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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Strategizing under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism

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Abstract

This study employs a single embedded case study design to investigate strategizing processes under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism. Drawing from a blend of secondary and primary sources, including semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, we harness thematic and narrative qualitative analysis for generating knowledge about strategizing processes under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism, as apparent in an African public sector context, through the study of the case of The Gambia Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. The article contributes to understanding the dynamics of strategizing processes, offering insights that can enhance strategizing practices in similar contexts.

Evidence for practice

- Strategizing processes under combined conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism display distinctive traits whose knowledge may enable the development of strategizing practices.
- The presence of traits of the Weberian bureaucracy in an African public sector context provides a shield to internal "political interferences" and can enable a public organization to better resist external pressures from donors and other stakeholders and build long-term institutional capacities.
- Strategizing processes and practices should be understood as lived experiences beyond a set of tools, considering the role of emotions and moral discourses in how strategies are crafted, negotiated, and implemented in public sector organizations.
- In the public sector in Africa, interpersonal dynamics mediated by ethnic consociationalism and joking relations contribute to shape high-level strategizing functions.

INTRODUCTION

This study takes the theoretical angle of the strategizing theory in public management (e.g., Bryson, 2021; Bryson et al., 2018), and it investigates strategizing processes under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism, as apparent in an African public sector context. The case of The Gambia Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (henceforth MoBSE) is studied through a theory-building approach to gain insights into the dynamics of strategizing processes under conditions of combined presence of traits of the Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism. African public bureaucracies, including the Gambian public sector, tend to be perceived, portrayed, and studied in a negative rather than constructive way, including through neopatrimonialism—which is the view of African states as allegedly deficient, corrupt and dominated by patronage, due to their (alleged) distance from Western administrative models (Blundo & Le Meur, 2008; Crook, 2010; Willott, 2014) and characterized by low political will and overstaffing (Crook, 2010, pp. 479–480). Such a view makes it

difficult to appreciate their distinctiveness and effectiveness. Nevertheless, MoBSE, as a revelatory case study, has been sampled because, according to consistent evidence, it has been able to thrive and enhance its institutional legitimacy among local and international stakeholders. This makes it an interesting and suitable case to illuminate how it balanced pressures to exploit the benefits of Weberian bureaucracy and strategic management approaches and the need to adapt bureaucracy to the local culture and norms, and political and economic challenges.

Our research focuses on how strategizing occurs in a context characterized by the coexistence of elements of the Weberian bureaucracy (whose features include: legality as the basis for administrative action and rules-based administration of the office; a centrality of hierarchy as the main coordination mechanism; the separation between office and officeholding; the occupation of office based on expertise and training; protection of employment from discretionary appointment—Weber, 1978/1922; see also du Gay, 2000 [pp. 1–12 in particular]; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022 [pp. 4–5 in particular]; Sager & Rosser, 2021) and elements of strategic planning (a structured approach to enable decisionmakers in organizations to set goals and align capabilities)—Bryson, 2018—intertwined with mechanisms associated to ethnic consociationalism (which can be defined as a governance mode for the state or other political communities which is based on power-sharing arrangements promoting intergroup cooperation and preventing dominance by any single faction in a society which is characterized by internal divisions along ethnic or other—religious, linguistic—lines, and which preserves a relative stability due to consultation among the elites of these societal groups, see Lijphart, 1977; also McGarry & O'Leary, 2006).

Our study addresses the following research question: *how does strategizing take place in organizational settings characterized by both traits of the Weberian bureaucracy combined with elements of managerialization, and forms of ethnic consociationalism?* The aim of our study is theorizing from the findings of the empirical investigation of MoBSE for furthering our understanding of strategizing processes under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism, a condition which is relevant to many non-Western public organizations in the world. This is a theoretically significant object of inquiry, and one which, to our knowledge, has not been investigated in the otherwise growing literature on strategizing, to which our study contributes.

THEORETICAL BACKDROP

Strategic management can be considered one of the theoretical approaches and repertoire of management tools of enhanced applicability for public service organizations (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022, 1–27 in particular), partly due to advances in the academic field (Bryson, 2018; Moore, 1995),

and partly through policy changes, notably managerialization reforms that have had (controversial yet) transformative effects on the public sector in a number of jurisdictions across the world.

The field of strategic public management has developed and evolved significantly in recent decades (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022; Greve & Ysa, 2023), and it has shifted its attention from a more static focus on strategic planning and implementation as a formal multi-stage cycle toward a more dynamic, political and decentered understanding of strategy, which has been elaborated also through the development of the concept of strategizing (e.g., Bryson, 2021; Bryson et al., 2018). This evolution is significant because any analysis of strategic public management cannot be oblivious to the political nature of the strategic processes and practices in public organizations (Mulgan, 2009) and should consider the need for ongoing adaptation to changing political, social, and organizational environments. Importantly, strategic public management also considers how external influences (such as donors and international organizations) and internal actors (e.g., elected officials and street-level bureaucrats) interact in strategizing. This approach implies a move beyond merely focusing on planning to also emphasize implementation styles and their alignment with the strategic goals and context of the organization (e.g., Andrews et al., 2011). According to Bryson and George (2020, p. 2) "strategizing implies the deliberate as well as emergent (re) alignment of aspirations and capabilities, thus making sure that aspirations can actually be achieved—or else need to be changed—by taking into account current capabilities and the possible need to develop new ones." This definition contains key terms that require deeper exploration. The focus on deliberative efforts points to the collective sense-making endeavors embedded in strategizing, where the concept of sensemaking enhances our understanding of strategizing by providing a framework for examining how individuals and groups within organizations interpret and construct meaning around strategic issues (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015). Key applications of sensemaking in strategizing include considering the role of strategic conversations, interpersonal dynamics, emotions, temporal analysis of strategy, narratives and discourses, materialities, and tools. The concept of strategizing points to any entity for which aspirations and capabilities need to be aligned, and it consists of all the activities through which an entity and/or individual(s) try to achieve a series of pre-established objectives by using the resources available in the most efficient and effective ways and by continuously adjusting this endeavor in a co-evolutionary mode according to the circumstances and events happening in the environment where this endeavor takes place. This understanding of public strategy enables to acknowledge the importance of emergent strategies and the role of leadership and entrepreneurship in exploiting opportunities for change and learning.

