedly, however, Cameron (2009: 923) also cited a government inquiry into public entities, which conceded that the establishment and review of these structures had occurred in the absence of any guiding policy framework. The stylistic character of getting the machinery to work in a more integrated and holistic manner, whatever the motive, otherwise corresponds with what Christensen and Laegreid (2007, 1061) describe as a hierarchical variant of an instrumental perspective, entailing expanding and strengthening the steering capacity of the centre of government.

Thabo Mbeki’s efforts to strengthen centralised steering of the cabinet and bureaucracy through a more powerful Presidency halted the expansion of departments seen in the previous period, but it did not reduce their number either, electing not to act on the PRC’s earlier preference for a reduced departmental population. This could be explained by a variety of factors, such as continuity of functional demands, stabilisation of the government’s policy agenda, political accommodation, or complacency and structural inertia. At the political level, it could be argued that Mbeki’s unwillingness to reduce the machinery was intended to moderate political pressures he experienced within the ANC, in response to criticisms of an increasing centralisation of power. Gumede (2007, 176) describes Mbeki’s cabinet choices as being self-serving: the selection of like-minded and partisan loyalists, but he adds that Mbeki was not unwilling to be accommodating when

the need arose, citing his second term picks, which suggests a tactical necessity of ensuring that the machinery could, when necessary, serve to curb internal dissent.

Whatever the mix of reasons, negligible growth in the departmental machinery along with efforts to strengthen centralised co-ordination did not yield negligible outcomes. Structural consolidation and efforts to strengthen policy co-ordination at the centre was unable to resolve a variety of deep seated problems, including structural misalignment with the government's policy orientation, departmental-level micro-politics, as well as structural inertia. In a retrospective review of public service transformation by the DPSA (2007, 44), organisational structures were described as being of 'generally ... poor quality', based on departmental capacity assessments undertaken between 2005 and 2007. This was further linked to restructuring exercises which appeared to happen in isolation from the strategic and functional agenda of departments, as implied by the following recommendation: 'when structuring or restructuring, [departments must] map their service delivery value chain, take into account their strategic plan and develop their organisational structure accordingly, ...' (DPSA 2007, 54).

Efforts by the Presidency to encourage greater inter-departmental co-ordination through initiating a 'Framework for Managing Joint Programmes', all but conceded that the departmental architecture which had evolved continued to be at odds with the integrated policy programming being introduced by the government. The Framework document described as 'fragmented' the manner in which departments rendered services (Governance and Administration Cluster 2005, 3). The cabinet 'clustering' of ministerial departments, which was part of efforts to enlarge and strengthen the Presidency, also appeared ineffectual by struggling to penetrate the operational level of departmental boundaries (The Presidency 2008). Everatt and Gwagwa (2011, 276) concurred with this assessment, but were more candid in their observation, describing 'Ministers, ministries and departments talk[ing] the talk of cooperation and coordination, but walk[ing] the route of autonomy and "non-interference"'. This also highlights the limitations of employing seemingly one-dimensional co-ordinating mechanisms driven by hierarchy to enhance policy capacity. In this regard, machinery change under the Mbeki period could be likened to Radin's description of re-organisation as a surrogate for policy change, with a focus on changing the implementation modalities of policy delivery. In this instance, the preferred approach was to institute new co-ordinating mechanisms at the centre of government. This is also consistent with McClennan and Orkin's (2009) description of a shift from the policy state to 'the implementing state' after 1999.

More pointed critiques of organisational restructuring were evident in other government sources, including a DPSA report, referring to two government studies in 2003 and 2005 which suggested that structural design was unduly influenced by patronage pressures. The development of organisational structures was said to be focused on the 'creation of posts' in contrast to the purpose and functions of departments, implying that post establishment, if not serving functional demands, was also prone to rational choice pressures or used to dispense patronage; structural design was also described as catering for particular individuals as opposed to departmental-wide interests, a more explicit reference to patronage motives; and inadequate attention was afforded to workload and the inter-relatedness of work in structural design (Pienaar and Geldenbloem Not dated, 41).

