

# Improving merit recruitment practices in the Western Balkans: Lessons from the ReSPA Regional Study

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ReSPA Activities are  
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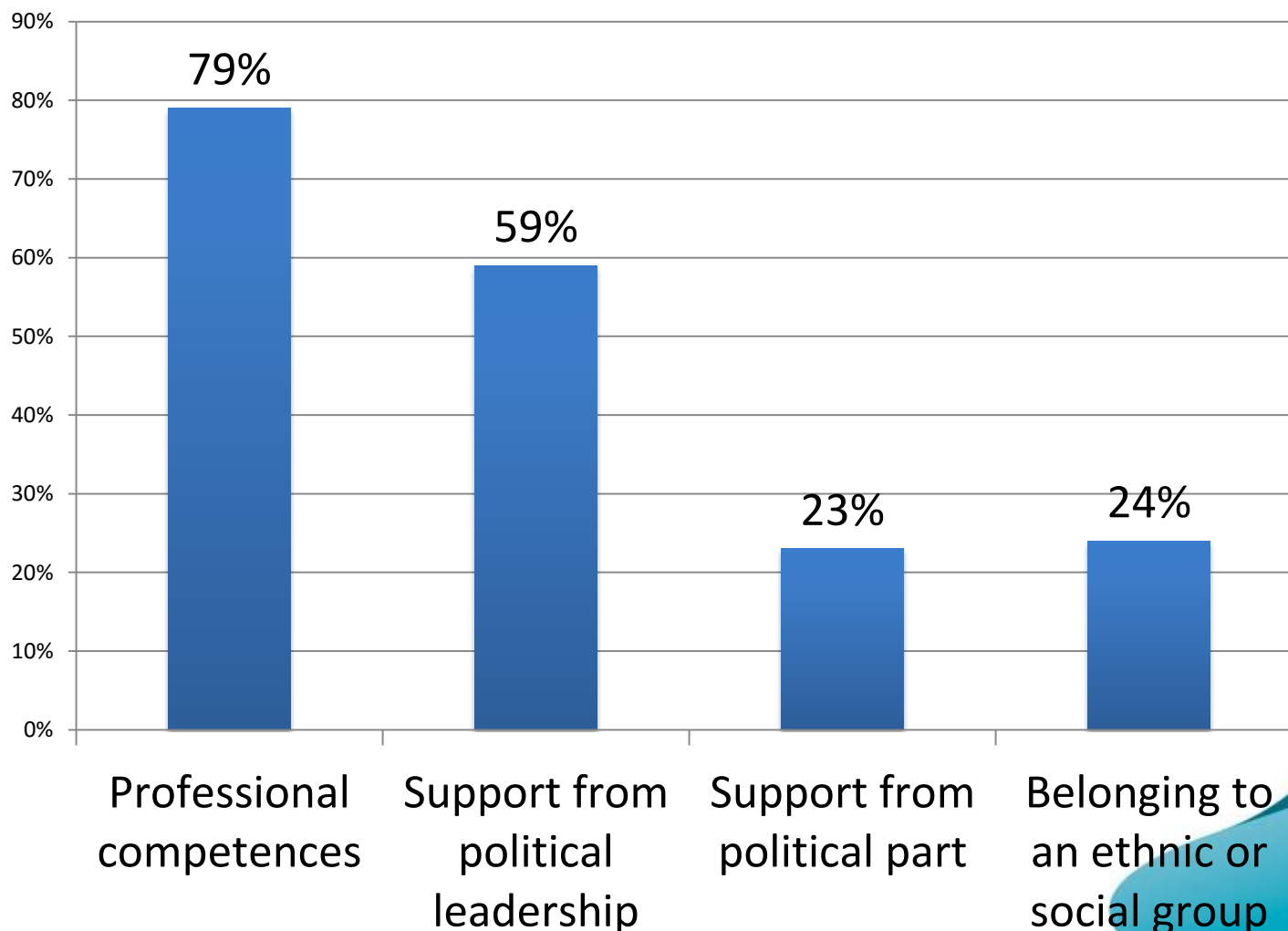
# Approach of ReSPA regional study

- Focus on implementation
- Unpacking procedures to identify the weakest link
  - Adverts and approvals, commissions, written exams, interviews, rankings, final selection
- Bottom-up research approach
  - Work with / by ReSPA Community of Practitioners in HRM/HRD
  - Work with regional experts
  - Survey of personnel managers
- Recommendations for region & each country

