

## Exploring Criteria for Political Professionalization in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes of selected power groups about exploring the political professionalization criteria in Sri Lanka. Through a thorough examination of issues of political practice, it focuses the possibility to make space to introduce the concept of political professionalization and prerequisite to resolve or minimize those issues. A total of twenty-seven academics, clergy and journalists were participated in three focus group discussion. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Through this process, it was revealed three main themes: 'knowledge', 'skills', 'values' and recommends policies for political recruitments. The findings suggested that professionalization political practices should be promoted by introducing knowledge, values and skills as criteria for consideration in political recruitments. And also it is suggested that introduction of professional political practice methods is essential to reduce in political practice issues in the current political scenario of Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Profession; Political Professionalization; Criteria for Politicians; Political Practice; Sri Lanka

### Introduction

Political professionalization is a developing research field which has attracted an increasing amount of research attentions [1]. Max Weber in 1919, firstly, raised the concerns regarding the rise of a "political class" professionalization, as a theme, which has become synonymous with charting change in the world's parliaments [2-7]. Establishing political professionalization across the world is a global challenge [8]. However, scholars in many countries have discussed the importance of political professionalization [9-11] and how politics leads the national development as a strategic profession [10]. Literature specifies that a professional political system would play a significant role in social development and promoting innovative practices [12].

The political systems in most of well developed countries such as United States of America (USA), Australia, countries in European Union and Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) concerns about professionalization of politics [11,13,14] by introducing some parliamentary role and behavior [15]; professionalism of politicians [9,16]; political campaign, communication, marketing and advertising [17-19]. The development of professionalized politics becomes possible, when the practitioners, themselves, set out to manipulate charismatic symbols and create a social order which is compatible with professionalized decision-making process.

Greenwood stated that if someone wants to be a successful professional practitioner, he or she must possess sufficient knowledge, skills and values about the basic concepts and practical approach on professional practices. And also, it can be noted that the knowledge, skills and values are the major three components which are in cooperation to be a professional practitioner in any field of work. The recruitment criteria used by empirical political scientists to evaluate the quality of politicians tend to focus on more concrete qualities that can be measured easily and objectively. In numerous studies, the educational levels of the politicians have been used as a proxy to assess the quality, for example; on the assumption that better educated politicians would be more intelligent and more knowledgeable and, therefore, it would be very efficient and effective in making good decisions and sound policies [20]. Elison [21] and Saalfeld [15] exemplified that political experiences, legitimacy, knowledge and professional skills could be used as recruitment qualifications for parliamentary positions. Further, the parameters such as social values, attitudes and interests are key

indicators to be a professional politician [9]. Additionally, knowledge, ethics, ethical codes, rights and political language are essential attributes in a system of good political professionalization [13,22,23].

Though the general public has recognized the importance of the educational background and intellectual capacity of the election candidates in electing their political leaders [11], the ground situation is worse in most of the developing countries, for instance; the current candidate selection criteria system is ill-defined, poorly specified, difficult to measure and discriminatory. Sri Lanka has a unicameral parliament system with 225 seats, elected for a five-year term through an electoral system based on district proportional representation. In the present parliament, according to CaFFE, 142 members of the parliament have not qualified, at least, Advanced Level examination qualification, which is considered as the university entrance examination in Sri Lanka, and the most of the members are businessmen or land owners [24]. The electoral system to the parliament of Sri Lanka is, comparatively, highly competitive and the system, itself, has loaded unwanted weights on the candidates to spend an extensive amount of money and use carefully planned religious-ethnic symbols during the election campaign [25,26]. The political candidates interfere and change the minds of the voters unethically by providing benefits to the voters for their day to day social life strategically [26]. Violence and corruptions have long been associated with the present system of elections in Sri Lanka. Specially, the presidential and parliamentary elections have led to increasing concerns over the cumulative impact of such malpractice on the integrity of the democratic process in Sri Lanka. The outcome of these elections, generally, reflect the determination of the people, nevertheless, political murder cases, terrorism and ballot rigging are surrounded and well associated with the electoral process during the recent past.