These observations, especially those suggestive of patronage motives, seems to correspond with the experience of public sector reform in other developing and newly industrialising countries.⁷

Period three (Jacob Zuma presidency, 2009 - 2014) punctuated expansion of the national machinery: strategic dissonance gives way to strategic incoherence

A third round of organisational restructuring followed the re-election of the ANC under Jacob Zuma, in 2009. In contrast to the preceding period, there was an immediate expansion in the number of ministerial departments, increasing both the size and diversity of the national bureaucracy. Curiously, this expansion also coincided with continued efforts to enhance horizontal co-ordination through stronger centralised steering. The new administration presided over a new National Planning Commission, a department responsible for performance monitoring and evaluation, and a more elaborate system of horizontal and vertical co-ordination backed by 'delivery agreements' and ministerial performance agreements (Kraak 2011; The Presidency 2009). The overarching narrative of the period was outlined in a long-term National Development Plan, which, building on the preceding period, stressed an increase in state capacity to expedite socio-economic progress: under the banner of a 'capable' and 'developmental' state. The Plan also highlighted unevenness in the capacity of government machinery, and reinforced the importance of policy co-ordination, remarking that '[t]he foundations have been laid, but weaknesses in how these structures function constrain the state's ability to pursue developmental objectives' (NPC 2012: 408). This signaled a more ambitious approach to improving implementation through re-organising the state machinery as a surrogate for policy change.

In contrast to the Mbeki period, which saw negligible growth in the number of ministerial departments, efforts to bolster the co-ordinating capacity of the Presidency occurred alongside an increase in their number, effectively diluting the impact of the former. The difficulty reconciling these crosscurrents have led some to discount attempts to enhance centralised steering, citing the disbandment of a key policy co-ordination and advisory office in the Presidency, and a more hands-off or light touch style of cabinet leadership by Jacob Zuma compared to Thabo Mbeki, which one cabinet minister supposedly described as "sweet anarchy" (Calland 2013, 52-53).

The rationale for expanding the number of ministerial departments was officially explained by the new Minister of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation, Collins Chabane (2009), which, based on Radin's framework, appeared to stress an implementation/surrogate for policy change imperative: '...the state is not positioned in a manner...to deliver efficiently on the priorities which have been identified'; and, '...whilst the ruling party has good policies as people say, but there is a problem with implementation of those policies'. Machinery expansion was primarily effected by re-modelling existing cabinet departments (e.g. adding, splitting and re-combining functions) compared to birthing new structures, which also increased functional specialisation within the national

⁷ Charles Polidano (1999, 16-17) has observed, with reference to public sector reform in developing countries, that administrative structures suffered from weak institutionalisation resulting in organisations prone to politicisation.

machinery. Unsurprisingly, most of the individual machinery changes explained by Chabane appeared to be driven by an implementation imperative: ensuring greater 'focus', 'capacity', and impact on existing policy areas.⁸ Expanding the machinery in this way, i.e. through functional re-location and altering its implementation modalities would be easier to effect because it is, arguably, subject to a lower policy rationale threshold than birthing new entities to pursue new functional priorities. It also imparts the impression or illusion of a responsive and focused state administration, as both Mathekga (2016, 34) and Booysen (2015, 103) have observed; whilst on the other hand, yielding quick political benefits for incumbents to maintain advantageous cabinet coalitions, as Zuma's multiple cabinet re-shuffling has shown.⁹

Conventional arguments in favour of functional specialisation were acknowledged by the PRC in the early phase of machinery change. However, the political value to Jacob Zuma in growing the machinery in this way is more than equally compelling. This is based on heightened patronage pressures exerted on him following an acrimonious succession from Thabo Mbeki. Booysen (2011, 383) and Calland (2013, 55-56) have both alluded to these patronage pressures, with the former describing Zuma's expanded cabinet as an 'inclusive and reconciliatory mechanism'; and the latter citing the 'many considerations', 'interests to balance', and 'favours to return' amongst the 'disparate ... coalition of forces' that helped Zuma supplant Mbeki.

I return to Radin's third motive behind state machinery change: new political leaders re-organising the bureaucracy to imprint their agenda, to consider how this provides a more meaningful explanation of machinery expansion in the Zuma period. This draws on Conor O'Dwyer's (2006) notion of 'runaway state-building', which recounts the experience of post-communist democratic transitions in Eastern Europe. O'Dwyer examines the relationship between an expanding state administration, emphasising personnel but also including organisational composition, and patronage-driven party re-building. He argues that runaway state-building is driven by elected officials who seek patronage resources for the purpose of party building (O'Dwyer 2006, 3). He argues that the process of re-making the state apparatus becomes fertile ground for new incumbent parties to entrench their grip on the state through patronage, and where state-building becomes intertwined with party-building (O'Dwyer 2006, 6).