# Main findings

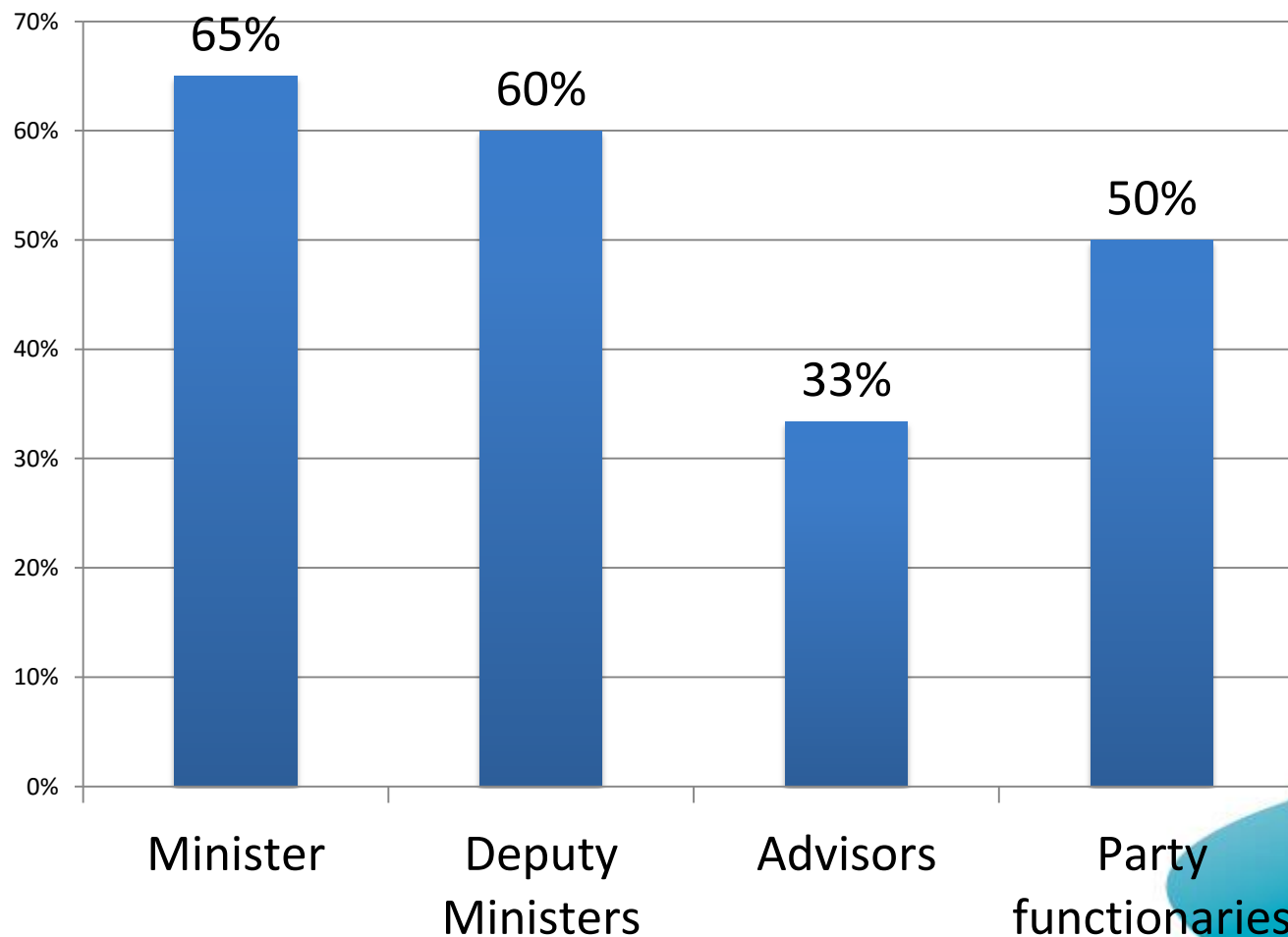
- Merit recruitment usually formalised by law
- Procedures are widely applied in practice (i.e. rule evasion is unusual)
- But
  - Perceived ineffectiveness of procedures
  - Political interference is widespread
    - Importance of non-merit criteria
    - Influence of politicians and political appointees
  - Perceived lack of fairness and efficiency

## Relative importance of selection criteria: 'Somewhat', 'very' & 'extremely important' (per cent of respondents, cross-country average)



## Importance of [POLITICIANS] in determining recruitment outcomes:

Somewhat, very, extremely important (per cent  
of respondents, example of BiH State level)



# Main obstacles to effective merit recruitment practices

- Problems of regulation
  - Loopholes and systemic weaknesses
- Problems of examination standards
  - Low standards
  - Cumbersome processes
- Problems of capacity
  - HR units
  - Ex post and external monitoring
- Problems of information
  - Committee members and managers
  - Politicians including MPs
- Problems of informal norms
  - Culture of favouritism and political control