According to Bryson et al. (2022), the work and the processes through which strategizing takes place are particularly suited to being explored from a strategy-as-practice (SAP) perspective. SAP, as a distinct conceptual approach to understanding strategic management, is based on the idea that strategy is not something public organizations have but something they do (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Jarzabkovski, 2005). SAP implies an evolution in understanding strategic thinking and action, which shifts the focus from formal plans toward how strategizers act and interact, the focus being on "how to do strategy" (Whittington, 1996, pp. 731–733). Moving from a focus on plans and policies to actors and interactions implies not only looking at the intrinsic planning in the strategy but also looking at how managers, politicians, and consultants act and interact in the entire strategy sequence with a shift from the "what" to the "how" to make strategy.

SAP views strategy as enacted through the daily activities of the organization's members (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Institutional contexts are indeed shaped and reshaped by strategic practices (Lê et al., 2013), and this is even more important when considering public strategy processes (Alford & Greve, 2017) where there might be distinctive institutional norms, discourses, and rules on strategic practices in public organizations (Lystbæk et al., 2017).

This approach contrasts with traditional top-down or bottom-up perspectives and emphasizes the activities and practices to be adopted at the micro level, involving continuous interactions and vertical and horizontal coordination not only by top managers but also by middle managers and street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Balogun & Rouleau, 2011; Jones & Hoop, 2017; Livijn, 2019; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010; Rouleau et al., 2015; van Rensburg et al., 2014).

SAP contributes to the understanding of strategy in public administration by illustrating how strategic practices are embedded in the day-to-day actions of public managers and how these practices shape organizational outcomes. Samra-Fredericks (2003), through a focus on real-time interactions, highlighted the importance of context, communication, and the social construction of meaning in strategy formulation, which are often overlooked in traditional strategic management frameworks, underscoring the role of emotions and moral discourse in influencing strategic direction, and suggesting that effective strategizing is not merely a rationalistic process but also a deeply human endeavor. However, existing studies of strategy in public organizations have largely been biased toward rationalistic and Western-inspired approaches. Despite a growing body of literature, there has been little exploration of how strategizing occurs across different rationalities of performance and success—key constructs in the strategy field—particularly within the context of developing countries. In such settings, Weberian bureaucracy intersects with ethnic consociationalism, where strategizers often align with distinct ethnic groups driven by shared cultural identities and historical bonds. In this respect, SAP may be an especially apt theoretical lens to shed light on and better understand the dynamics of strategizing in a context such as the African public sector, where the influence of such actors like elected officials as well as officials and consultants from "outside" organizations like, notably, international organizations (both governmental and non-governmental), may be especially significant, thereby bringing center-stage core and often neglected issues in studies of strategic public management, namely the tensions that might originate from the clash of political and managerial logics in the processes of strategizing.

METHODOLOGY

Our research strategy is a single embedded case study approach focusing on the case study of The Gambia MoBSE, with the purpose of theorizing the strategizing processes occurring under conditions of both traits of the Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism. The importance and suitability of MoBSE originates from the presence of traits of the Weberian bureaucracy alongside "modern" management tools and logics, notably strategic planning. MoBSE is also the largest civil service organization in terms of headcounts in The Gambia, owing to its country-wide coverage. Besides, MoBSE has been the most impacted public sector organization by the legacy of the colonial period as well as contemporary international donors influence (both being key drivers of foreign and western-originated administrative and management concepts and models in former colonies and donor-dependent countries) due to its status as the first government department to be established by the colonial administration (Bouy, 2019) and high dependence on external donor funding (MoBSE, 2016).

Its relative success among Gambian public organizations and similar organizations in West Africa, and its high legitimacy among politicians, international donors, and partners (Barma et al., 2014, pp. 73–83) is also a key consideration for its selection as case study. Besides, MoBSE's status as a central government public sector organization and related likely limited strategic space could also provide insights into how it has been able to address such challenges. Furthermore, one of the researcher's familiarity with the case, ease of access to, and availability of considerable secondary data were also factored in selecting MoBSE for this study. Study's data are secondary (existing gray and academic literature) and primary (semi-structured individual and group interviews and observations) and are part of a larger study on the influence of the Gambian context on decision-making in the MoBSE.

The study population comprises MoBSE's key stakeholders, including central and regional level staff, education service provider apex bodies' officials, teachers, civil servants, elected public officials, and relevant civil society

TABLE 1 Sources of primary data.

Ref.	Participant	Type of organization	Designation	Data collection method
1	Senior internal stakeholder 1	Ministry (regional education directorate)	Director	Interview
2	Senior internal stakeholder 2	Ministry (headquarters)	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Interview
3	Senior internal stakeholder 3	Ministry (regional education directorate)	Principal Education Officer	Interview
4	Senior internal stakeholder 4	Ministry (headquarters)	Principal Assistant Secretary	Interview (2—includes follow-up interview)
5	Middle-level internal stakeholder 1	Private basic cycle school	Headteacher	Interview
6	Middle-level internal stakeholder 2	Grant-aided upper basic school	Headteacher	Interview
7	Middle-level internal stakeholder 3	Government senior secondary school	Deputy Headteacher	Interview
8	Middle-level internal stakeholder 4	Government senior secondary school	Headteacher	Interview
9	Middle-level internal stakeholder 5	Government lower basic school	Headteacher	Interview
10	Middle-level internal stakeholder 6	School cluster	Cluster Monitor (Education Officer)	Interview
11	Middle-level internal stakeholder 7	Grant-aided lower basic school	Headteacher	Interview
12	Middle-level internal stakeholder 8	Government lower basic school	Headteacher	Interview
13	Middle-level internal stakeholder 9	Private senior secondary school	Headteacher	Interview
14	Middle-level internal stakeholder 10	Grant-aided basic cycle school	Deputy headteacher (2)	Focus group discussion
15	Middle-level internal stakeholder 11	Government upper basic school	Deputy headteacher (2)	Focus group discussion
16	Lower-level internal stakeholder 12	Grant-aided lower basic school	Teacher	Interview
17	Lower-level internal stakeholder 13	Grant-aided lower basic school	Teacher	Interview
18	Senior external stakeholder 1	Government department	Director	Interview
19	Senior external stakeholder 2	Non-governmental organization	Chief Executive Officer and Former Senior Staff of Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education	Interview
20	Senior external stakeholder 3	Government department	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Interview
21		Government department	National Assembly Member	Interview

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Ref.	Participant	Type of organization	Designation	Data collection method
	Senior external stakeholder 4			
22	Senior external stakeholder 5	Education service provider apex body	Education Secretary	Interview
23	Senior external stakeholder 6	Education service provider apex body	Secretary General	Interview
24	Senior external stakeholder 7	Education service provider apex body	Former Education Secretary	Interview
25	Middle-level external stakeholder 8	Education service provider apex body	Coordinator	Interview
26	Stakeholders (direct observation)	Coordination Committee Meeting—the sector's largest, bimonthly, rotational stakeholder consultative forum	Various education stakeholders and categories	Observation (over 48 h/6-day period)

actors. The researchers selected and interviewed research participants based on their knowledge and experience of the decision-making processes and practices of MoBSE. Hence, former staff of MoBSE and key stakeholder organizations were included in the study sample to illuminate the broader case study context and the logics behind strategizing processes and practices. The study sample was purposive and saturated to ensure that all key issues were discussed and observed (Bell et al., 2022; Fletcher, 2017).