There are some requirements noted by the present constitution of

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Sri Lanka to enter into politics and to contest for a local government or national elections. These requirements only check the general criteria of the candidate such as the age, whether the candidate is mentally fit for the position or not and whether the candidate has been bankrupted financially or not. For an example, there are some general requirements to contest for the presidential election of Sri Lanka. Among them, the person must be a citizen of Sri Lanka and over 30 years old. If the candidate does not fulfill the basic requirements, he would be disqualified from the list. However, as yet, no studies have been conducted to investigate the political professionalization and the role of politicians in Sri Lankan political system. The purpose of this study was to embed the criteria to the political professionalization in to Sri Lankan context through focus group discussions. Ethics Approval for this research was obtained from the Wuhan University Research Committee in Department of Sociology. For Data collection to conduct this study in Sri Lanka approval was obtained from research development committee in Sri Lanka Foundation Institute.

### Qualitative Data Collection: Focus Group Discussion

To gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards political issues and political professionalization, it was organized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with three selected power groups in the Sri Lanka political scenario (Table 1).

The potential FGD participants were randomly selected on the basis of their active involvement in politics and related activities. The aims of the study were facilitated among the FGDs with an aid of a specially designed discussion guided questionnaire (Table 2).

The study followed a “funnel structure” format to analyze the data which were extracted through the FGDs. In each of FGD in this study, it was used a unit of analysis. In the middle section, the discussion was more structured to lead the process smoothly to the topic of interest. At the end of each discussion, a verbal summary was produced to synthesize and confirm the significant themes which were found in the discussion. The informed consent was signed by the participants before the discussion. It was used a digital voice recorder to collect the views and opinions of the participants and it was spend about 50 minutes to conduct each FG discussion.

### Data Analysis

For the thematic content analysis, Attride-Stirling’s [27] thematic analysis tool was employed. This tool provides a practical and effective procedure for organizing, conducting and presenting findings from qualitative analysis and ensures the full disclosure of the steps included in this phase of the analysis. The step-by-step guide of this tool would be used to identify relevant themes emerging from the collected

perspectives of the various informants’. The first phase of thematic analysis includes data familiarization and encompasses initial coding of data. The second and third phase of analysis consists of the searching for potential themes and reviewing themes. During these phases, initial codes were organized under broader themes and these themes were then tested against the completed data set. The last three phases of thematic analysis involve the naming and reporting of overarching themes and subthemes. In this study, the process of thematic analysis was identified three overarching themes, each with number of sub themes on knowledge, skills, values and policies. The study findings can be represented as follows (Figure 1).

### Results

The results of FGD analysis of the responses are presented in Table 3. Three themes were generated for the questions “what kind of factors should consider for political professionalization?” and “what kind of criteria can suggest for political recruitments?”. They were (1) knowledge for politicians (Table 4), (2) specific skills for political practice (Table 5), (3) value base of practice (Table 6). On the question regarding “how implement professional political practice system”, policy recommendations have been suggested by participants (Table 7). Further, for the question on “appropriate based on their experience”, four themes were generated. They were (1) requirements for political recruitments, (2) legal and agreements, (3) program structure for societal practice, and (4) awareness programs and training related professional practice (Tables 3-7).

### Discussion

Professionalization of politics has been described in literature in different settings using various criteria. Notably, there are similarities in the responses of the selected respondents in this study with those in other countries instead of the settings and criteria utilized in political recruitments. They include (1) Respondents have been mentioned that knowledge, relevant skills and values as main criteria for selecting political candidates (2) Personal characteristics might affect political practice and for working with people as well as contributions for the social development and (3) Implementation of professionalized political practice would be differed due to the attitudes of the politicians and the citizens’ perceptions.