O'Dwyer (2006, 1, 4) recognises that separating genuine state-building from runaway state-building is empirically difficult, requiring a disentangling of functional from political needs. But, he contends that cases of runaway state-building can be deduced from newly democratising states experiencing rapid expansion of their state administration without 'appreciable gains in ... effectiveness' and performance.¹⁰ Christopher Hood (1979, 23) also recognises the empirical difficulty of pinpointing a clear and measurable link between organisational structure and

⁸ The only exceptions, which seemed to reflect a public demand for change/policy reframing motive, were cases that did not result in direct machinery expansion: moving the fisheries portfolio to the Department of Agriculture, and combining environmental affairs with water affairs. The latter combination did not however appear as a distinct ministerial department in the PSA schedule for 2009/2010.

⁹ Van Onselen (2017) gives an illuminating illustration of this by unpacking Zuma's eleven episodes of cabinet reshuffling.

¹⁰ Data from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators rating of South Africa's 'government effectiveness', which measures bureaucratic quality and satisfaction with public services, shows that the country's rating tracked a generally downward trajectory between 1996 and 2015 (The World Bank Group 2014). Domestic data published by the DPME (2014, 90) also shows that public opinion of basic service delivery was on a downward trajectory between 2004 and 2011, showing only a marginal increase since.

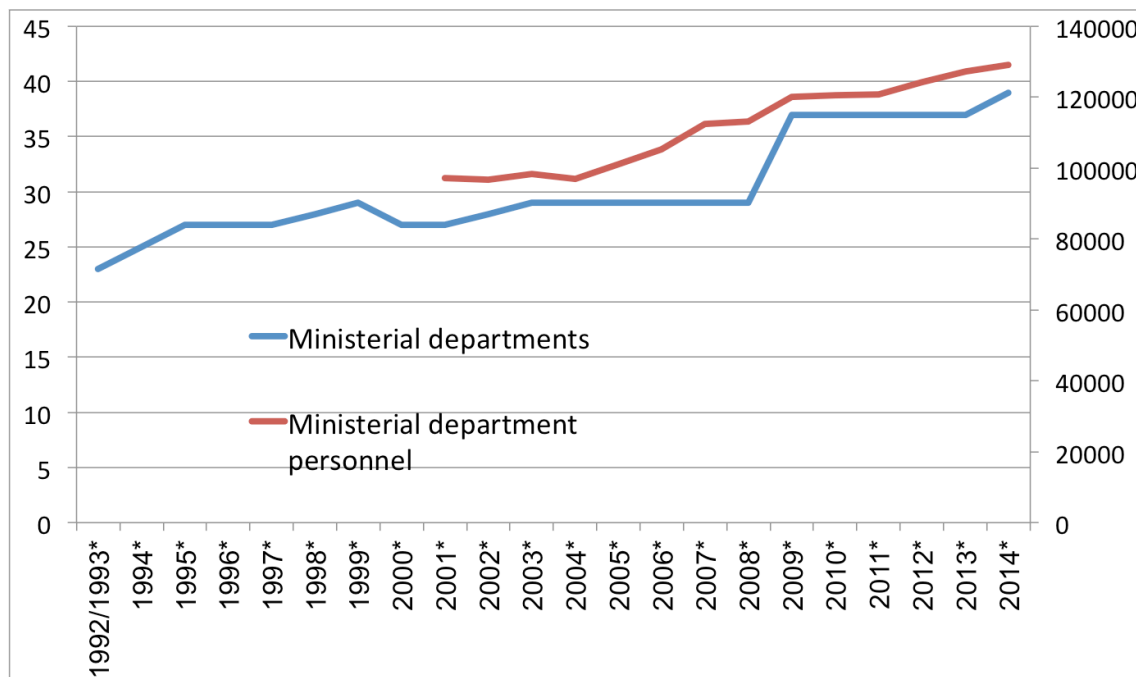
performance, but concedes that the distribution of ministerial/departmental portfolios due to 'internal politics', cannot be 'strictly divorced from performance'. This reinforces O'Dwyer's concern about the relationship between state machinery and internal party politics, and a hazy boundary between functional and political motives. Interpreting machinery expansion under Jacob Zuma as an example of runaway state-building captures how the incumbent has adeptly used state machinery to enforce his grip on the ANC.