# Problems of regulation

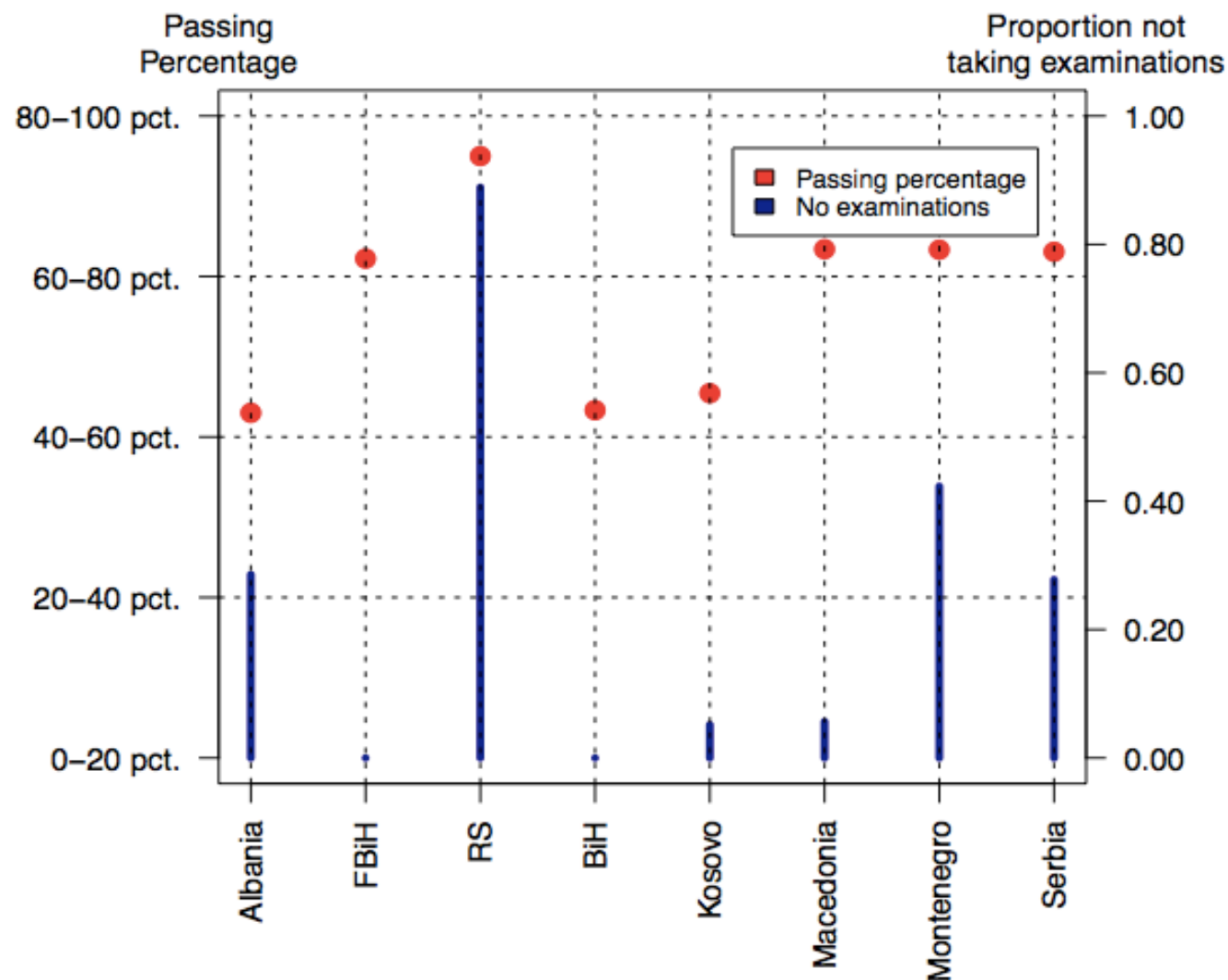
- Under-regulation of complementary policies with negative side-effects
  - E.g. temporary employment

# Problems of examination standards

- Despite use of (often complex) examination systems, lack of capacity to identify competences
  - Insufficient criterial frameworks
  - Low standards
  - High pass rates
    - Examinations as routines to legitimise permanent employment?



Figure 5: Passing rates for written examinations



# Problems of capacity

- Insufficient capacity to manage and monitor personnel management
  - Small size or complete lack of personnel departments
  - Lack of HRM experts
  - Weakness of ex post monitoring
  - Limited role of civil society in externally monitoring public administration
    - But good examples, e.g. Institute Alternativa (Montenegro)

# Problems of information

- Insufficient knowledge as major obstacle to better implementation
  - Selection commissions
    - Ad hoc members, mainly senior civil servants
    - Independent experts (academia, civil society)
  - Personnel managers
  - Politicians, including MPs

# Problems of informal norms

- Informal norms undermine (rather than support) formal civil service rules
  - Widespread acceptance of political control over personnel policy
  - Accommodation of ethnic diversity
  - Culture of favouritism

# Recommendations

- What is possible – given the context?
- Improve regulatory framework
  - Review and develop complementary regulation
- Raise standards
  - Review and improve examination systems and standards
- Develop capacity and external monitoring
  - Strengthen personnel departments
  - Work with civil society
- Invest in training and education to raise information levels, public and political awareness
  - Senior civil servants, politicians, applicants