Moreover, the study revealed some responses about the political setting of Sri Lanka which are occasionally encountered in literature on political professionalization. The impression of “infrequency” has been noted by the respondents, because most of the published incidences on political professionalization have been recorded from the developed countries. These responses were categorized under the themes of (1) professional political practice models, (2) legislation professionalization

All Groups	Academics (FGDA 01-09)		Journalists (FGDJ 01-08)		Clergy (FGD 01-09)		Total (FGDA)+(FGDJ)+(FGDC)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	5	4	5	3	8	2	18	9
	Total						27	

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Questionnaire Guidelines for FGDs	
1.	What kinds of issues are visible in current political practice in Sri Lanka?
2.	Does Sri Lanka need professionalized political practice system?
3.	What kind of factors should be considered for political professionalization?
4.	What kind of criteria can be suggested for political recruitments?
5.	How professionalized political practice system would be implemented to the Sri Lankan context?

Table 2: Questionnaire Guidelines for FGDs.

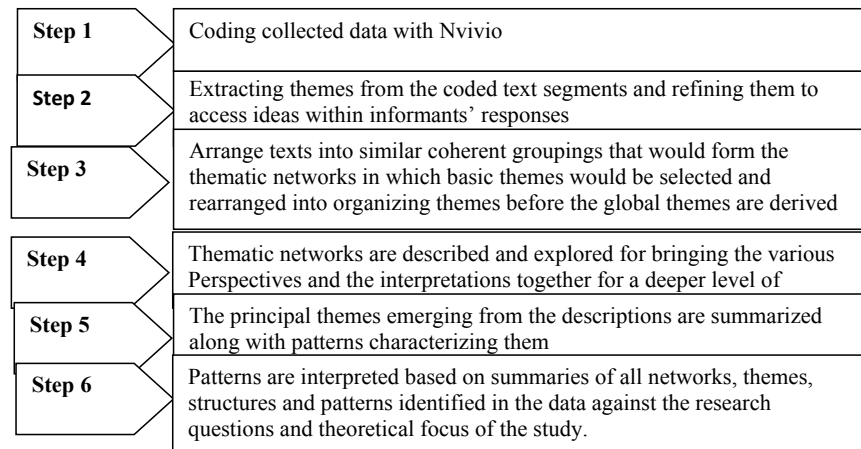


Figure 1: Thematic analysis: 6 Steps (adapted from Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Knowledge	Skills	Values
<p><b>Education</b> G.C.E Advanced Level or above/Equivalence IQ test</p> <p><b>Political knowledge</b> Political , electoral System/Party Politics/Current local &amp; international politics/Provincial councils/ Socio-cultural background Democracy.</p> <p><b>knowledge Legal/constitutional</b> Constitution/National level policy making/ Human rights &amp;civil rights/Administration/ Justice &amp; strategies</p> <p><b>Experiences</b> Working experiencein relevant felid/Experience in business or any other area</p>	<p><b>Soft Skills</b> Leadership/Communication conflict resolution/ Presentation Conducting meetings/ Public speeches</p> <p><b>Personality</b> Personality/Social consciousness/Creativity</p> <p><b>Technology</b> New technologies</p> <p><b>Management Skills</b> Organizational skills/ Networking skill/ Motivation skill/ Understand Current political, economic &amp; social issues</p> <p><b>Language</b> Competent in at least 2 languages</p>	<p><b>Equality</b> Not cater to family linkages/ Unbiased on ethnicity, religion cast &amp;gender/Without prejudices/ discrimination/Distinguishes between personal problems and public matters</p> <p><b>Social Justice</b> Past records of proven social harmony/Bridge between different communities/ Accountability to the people/ Obligation – through social institutions</p> <p><b>Qualities</b> Honestly/Punctuality/Rationality/Tolerance/Environmentally friendly.</p> <p><b>Human Dignity</b> Concern about the self-dignity of citizens</p>

Table 3: Derived themes and representatives' responses.