Machine politics under Jacob Zuma

The relationship between the ANC and the state has, throughout the democratic period, been mediated by the party's explicit espousal of a policy of 'deploying' its members into state institutions. The assumption of political power attached great importance and urgency to deployment as a means of grafting the party's organisational principles onto the state apparatus. The party has emphasised the 'need to deploy cadres to various organs of the state, including the public service and to other centres of power in society' (ANC, 1997). This resembles the intermingling of state and party re-building described by O'Dwyer. However, the expansion of state machinery to accommodate the strategic deployment of partisan cadres to steer these institutions has displayed a particularly pernicious variant under Jacob Zuma¹¹; one that is also visible in *how* the machinery has expanded under his presidency.

¹¹ Booyesen (2015, 101-102) gives a telling portrayal of deployment under Zuma, describing it as a means to ensure 'compliance' both to the ANC, to the presidency and his 'personhood', and which – citing work by Beresford (2014), may also 'feed elite predatory needs'. This is also overlain by the 'state capture' narrative that has come to define the Zuma presidency.

Figure 5: Change in the number and personnel composition of ministerial departments*



*Source: DPSA based on PERSAL data; excludes Defence, South African Police Service, and State Security Agency. Also excludes non-ministerial departments as per author’s earlier categorisation

Figure 5 shows the number of people employed in ministerial departments alongside changes in the number of national departments across the three presidential periods under study. It reveals a steady growth in the number of people employed in ministerial departments from about 2005, with the steepest increase occurring prior to Jacob Zuma’s ascension to president. Moreover, the pace of personnel expansion appears to moderate since 2009, which stands in stark contrast to the abrupt and significant increase in the number of departments. This shows that machinery expansion under Jacob Zuma has not resulted in a bloating effect through massification of state functionaries. Instead, it could be argued that increasing the machinery population has enlarged the institutional scope of cabinet and related bureaucratic structures to enable Zuma to strategically orchestrate the placement and absorption of partisan loyalists to head up the machinery. For instance, describing the ‘institutional re-engineering’ in Zuma’s presidency, Booyesen (2015, 103) argues that reorganisation ‘...creates the space for the elites to play their presidential protection politics’, and ‘...also helps position compliant personnel...who are occasionally also good at their jobs.’ Calland (2013, 57) observed that growth in the number of deputy ministers was particularly high under Zuma, relative to Mbeki. Whilst expanding the machinery would have clearly facilitated this growth, he noted that these appointments often add little functional value, other than to ‘...provide the president with more opportunities for keeping people happy and dispensing patronage.’

There are other reasons to doubt the integrity of a functional rationale behind the machinery expansion under Jacob Zuma, even if driven mainly by an implementation/surrogate for policy change motive. Commenting on the 'continuous redesign' of government departments under Zuma, Booysen (2015, 103) contends that there is little evidence to show that policy goals could not, in the absence of new departments and re-arranging other departments, be equally achieved with more attention directed at existing institutional arrangements. Mathekga (2016, 33-34) advances the same point, critiquing Zuma's machinery expansion by arguing that it has ignored substantive assessments of the policy performance of machinery already in place.

Individual examples of machinery change under Jacob Zuma also casts doubt about the functional value of expansion. The creation of a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is a case in point. Kraak (2011) cites the comments of Blade Nzimande, incoming Minister of the DHET, who pointed to the policy void which his new department sought to fill by forging a closer link between education and training, which previously poor co-ordination between the existing departments of Education (DoE) and Labour (DoL) had failed to accomplish. The Minister highlighted this failed co-ordination in his remarks: '...institutional interests and the tendency of government departments to think rather narrowly about their own responsibilities militated against a close cooperation...' (Nzimande 2009 in Kraak 2011, 354). Such remarks do more to elicit questions about how and why efforts to improve co-ordination by strengthening the Presidency and cabinet decision-making, which transcended both Mbeki and Zuma, had failed and were seemingly destined to be unable to overcome the longstanding impasse between DoE and DoL, thereby necessitating a new structure in the DHET. The justification for creating a new ministerial department therefore appears inadequate, in view of the circumstances, whilst risking further fragmentation amongst the bureaucracy's skills development institutions. In addition, whilst the higher education funding crisis that emerged in 2015 breathed new life into the DHET's role, Zuma's apparent sidelining of the department as well as the National Treasury in unilaterally announcing the government's intention to fund free higher education for poor and working-class students, otherwise seems to have damaged the policy advisory and planning credibility of the department. (Paton, 2017)