Specifically, further to conducting five face-to-face pilot interviews (two senior and one middle-level staff and two senior external stakeholders in October 2019), the researchers adopted the participant as observer role (Bell et al., 2022) during the Coordination Committee Meeting (CCM), a bimonthly, rotational, and largest decision-making forum of MoBSE, which was held in Farafenni, Regional Education Directorate Three, from September 30 to October 5, 2019. Witnessing the strategizing processes of the CCM (including policy and project implementation updates from various departments and stakeholder organizations, school visits to one of the randomly sampled schools, and presentation of school visit reports by various teams) provided the researchers with first-hand information and experience on its decision-making processes and practices and opportunity to identify, meet informally and arrange meetings and interviews with potential participants.

After this event, 23 interviews were conducted over a period of 3 months—from November 2019 to January 2020. These comprised 19 semi-structured personal face-to-face interviews, two focus group discussions, and two remote follow-up interviews. The interviews lasted between 20 and 90 min and were guided by an interview guide and audio recorded with the prior consent of participants. Audio recordings were transcribed manually, and interview transcripts anonymized in line with the ethical principle of confidentiality. NVivo 12 was used for organizing, coding, and aiding the thematic analysis of the study data. Table 1 summarizes the sources of primary data collection methods used, while Table 2 reports on the documents cited in this text. The questions that guided individual and group interviews were aimed at drawing insights on strategizing in a context largely influenced by political and societal-cultural considerations. Specifically, respondents were asked about strategizing practices and praxis, including HR and communication procedures, what cultural factors influence strategic planning and education service delivery, and how colonial legacy had influenced the structure of the Gambia primary and education sector. The researchers obtained formal approval from The Open University, UK—Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/3257/Applicant: Sampierre Mendy). The HREC application included participant's information sheet, interview, focus group and observation forms, data collection guide, and approval letter from the case study organization. The participant's information sheet and consent forms provided detailed explanations and assurances on key ethical issues, including participant recruitment, informed consent, confidentially and data security issues—storage and processing and dissemination of research findings. Furthermore, specific organizational approval was obtained to attend and observe MoBSE's CCM, which is a public forum (open to all education stakeholders and the public).

For improved quality of research results, the research employed two complementary qualitative data analysis strategies: qualitative thematic and narrative. The qualitative thematic strategy (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Turner, 2010) was used to identify the key themes presented in the findings section. This was achieved using Braun and Clarke's (2012, pp. 60–69) six-stage method to conducting thematic analysis—the stages being familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The narrative strategy,

TABLE 2   Documents cited in the text.

No.	Gray literature on the Gambia and Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education
1	Gambia Bureau of Statistics. 2013. "Census 2013 – Access to Information and Communications Technology." Accessed 10 May, 2021. https://www.gbosdata.org/downloads/8-2013-population-and-housing-census-reports
2	Gambia Bureau of Statistics. 2013. "Census 2013 – Spatial Distribution Report." Accessed May 21, 2021. https://www.gbosdata.org/downloads/8-2013-population-and-housing-census-reports
3	McMath, A. M. 1943. *Report on Infant and Girls' Education Together with Additional \notes on Re-organization of Boys' Education in Bathurst by Director of Education and a Despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*: Sessional Paper No. 4/1943: The Government Printer
4	Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education and Higher Education Research Science and Technology. 2016. "Education Sector Policy 2016–2030." Accessed August 20, 2019. http://www.edugambia.gm/data-area/publications/policy-documents/256-education-policy-2016-2030-web-version/download.html
5	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. 2015. "Coordinating Committee Meeting" Accessed December 20, 2020. http://www.edugambia.gm/ccm/c-c-m
6	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. 2015. "Joint Donor Review and Supervision." Accessed 30 July. 2021. http://www.edugambia.gm/joint-donor-review-and-supervision/joint-donor-review-and-supervision
7	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. 2017. "School Management Manual for Lower Basic, Basic Cycle and Upper Basic Schools: Revised Version 2," Banjul, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education
8	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. 2019. "Education Statistics Summary Report 2019." Accessed May 26, 2021. http://www.edugambia.gm/data-area/reports/education-statistic-report/330-education-statistics-summary-report-2019/download.html
9	Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. 2022. "Year Book 2022." Accessed September 24, 2022. http://www.edugambia.gm/data-area/publications/year-book-2022/770-yearbook2022/download.html
10	Basic and Secondary Education Act. 2018. National Assembly of the Republic of The Gambia
11	Education Act. 1992. National Assembly of the Republic of The Gambia
12	Children's Act. 2005. National Assembly of the Republic of The Gambia. https://extranet.who.int/mindbank/download_file/4891/c1402811e75bcdc1379e7341cb558c033699a852
13	Constitution of The Republic of The Gambia. 1997. National Assembly of the Republic of The Gambia. https://www.assembly.gm/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CONSTITUTION-OF-THE-GAMBIA-1997.pdf
14	Sarr, A. L. I. E. U., and S. Y. Hydara. 2005. A situational analysis of education in the Gambia. Save the Children. Ahttps://nsagm.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/0/3/12030125/gambia_education_situation_analysis_stc_2005.pdf
15	Sleight, G. F. 1965. Educational planning mission: British Eastern Caribbean Group – (mission) August–November 1967: A Survey of Education in The Gambia. Accessed 20 December 2019. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000003308?posInSet=4&queryId=N-EXPLORE-80a49630-612a-43af-8ea2-9b271f44a93c
16	The Economist. 2020. "Africa's population will double by 2050." Accessed August 15, 2023. https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/03/26/africas-population-will-double-by-2050
17	United Nations Development Programme. 2024. "Human Development Index: 2023/2024 Overview." Accessed September 12, 2024. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24overviewen.pdf
18	United Nations Development Programme. 2007. "Public Service and Institutional Development Project." Accessed September 12, 2024. https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/GMB/Signed%20Pro%20doc%20Public%20Service%20Reform.pdf
19	World Bank. 2006. "Basic Education Support for Poverty Reduction Project." Accessed 12 September, 2024. https://www.google.com/url?sa=j&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdocuments1.worldbank.org%2Fcurated%2Fen%2F895661468032130934%2FProject0Inform1tage010110April02006.doc&uct=1707817857&usg=EEDSXmcDv8CnnDpnvBgDEkQZ3VE.&opi=89978449&ved=2ahUKEwiT7PvEwMCIAxX3BfsDHZfnHTcQwtwHKAB6BAgBEAE
20	World Population Review. 2023. "Gambia population 2023 (Live)." Accessed October 22, 2023. https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/gambia-population

a process-type data analysis approach, was also utilized due to its appropriateness for contextual research and ability to provide a detailed and accurate account of the causal mechanisms of decision-making processes.

