

State capacity and governance in South Africa: a case study of school education in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng provinces, c. 1970 to 2015.

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## Thesis abstract

This thesis provides a history of the administration and governance of school education in South Africa. I explore this through a comparative study of two of South Africa's provincial education sectors, the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, over a roughly fifty year period. I begin with a brief sketch of state building in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa, and then focus in on the workings of the education bureaucracy and its interactions with teachers and schools in these two provinces from the 1970s through to 2015. I explore the various factors that shaped, enhanced, or limited state capacity over this period, and how the state shaped the sector in turn. I have an especial interest in examining the historical process of "bureaucratisation" (defined in the thesis) which I see as a necessary, but not sufficient component of state capacity.

The method I employ in my thesis is influenced primarily by the disciplines of history and political sociology. I use literature in the latter field to operationalise a concept of "state infrastructural power" (Mann, 1984, 1993), which I use for making comparative assessments about state power between my two case studies – the Eastern Cape and Gauteng provinces.

The Eastern Cape province is often in the South African news for its failures to deliver resources to schools, and it has been subject to numerous interventions by the national government and provincial treasury to "fix" it. Gauteng by comparison has established far better systems for ensuring resource provision to schools. The first part of the thesis is focused on explaining the reasons for the development of a more capable provincial state administration in Gauteng than in the Eastern Cape. I posit the differing fortunes of bureaucratisation in each case as central to explaining this first puzzle, and I explore the historical factors shaping this process in both provinces. This includes an examination of the way in which the apartheid policies of "separate development" and "bantus education" shaped the administration, state-society relations, and the wider political economy. I then explore the development of a particular form of patronage politics in the post-apartheid period, affecting parts of the state, ruling party, and its affiliated trade unions. In the Eastern Cape, the character of that administration and civil society shaped patronage as highly factionalised and unstable in the province, with impacts on the daily functioning and capacities of the administration. I show how labour protest, organised by South Africa's largest trade union, has developed a dual function – as a form of contentious politics in mobilising against the faltering state and as a tool for organising around local level patronage.

I also briefly explore (in the apartheid and early post-apartheid period), how questions of state legitimacy interacted with bureaucratisation to produce state infrastructural power. I argue that state infrastructural power in Gauteng has increased relative to the apartheid period by virtue of its greater social legitimacy, but that the state still remains weak in its ability to support learning and other social goals in schooling. While Gauteng's better administrative capacity has been linked to the better aggregate learning outcomes in comparison to the Eastern Cape, these results are not overwhelming, and fairly low in comparison to other countries when controlling for per capita resource input. The difficulties in getting schools to improve the world over have been well documented in the school

reform literature. A complex set of factors influence learning and the wider functioning of schools – many of these a result of the interplay between in-school resource constraint, poverty, inequality, and associated social stresses. Without a doubt this provides a good deal of the explanation for why Gauteng has not done much better than the Eastern Cape regarding learning outcomes. While Gauteng has a larger middle class, a predominantly working class and poor population attend its under-resourced public schools. Another explanation is the particularly weak content or subject knowledge and pedagogic skill of many teachers in South Africa – the roots of which lie in the apartheid education system. All of these observations form a part of my argument: in the latter part of the thesis I show, however, that the often highly conflictual nature of local governance in the education sector explains why Gauteng’s better administrative capacity in the provincial office has had limited “reach” into schools. Local governance in the Eastern Cape exhibits a similar form to that of Gauteng.

I explore how some schools in South Africa experience major conflict – a good deal of this emanating from contestation over leadership and posts within the schools, sometimes over the use and control of school resources. The examples I provide incorporate a continuum from outright predatory politics through to parents attempting to balance school development needs on the one hand, and strategies to secure (precarious) livelihoods on the other. The complex role of labour, the operations of patronage in the district offices of education, and the limited resources they have been allocated, make district education offices fairly ineffective at supporting stable school governance. This produces a governance environment undermining of the conditions for learning, and for experimenting with schools governing bodies as sites of civic participation in South Africa.

This historical narration makes a number of contributions. It provides insight into the factors shaping state capacity in South Africa. It also provides some insight – a piece of the puzzle – into explaining the poor quality of education provided to South Africa’s working class and poor communities. My research is also of potential interest to a wider audience: it makes a small contribution to understanding the politics of education reform in the Global South, which is understudied, and it provides a case study of the historical process of bureaucratisation outside of the Global North, where much of the literature on this process has tended to focus.