Questions have also been raised about the creation of the Department of Economic Development (DED), also established in 2009. The DED's role has been subject to more pointed critique since its inception, which unlike the DHET's creation, which was premised on filling a policy gap, has seen its policy relevance questioned in the midst of existing economic policy departments. This included reports that a failure to clarify the respective roles of the Finance Minister and Minister of Economic Development had adversely affected preparation of the government's budget and sown confusion about which ministry should assume leadership over macroeconomic policy (Rossouw 2010). Some commentators even opined that the DED should not have been created in the first place¹²; that its existence stemmed from rewarding ascendant union interests within the ANC's political alliance¹³ following the party's 2007 elective conference, and that the DED created duplication with the existing Department of Trade and Industry (Qobo 2011). In the lead up to the 2014 national elections, reports suggested that the DED might be eliminated from the new cabinet

¹² Mathekga (2016, 35) makes this point.

¹³ Ebrahim Patel, a union leader within the ANC/COSATU alliance was appointed Minister of Economic Development.

after having to 'fight for space alongside bigger and more influential departments, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry' (Magubane, 2014).

In more recent cases, the Ministry and Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) which came into being after the re-election of Jacob Zuma in 2014, has sustained similar questions about its functional relevance. In its annual cabinet report card, the *Mail and Guardian* (2014) newspaper argued that despite a previously fragmented response to small business policy housed in both the DTI and DED, the creation of a new entity which has, since 2014, been led by Zuma loyalist, Lindiwe Zulu, could invite the risk of further duplication. The paper also acknowledged 'reports of a turf war' between the three departments in the early months of their relationship. Nearly two years after its creation, the DSBD faced criticism by a parliamentary committee for exhibiting confusion and uncertainty about some functional tasks assumed from and shared with the DTI (PMG, 2016). The creation of a new Ministry and Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services in 2014 also evoked initial 'confusion' amongst policy stakeholders, including how functional activities established by the existing Department of Communications would be parcelled out (Donnelly, Steyn and Holmes, 2014).

Conclusion

South Africa's state machinery underwent considerable restructuring between 1994 and 2014, marked by the shifting parameters of an increasing population of ministerial departments. A mixture of situational and political factors have contributed to the changing size and form of the national bureaucracy, which have been distinctively shaped by individual presidential incumbents. Re-configuring the national machinery as a response to public demands for change appeared prominent in the policy-reform era of the Mandela presidency. Incremental expansion, despite the moderating language of 'rationalisation', was promoted by the imperative of fostering inclusive multi-party and intra-ANC interest accommodation within the state.

The transition from a policy to an implementation-oriented state, resembling Radin's description of re-organisation as a surrogate for policy change, accompanied the Mbeki presidency, which was marked by organisational consolidation and relative stability. Thabo Mbeki's approach to dealing with implementation problems, notwithstanding its questionable efficacy, favoured re-organising cabinet co-ordinating machinery with minimal alteration to ministerial departments. The abrupt expansion of ministerial departments following the succession of Jacob Zuma, despite renewed efforts to bolster central co-ordinating capacity through a continued emphasis on implementation, appears to have been driven more acutely by patronage motives, in an effort to consolidate a critical mass of constituency support within the ANC.

Re-organising the national machinery on the basis of private sector efficiency values has achieved little traction in South Africa, despite the language of public management reform permeating the transformation agenda. South Africa has demonstrated only a tenuous commitment to public management, or 'new public management' reform, which in practice has exhibited a confusing and directionless mix of traditional management control and unconsummated reform

measures (Naidoo 2015). This was most visibly shown in how agencification, or expanding the number of non-departmental entities, occurred outside of the conventional logic of reducing the organisational scope of ministerial departments, which underwent no significant change in organisational form.

Beyond the saliency of these general push factors behind state machinery change, what significance might be gleaned about the trajectory and shape of machinery expansion? The evidence suggests that South Africa's state machinery is not so much functionally overstretched, in scope, but functionally splintered. This draws on, but deviates from Fukuyama's (2004) description of the propensity of developing countries to sustain bureaucratic bloat by pointing to a trade-off between the 'scope' of a state's functional activities, and its 'strength' or capacity to execute these activities. He argues that developing countries have generally opted for state machinery that service relatively extensive functions inadequately, rather than servicing a more limited set of core functions effectively. Functional splintering will inevitably lead to organisational expansion, but it does not necessarily result in the state expanding its scope of activities. So, the issue may not be the breadth of functional demands being piled onto the machinery, but the substantive benefits of functional splintering or re-location in a scenario of declining bureaucratic performance.

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