CASE STUDY: THE GAMBIA MoBSE

The Gambia is the smallest country in Mainland Africa, with a population of about 2.8 million people and land size of about 11,000 square kilometers (World Population Review, 2023). Despite its relatively small size, it is highly diverse in ethnicity, religion, and culture. According to the 2024 United Nations Development Program Human Development Report (2022 statistics), The Gambia ranks 174 out of 189 countries, making it one of the least developed countries globally (United Nations Development Programme, 2024).

After gaining independence from Britain in 1965, The Gambia passed through different political regimes, and notably, it was under a military regime between 1994 and 2016, following up a coup that toppled the then

President Dawda Jawara (who had been in charge since 1965). It is at the time of writing a multi-party democracy with a presidential system of government. Like its former colonial master, Britain, it implements tripartition of powers in the form of the executive, legislative, and judiciary. The high concentration of power in the Gambian presidency makes the Gambian bureaucracy, especially central-level civil service organizations such as MoBSE, prone to politicians' intervention in bureaucratic decision-making. On the other hand, a number of factors—including the introduction of a merit-based system (civil service entrance examination by the colonial British administrators), the requirements of external donors-driven education policy promoted by UNICEF and UNESCO since 1965 (Sleight, 1967), the intervention of skills and capacities building for core staff in policy planning and budgeting occurred in the 1980s (Alvesson & Viñuela, 2014), and Gambia's regulatory changes (including Basic and Secondary Education Act, 2018; Children's Act, 2005; Constitution of The Republic of The Gambia, 1997; Education Act, 1992) aimed at promoting equal treatment in education service provision to its relatively high ethnically and economically diverse population and to reduce stakeholder interference especially from politicians and international donors—may have reduced the potential for elective officials influence on bureaucratic-level decision processes in MoBSE.

Various factors have contributed to the consolidation of strategic management, especially the strategic planning approach, in the Gambia public sector. Initially, after independence, formal policy and strategic planning in the Gambian education sector were heavily influenced by international donors, including UNESCO and UNICEF, through such funding as the development of Gambia's first comprehensive education policy (Education Policy 1965–1975) (Sleight, 1967). Strategic planning has remained, with subsequent education policies, including the Education Sector Policy 2016–2030, having been translated into strategic plans for improved education service delivery. Also, strategic management was further consolidated in MoBSE through the implementation of the DFID-funded Basic Education Support for Poverty Reduction Project on participatory school management (World Bank, 2006). Regarding the Gambian public service in general, it was mainly in 2010 that the Gambian public sector witnessed high adoption of formal strategic planning through the implementation of the United Nations Development Program and Spanish Thematic Trust Fund-sponsored Public Service Reform and Institutional Capacity Development Project (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). This led to the development of strategic plans for 10 government institutions.

The suitability of the MoBSE as a revelatory case study stems from several elements. First, it is the largest civil service organization in The Gambia. Besides, it has been the most impacted by colonialism and international donor influence (key drivers of foreign and western-originated administrative and managerial models in former colonies and donor-dependent countries like The Gambia), due to its status as the first government department to be established by the colonial administration. International stakeholders such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and DFID (through the Basic Education for Poverty Reduction Project) pressured for the (further) introduction of both elements of the Weberian bureaucracy and for the adoption of managerial approaches in MoBSE (Sleight, 1967). Notable initiatives include the formulation of the first comprehensive education policy (Education Policy 1965–1975) and its successor policies and strategic plans, including the current Education Policy 2016–2030, and the introduction of managerial approaches by means of interventions like the development and implementation of the school management manual (minimum performance standards and school management committees) in Gambian schools (MoBSE, 2017). Approaches to strategic planning were further consolidated over the past two decades as both international donors and key decision-makers, like former President Yahya Jammeh, were enthusiastic supporters of this managerial approach.

The Gambian education system has witnessed some notable changes since Western education was introduced by Christian missionaries in the colonial era. There are two main categories of basic (nursery and primary) and secondary education institutions by management type: public (government and grant-aided) and private (conventional private schools and Madrassahs). Grant-aided schools are comprised mainly of Christian missionary schools governed by their own Board, but that receive subventions from the government in the form of teachers' salaries and school development grants. Madrassahs refer to formal Islamic Arabic education institutions that use Arabic as a medium of instruction and offer among the core subjects: English, Mathematics, Social and Environmental Studies, and Science (MoBSE, 2017, 2019; Sarr and Hydara, 2005); although they receive grants from government and the salaries of English teachers are provided by MoBSE, Madrassahs are privately owned and managed. The sector's performance has registered significant achievements in many areas including access, enrollment, and gender equality (MoBSE, 2022).

FINDINGS

Using the qualitative thematic analysis approach, we generated the following key themes, which shed light on strategizing practices and can pave the way for some broader considerations about strategizing under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism: (i) strategizing can enable law-abiding behavior and resisting unlawful and policy contravening executive directives and pronouncements; (ii) managing MoBSE—donor relations; (iii) exploiting and navigating societal culture to increase stakeholder cooperation. We also

observed a related theme, namely (iv) how the procedures, institutionalized venues, and tools of strategic planning have created opportunities for strategizing by key actors.

Theme (i): Strategizing can enable law-abiding behavior and resisting unlawful, policy-contravening, and ill-informed executive directives and pronouncements

During the former regime (1994–2016), the operating environment was quite challenging for civil servants in terms of law abidance. Senior external stakeholder 3 lamented that "*prior to the new dispensation in January 2017 [change of regime], we all experience how bad it was. Anyone can be appointed to any position, but people can also be dismissed anytime. So civil servants were living in fear of being dismissed at any point in time because the regulations guiding people's termination were not respected.*" Despite these challenging circumstances, several civil servants were able to cope. MoBSE also benefited from being spared from high-level dismissals as none of its three ministers (all female) were fired during that period.

> "If you look at the former regime, with all the sackings of ministers, no education minister has ever been sacked [in MoBSE]. The same goes for the permanent secretaries. This is because the ministry is well-grounded with systems. Whoever comes the first reference point are the Act and the policies. They work within that."
>
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

Overall, according to our interviewees, MoBSE has been able to perform relatively well in terms of compliance with the law and challenging ill-informed executive directives/pronouncements despite the autocratic tendencies of the former president, Yahya Jammeh:

> "They are really doing well and of course recently, the Public Service Commission started their dialogue with ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) and the first port of call was MoBSE because it is a big ministry, but also, because it has been gauged as a model ministry in terms of how they manage their ministry. They are not perfect, but they are doing very well, and we urge other ministries to emulate them."
>
> (Senior external stakeholder 3)

While this could be attributed to several reasons, the significant level of (Weberian) bureaucratization has been a key contributing factor. Weberian bureaucracy provided an enabling condition for this to occur, and also that this

enabler was triggered by agential action by tenured officials unfolding through strategizing dynamics. This was also highlighted by Senior external stakeholder 2, who compares MoBSE to other administrations and notices:

> "The other thing is that he would go with a notion that something is possible and would want to go far as making it policy or a ruling. And the sector that the issue concerns will not have the courage of going to him and presenting him with a detailed piece of analysis and evidence that would advise him against that. I will give several examples of where we challenged him and he had to back out and because of that, he ended up having very high regard for us and our minister. Because, whatever we tell him, we will provide the evidence and it will be the truth. There is nothing in it that will be of personal or political interest."
>
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

MoBSE successfully challenged these policy contravening directives and pronouncements by relying on legal and policy provisions and by engaging and presenting the former President with factual evidence. Examples are provided by Senior external stakeholder 2 to demonstrate how MoBSE handled these policy-contravening directives and pronouncements, including:

> "The first time he wanted to introduce scholarship for all the girls, he wanted to make an announcement. My minister said to him: can you wait for us to know what exactly is involved? The minister called us, and we had the data, we just made a simple table showing the number of girls in each region, how we are spending on their books, school fees, etc. It was faxed to her, and she took it to him. When she gave it to him, he said no! no! no! we cannot afford this, let's shelf it for now. If she had told him at that time for him to realise that it was not possible, was that not going to create a problem for her? I can give you several others. But we were always prepared for him to give us our termination letters rather than putting ourselves in a situation where we will be attempting to do what is not feasible or not possible."

Overall, adherence to organizing prescriptions of the Weberian bureaucratic model, which has to some extent penetrated the ministry, has enabled MoBSE to resist political pressures and attenuate interference, which has enabled the execution of national education policies and plans and improvement public governance (see Appendix S1 for details about key events and processes,

and stakeholders). This has increased the status of MoBSE among Gambian public organizations and its legitimacy vis à vis its stakeholders, especially politicians and international organizations (Alvesson & Viñuela, 2014).

Theme (ii): Managing MoBSE—Donor relations in a relational way and dealing with the power imbalance

Like many developing African countries, The Gambia is highly dependent on external donor funding to implement its development programs. The high significance of donor funding to The Gambia's national development is perhaps most evident in MoBSE, as it is the biggest governmental department. About 80% of the sector's capital expenditure is provided by external donors (MoBSE, 2016): these include individual and family-run charities like MRC Holland Foundation, which is currently "*the main sponsor of classroom construction and furniture in the education sector in The Gambia*" (Middle-level internal stakeholder 15). Managing such a high level of financial dependence has challenging implications, which most external stakeholders regard as disadvantageous to the Gambian national interest and educational needs because of the relationships of dependence on external donors that it engenders and a consequent risk of reducing ownership of public policies. The following interview excerpts summed up some of these sentiments:

> "I think there is some support from international bodies like the World bank, IMF and others. Because, when they talk about these standards, they would tell you if World Bank heard this. I am not sure how much the World Bank is giving to the ministry. So, meeting the minimum standards is looked up with a view to what would be the impression given to these international bodies. Are we ourselves or are we trying to keep up to standards because of the World Bank?"
> (Senior external stakeholder 5)

While they acknowledged that external donor interests and stringent funding access and management mechanisms have some adverse effects on Gambian public sector organizations, including MoBSE, most of MoBSE's senior staff hold a somewhat different view. They attributed the continued dominance of some Gambian public organizations to inadequate organizational capacity and goal clarity:

> "All international funding agencies have their strings, but you have to know your situation and how to negotiate. If you are able to bring all your needs to the negotiation table – tell them this is what I can and cannot do. If they

are going to support you, they will."
> (Senior internal stakeholder 1)

> "I have seen some of my colleagues in government tell me donors are dictating to us. If you ask them: what did you present to them? If you look at it, you will realise that no donor will want to put their money in such a project in the way it is presented. So, it like failing even before you start. You need to be able to put your case in a manner that sits well with the policy you want to implement. That was how we were able to manage these donors."
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

The following situation recounted by a senior stakeholder seems to corroborate the above approach to donor management:

> "I remember even telling a Japanese donor at the time we wanted to build classrooms in the rural areas – Region 3, 4, 5 and 6 and of course the Fonis which is part of Region 2. This guy came and said to us the money they have available can only be used in the urban area. We said to him we don't need that because our conscience would not allow us to be putting up classrooms in the urban areas when their need is in the rural areas. He left and went away."
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

MoBSE's relatively high performance as compared to its Gambian public sector counterparts and like-minded organizations in the sub-region (Barma et al., 2014) is partly due to its strong capacity in donor coordination, resource mobilization, and program supervision (Alvesson & Viñuela, 2014). This has helped bridge the wide government funding gap and improve education services, thereby enabling to expand and improve education access and quality through improved resource mobilization (further analysis of key events and processes is reported in Appendix S1). This has also endeared MoBSE to its principals, stakeholders, and clients. Specifically, it was compatible with the former president's (Yahya Jammeh) development priorities and had helped increase his regime's legitimacy. Hence, his non-interference and public praise for the public sector, specifically MoBSE (hence enhancing its legitimacy), despite his autocratic tendencies.

Given the crucial role of donors in the Gambian basic and secondary education sector, MoBSE undertakes joint donor program reviews and supervision missions every 6 months as part of its strategic planning. This aims to, among others, increase collaboration, reduce duplication, harmonize procedures, reduce transaction costs, and enhance overall coordination and synergy among donors for improved achievement of policy and strategic plan

objectives (MoBSE, 2015). While recommendations from joint donor reviews and supervision meetings feed into mid-term education policy and strategic plan reviews, there is flexibility to enable simultaneous formulation and implementation of emerging, urgent, and important issues. These policy and strategic plan formation processes are highly collaborative and include national and regional conferences and are attended by all relevant stakeholders including teachers, parents, and students.

Theme (iii): Exploiting and navigating cultural expectations to increase stakeholder cooperation

Elements of the Weberian bureaucracy have combined with features of the local context in The Gambia. For example, educational staff, especially teachers, have had to accommodate the local cultural norms and practices and exercise flexibility and leniency when dealing with issues such as absenteeism, softening and accommodating the prescriptions of formal regulations to the specifics of the circumstances, in order to address culturally embedded expectations:

> "Here, you have different ethnic groups and each of them have their own norms. You have to accept some of their culture. Like some children that come to school with a type of haircut. They have just been circumcised. You have to accept them like that for the period. Because they will tell you, this is our culture."
>
> (Middle-level internal stakeholder 7)

Given that it is widely practiced among Gambians and its high effectiveness in increasing cooperation and dispute/conflict resolution, education authorities and service providers have occasionally exploited the so-called "joking relations" between communities and ethnic groups to increase community acceptance and cooperation. It also enabled school headmasters to use joking relationships to engage them in a frank discussion of sensitive and problematic issues affecting the school:

> "If I can cite one example like Kanilai. The headmaster there is a Serer. So, he took that relationship card between Serers and Jolas. So, he is well accepted in that society. Because all the time, he will tell them that I am your king and they will say no, you are our slave or things like that. So, that man is really accepted, and I think that has really raised the level of cooperation from the parents and that school did very well in this academic year."
>
> (Senior external stakeholder 5)

The effectiveness of the joking ties between the Serer and the Jola (fourth and fifth largest ethnic groups in The Gambia, respectively) is caused by the belief that the two ethnic groups share a common ancestry, as outlined in the literature:

> "The dangkuto [strong mutual obligations] between Jola and Serer with an account of a time when their progenitors were traveling in a boat and a storm caused the vessel to split. One passenger floated away with part of the boat and landed in a forest, thereby founding the Jola ethnic group. The other passenger drifted with the rest of the vessel toward a riverine delta and evolved into the Serer ethnic group."
>
> (Davidheiser, 2006, pp. 838–839)

Because of this, hurting behaviors or displaying by involved parties of an unwillingness to grant favors to each other group are frowned upon, or outright disapproved.

Another cultural adaptation of the "impersonality" predicated by a strict interpretation of Weberian bureaucratic features is related to the practice of purposefully posting teachers to their native communities in order to help address low community cooperation and student academic performance. The usefulness of this practice stems from their familiarity with the local context and high respect accorded to elders and teachers, especially in rural communities where traditional norms and values are still strictly followed. Strategizing practices co-evolve in sync with deep-rooted cultural expectations, which are permeated by the forms of ethnic consociationalism that structure societal dynamics in The Gambia. We can observe here a "transformative effect" on the Weberian bureaucracy, making it depart from how it is assumed to operate in a (simplified, stylized, and idealized depiction of) the "western context": going by the book and the depersonalizing that is assumed to bring about such outcomes of a Weberian bureaucracy like compliance with the law, impartiality in treating citizens, efficiency in executing public services—are at least partly reversed through exercise of discretion and highly interpersonal relations; yet, crucially, the same outcomes are ultimately attained. Consociational dynamics—crucially: the mechanism of joking relations connecting tribes—de-depersonalize the Weberian bureaucratic model; however, strategizing under forms of ethnic consociationalism enables to attain the outcomes a Weberian bureaucracy is expected to perform (compliance with the law, impartiality in treating citizens, efficiency in executing public services) through different mechanisms to those assumed to be at work in the Weberian bureaucracy in the (stylized and idealized) "western context." Embedding key features of the Weberian bureaucracy into MoBSE has provided guardrails against unruly and opportunistic

behaviors as well as, crucially, dictated outcomes to be attained, thereby empowering social actors minded to achieve them. Yet the means to attain such outcomes are different to a Weberian bureaucracy in a Western context: they occur through high levels of interpersonal relations as enabled by societal dynamics, most notably the social mechanisms wrought out over the centuries in the Gambian context to enable appeasing and smoothing inter-tribal relations (which in this context shape primary social identities).

We now turn to observe another aspect that has arisen from the experience of MoBSE: how the procedures, institutionalized venues, and tools of strategic planning have created opportunities for strategizing by key actors.

Theme (iv): Formal strategic planning and strategizing

MoBSE is distinctive not only for its Weberian traits but also for its managerial elements. MoBSE has long been adopting a formal strategic plan, and a strategic planning approach has infused its organizational routines. This is because education policy planning started before independence (McMath, 1943) and witnessed a high adoption after independence through the development of the education sector policies. However, the first education strategic plan was developed in 1995 following a mid-term review of the 1988–2003 education policy. The adoption and consolidation of the strategic planning approach has significantly influenced the organizational structure, planning cycle and strategic management processes of MoBSE. As regards its organizational structure, MoBSE has a dedicated planning structure: the Planning, Policy Analysis, Research, and Budgeting Directorate. Correspondingly, MoBSE's policy and strategic planning cycles are long-term oriented, and its strategy formulation is separate from implementation, and it is highly formal as well as participatory. The current education sector policy and strategic plan (2016–2030) spans 15 years.

Another major driver of strategic planning in the Gambian public sector was its appeal to the then President, Yahya Jammeh, and to the National Assembly (Public Accounts Committee and Public and Enterprises Committee). Thus, while strategic planning was enforced in many Gambian public organizations through executive and parliamentary directives, it was encouraged as a best practice in MoBSE.

MoBSE's strategy formation process is highly participatory and includes holding regional and national forums with a range of stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of education to national development and diversity and inclusion to creativity and innovation, these strategy formation forums are attended by all relevant stakeholders:

> "We have regional and national conferences. In our national conference, schools are represented. They select their representative and send them to regional conferences. They come there with their issues."
>
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

In its quest to ensure that Gambians from all walks of life are included in these consultations,

> "people who have issues but cannot attend can write and send these to the regional offices. They will express their ideas in terms of what they want the education sector to look like or do."
> (Senior external stakeholder 2)

This relatively high level of organizational diversity and complexity including conflicting interests of stakeholders comes with its challenges. Senior external stakeholder 1 notes that "*over the years, MoBSE has become sort of the most sought after. Why? Because they are in charge of education and everybody wants their sector to be reflected in the education system. The last time I even heard someone saying they should introduce swimming in schools because people are dying in the sea from drowning. This is just to give you an idea of the expectations.*" Hence, "*the participation of all stakeholders in education was central in the policy dialogue process*" (MoBSE, 2016, p. 2) and has led "*to ownership*" (Senior internal stakeholder 4). At the level of the sector, policy, and strategy implementation is carried out through service-level agreements between education staff and operational plans at the directorate, department, cluster, and school levels. Due to their importance in education policy and strategy implementation, schools are required to develop school annual improvement plans and budgets:

> "At the beginning of every term before you do anything, you must prepare your plan for the whole year. From there, you have your action plan, and this is prepared every term, you have the duty roster where each teacher has a role to play and so forth."
>
> (Middle-level internal stakeholder 11)

School improvement planning "*helps the SMT/SMC [Senior Management Team/School Management Committee] balance the individual school's needs with national priorities.*" (MoBSE, 2017). These plans are implemented in collaboration with key local stakeholders, regional education directorates, and key government departments such as The Gambia Public Procurement Authority and financial institutions (banks and credit unions). This has enabled the execution of national education policies and their alignment at the local level. The reference to the School

Management Manual 2017 for school planning and performance management indicates the significant influence of this approach in decision-making in MoBSE. Key strategy evaluation mechanisms in MoBSE include its bimonthly, rotational, and largest stakeholder forum, CCM, Joint Donor Reviews and Supervision Missions, mid-term education policy reviews, and quarterly and annual school improvement grant reports to regional education directorates.

Introduced in 1996, the CCM is a body in charge of providing a sector-wide policy assessment forum on the level of achievement of the national and international education policy goals and commitments including Education for All goals (MoBSE, 2015). This bimonthly rotational (held across the six education regions) meeting is highly diverse (it includes all key stakeholders, including education managers, planners, civil society organizations, politicians, statisticians, donors, school heads, researchers, politicians, and parents, Alvesson & Viñuela, 2014, p. 99; MoBSE, 2015) and it is interactive, as various departments provide policy implementation updates and school/site visit teams present visit reports on the achievement of Minimum Standards (in terms of leadership and management; teachers' professional development; community participation; teaching and learning resources; curriculum management and learner welfare and the school environment, MoBSE, 2017). These reports feed into corrective notes (for schools) and revised program/project plans and implementation arrangements for the next reporting period or CCM. In 2016, the duration of the CCM was extended from 5 to 6 days to provide the host region's stakeholders the opportunity to develop solutions to peculiar issues affecting them. This can be interpreted as a place-based approach to co-creating solutions for challenges confronting the education sector, and such an approach is informed by the active consideration by the actors involved of the differences across the country, including economic disparity, ethnic diversity and concentration or dispersion of education providers and services across the territory of the country. For example, the predominance of informal Islamic schools—referred to as "Majilis" in Arabic and "Dara" locally—in the Central and Upper River Regions of The Gambia and the manifest reluctance among some members of these communities to embrace western education has resulted in targeted interventions, such as awareness creation and provision of incentives (cash transfers) and technical assistance to the owners of these informal education establishments.

CCMs can be seen not only through their face value as formal venues for consultation, rather analytically such meetings can be interpreted as a social practice triggering the social mechanism of brokerage. Social mechanisms are a form of middle-range theorizing about how social change is brought about (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). Social practices may embed social mechanisms, thereby enabling change to occur; in turn, social practices may be created or appropriated by social actors strategizing, as is

the case illustrated here. Specifically, we interpret CCMs as the social practice enabling the activation of the social mechanism of "brokerage." Brokerage can be defined as "the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another […] it can become a relational mechanism for mobilisation" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 26). Specifically, CCMs have enabled the mobilization of otherwise dispersed (both in the sense of socially and with reference to their being geographically scattered) and unconnected social actors (thereby including education managers, planners, civil society organizations, politicians, statisticians, donors, school heads, researchers, politicians, and parents)—actors who have brought precious skills and expertise into educational services run or overseen by MoBSE. Overall, these mechanisms have enabled MoBSE to determine and shape the strategic direction of the education sector and the execution of the national education policies and plans (further analysis of processes and stakeholders are provided in the Appendix S1).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The coexistence of Weberian elements and forms of strategic planning in MoBSE contributes to shape the conditions under which strategizing processes unfold. These logics—Weberian and managerial—seem to be compatible, even reinforcing each other according to our study, in the context studied. For example, the utilization of the strategic planning approach has contributed to more formalization, including a hierarchical structure in MoBSE, which in turn has led to MoBSE being better able to adopt law-abiding courses of action and resisting unlawful, policy contravening or ill-informed executive directives and pronouncements.

Both individually and, most notably, jointly, strategic planning and Weberian bureaucracy mechanisms shape the conditions under which strategizing has occurred in MoBSE. In particular, strategic planning processes have provided for the institutionalization of procedures and venues—such as the CCMs—which, appropriated through active strategizing by certain key actors in both elected and tenured official positions, have enabled the mobilization of otherwise dispersed and unconnected social actors.

However, it has also been noticed (in our case study and elsewhere in the scientific literature) (Bayo, 2013; Hyden, 2020) that influences of the Weberian bureaucracy and managerial tools like strategic planning are mediated by the specific traits of public administration in Africa: such features—Weberian bureaucracy and strategic planning—co-exist with ethnic consociationalism. It is this combination that shapes the context into which the strategizing processes that we have investigated and about which we aim to generate theoretical insights.

Addressing our main research question—*how does strategizing take place in organizational settings*

characterized by both traits of the Weberian bureaucracy combined with elements of managerialization, and forms of ethnic consociationalism?—also enables us to further theorize about the interplay among Weberian bureaucracy, ethnic consociationalism, and SAP. We have seen how, ultimately, consociationalism dynamics—notably the mechanism of joking relations—shape the very way the Weberian bureaucracy "functions" in such a context. Specifically, we have observed how strategizing under forms of ethnic consociationalism can enable the attainment of the outcomes a Weberian bureaucracy is expected to perform (compliance with the law, impartiality in treating citizens, a certain level of efficiency in executing public services), yet through different mechanisms than those assumed to be at work in the Weberian bureaucracy in a (stylized) "western context." Rather than being the intrinsic features of the Weberian bureaucracy to bring about certain effects, such features may act more as providers of constraints/opportunities for social action, which strategizing actors may leverage in the overarching joking games that constitute the main societal dynamics, to ultimately bring about such expected outcomes. The means to attain such outcomes in this context are different from a Weberian bureaucracy in a Western context, as they occur through high levels of informal sociality (rather than by stripping, or at least constraining, public officials of informal sociality, as would be supposed to happen in a Weberian bureaucracy). Sociality is enabled by the social mechanisms driving inter-group dynamics in the context of ethnic consociationalism, which in this context is the primary shaper of social identities and social belonging.

Strategizing can appropriately be seen not just a set of social practices in this context: it becomes the basic approach to managing (in the broadest sense of setting and attaining individual and social goals by utilizing appropriate means) in a Weberian bureaucracy immersed into ethnic consociationalism governance arrangements. Differently from a Western context (or at least from a somewhat stylized and idealized representation of it) in which strategizing in a Weberian bureaucracy occurs "in the shadow of hierarchy and the law," strategizing in a Weberian bureaucracy under ethnic consociationalism differs in that strategizing may be the very process which enables to attain the outcomes of compliance with the law (and what this may entail also in terms of impartiality of treatment of citizens), and—when interacting with elements of managerialization such as strategic planning—to also attain some level of efficiency in executing public functions.

We can further develop this line of reasoning by speculating that strategizing within a Weberian bureaucracy, compounded with managerial elements, functions differently depending on the cultural context. If we "zoom out" from an African context for a moment, we can consider that, in the "individualistic" West, strategizing by public officials, as social agents, occurs within the shadow of formal hierarchy and the law. Conversely, in a society characterized by the "collectivistic" ethos of East Asia (though this is a simplified and idealized depiction), strategizing may occur under the influence of both formal administrative hierarchy and informal societal hierarchy. In contrast, strategizing within a Weberian bureaucracy in a context characterized by ethnic consociationalism represents a third scenario. Here, public officials, as social agents, engage in a process that takes place under the shadow of informal horizontal inter-ethnic joking relationships, which serve as the overarching societal context. These informal relationships may draw upon Weberian bureaucracy to set prescribed aims and provide guardrails to contain unruly or opportunistic behavior. Ultimately, this approach can lead to compliance with hierarchy and the law as an outcome of the strategizing process, rather than as a precondition for it.

These features are represented in Table 3.

Summing up, this paper aims at gaining insights into the dynamics of strategizing processes under conditions of Weberian bureaucracy and ethnic consociationalism. In our work, we have detected the coexistence of formal strategic planning with the presence of rational Weberian bureaucratic structures alongside informal yet influential dynamics like joking relations between tribal groups, leading to outcomes including resisting unlawful and policy contravening executive directives and pronouncements, managing donor relations, and exploiting and navigating societal culture to increase stakeholder cooperation. These findings underscore the potential for future research to apply the strategizing framework to illuminate the dynamics inherent in decision-making processes within the realm of public services and also beyond Western contexts.

Implications for policy, practice, and research

Our study offers significant implications for policymaking, practice, and future academic research. The themes identified, and the practices they relate to, challenge policymakers, especially those in international organizations, to consider proposed public sector reforms from multiple rationalities—not only Western perspectives (Roberts, 2020). These reforms can be viewed as setting up mechanisms whose effects can replicate or be widely dissimilar to those expected in a Western context due to contextual factors and dynamics of implementation rather than the centrally designed functions those mechanisms were intended to elicit. Accordingly, from this perspective, any performance-related reforms to be implemented in Africa ought to be co-designed with all key stakeholders representing different ethnic cultures. From our findings, in this administrative context, the process of collective sense-making toward performance anchor measures seems to be more important than the practices of accounting, assessing, and measuring through supposedly neutral indicators, which might anyway be perceived differently

TABLE 3 Strategizing in a Weberian bureaucracy and societal context.

	Western individualistic context	Eastern collectivistic context	Ethnic consociationalism context
Strategizing dynamics	Strategizing in the shadow of formal hierarchy and the law	Strategizing in the shadow of the informal societal hierarchy, alongside the formal administrative hierarchy	Strategizing in the shadow of the informal horizontal inter-ethnic joking relations, bound by prescribed statutory objectives and formal hierarchy
Strategizing outcomes	Supplementing statutory objectives and behavior criteria stemming from hierarchy and the law with agential objectives/goals	Supplementing informal societal objectives as well as statutory objectives and behavior criteria with agential objectives/goals	Attaining compliance with statutory objectives as an outcome

by different cultural stakeholders given the ethnic consociationalism socio-cultural contexts which shape the contours of strategizing through a lens influenced by ethnic considerations and not only by bureaucratic and/or managerialist principles. In this respect, future research in public administration could explore the intersections between ethnic consociationalism and the literature on co-ethnicity and diversity by examining, for example, how strategic frameworks in public institutions accommodate and manage ethnic diversity with their effects on performance (e.g., Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Posner, 2004; Wimmer, 2016).

In terms of practice and training of public officials, our study highlights the importance of understanding strategizing not as a tool to implement (allegedly) "rationally superior" choices, akin to a rationalist approach to strategic planning, but as an emergent capability to solve problems and exploit emerging opportunities (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) in a politically fraught administrative context where politicians are hierarchically understood as being above civil servants, with all the risks associated with this organizational and cultural pattern, as observed in our case study. Therefore, training in political astuteness capabilities is becoming increasingly paramount for civil servants in an African public administration operating in a context of ethnic consociationalism, as also pointed out for Western public administration systems (Hartley et al., 2019, p. 244).

Finally, before turning to future research opportunities, we specify a limitation of our study in that our research is not geared to assessing the extent to which the Weberian model of bureaucracy has penetrated the African context (scholars who have studied African public administration seem to point to colonial legacy having left a mark, albeit somewhat scattered, see Hyden, 2020); rather our research focuses on generating knowledge about what happens in terms of patterns of strategizing processes when such conditions of presence of traits of the Weberian bureaucracy combine with ethnic consociationalism. Thus, our thrust was the theoretical preoccupation of gaining insights into the dynamics of practices of strategizing when the combined conditions of presence of both the traits of the Weberian bureaucracy and of ethnic consociationalism apply, as a theoretically significant area of inquiry aimed at explaining patterns of

strategizing in non-Western public organizations, specifically but not limitedly to African public organizations.

Regarding future research, our focus on strategizing allowed us to observe findings that call for greater integration between the fields of strategic public management and public leadership, given that leadership dynamics were required for strategic intents to unfold beyond formal procedures. For example, research could investigate how public administration strategies leverage ethnic identities to improve resource allocation and address issues of representation. Moreover, these findings also underscore the importance of studying public administration beyond Western rationalities and philosophies (Drechsler, 2015; Ongaro, 2021; Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot, 2015), prompting a more contextual understanding of the social scientific knowledge generated by research in public administration. Ontologically, we should accept there are multiple public administrations across the world, with the African public sector requiring more context-sensitive studies that are open to discoveries that might appear unorthodox and yet can bear important fruits, such as the enabling role of joking relations and of ethnic consociationalist collective sensemaking.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.