Theme derived and representative responses for the theme "Knowledge"
<p><b>Education</b> "Education is the most important base factor for politicians because the future of a country is totally depended on the political decisions which are taken by them. Therefore, the minimum qualification is a must to enter into political scenario" (FGDA-2). "Education should be the first and foremost qualification for a politician, because politicians play a vital role for the improvement as well as deterioration of the society in a democratic country" (FGDJ-1).</p> <p><b>Political Knowledge</b> "Politicians should be knowledgeable about the range of political systems to promote general people in maintaining or achieving social development and well-being (FGDA-5) "Specific knowledge re needed to understand social, cultural, psychological and spiritual development of the people in the society" (FGDC-4). "Knowledge on possible problems and the alternative solutions are much required in the development aspects..."(FGDJ-4) "Every politician should be knowledgeable about local and international politics, political issues and trends, parliamentary roles and behaviors and international relations" (FGDA-8)</p> <p><b>Knowledge about Law/constitutions</b> "Knowledge about law and order, constitution, legislation is a must for each politician. Some politicians work without prior knowledge on such areas". (FGDA-7)</p> <p><b>Experiences</b> "The experiences on working with people, dealing with community leaders and organization as well as business management, entrepreneurship are also necessary to consider. Further, testing the IQ level and thinking ability should be considered" (FGDJ-3)</p>

Table 4: Theme derived and representative responses for the theme "Knowledge".

and (3) the professional consultancy. Based on the answers in the Focus Group Discussions, the study identified three main key themes: (1) knowledge for politicians, (2) specific skills for political practice, (3) value based of practice. Additionally, recommendations for policy making were suggested in the study.

The theme of "knowledge" mentions about the perception of the

questionnaire participants on educational background of politicians. According to Easton [28], practical knowledge should be utilized as one of the solutions for urgent practical problems of the society. Further, Greenwood noted that professions are required to have a systematic body of knowledge, authority, functional specificity, community sanction, and a code of ethics and an integrated set of norms.

Derived themes and representative responses for the theme "Skills"
<p><b>Soft skills</b>                      "A Politician should be a person with good leadership and teamwork skills"                      "A Politician is a mirror of our society and they represent our country at each level. Therefore, they should have good communication skills to represent their ideas" (FGDJ-7, FGDC-6).</p> <p><b>Personality</b>                      "Personality is depicted through behavior but most citizens believed figure of the politicians as personality. However, professional politicians could recognized through their leadership qualities, decision making abilities" (FGDJ-2, FGDA-6)</p> <p><b>Technology</b>                      "At least basic knowledge and skills about new technology is a must". (FGDA-1)</p> <p><b>Management skills</b>                      "Management and other skills with only a degree are not sufficient" (FGDC-2).</p> <p><b>Language</b>                      "Politician ought to be aware about his current social situations and international language for communication" FGDA-4)                      Demonstrated professional-level writing and verbal communication skills are also very important. It's not just giving a good speech in front of public and getting votes, it is all about how they will do it practically in implementing all their words into action"(FGDJ-5).</p>

Table 5: Derived themes and representative responses for the theme "Skills".

Theme derived and representative responses for the theme "Values"
<p><b>Equality</b>                      "...According to our experiences, the politicians in parliamentary and local government settings offer more opportunities to their henchmen based on the personal contacts. For example; sometimes job recruitments are mostly depends on the personal contacts not for the qualifications. We hope equal treatments for each citizen and also qualification based proper recruitments would be able to maintain equality" (FGDC-8).</p> <p>Social justice                      "Social justice is most important and influential factor...As a politician he or she must respect for the others religions, ethnicity, political party, gender and so on..." (FGDC-7, FGDJ-6).</p> <p>Qualities                      "It is necessary for politicians to maintain good qualities such as punctuality, (FGDJ-6, transparency, trustworthy, (FGDCA-2), respect towards colleagues, citizens". (FGDC-1)</p> <p><b>Human dignity</b>                      "Public discussions on media, in parliament or other meetings or in campaigns, politicians use unprofessional language, for example they blame each other by using the personal issues such as homosexuality, relationships, and use nicknames of the opponents...(FGDC-10)                      "Politicians should obey the human dignity towards the others" (FGDC-6)</p>

Table 6: Theme derived and representative responses for the theme "Values".

Recommendations to be taken on policy decisions towards how to improve current political practicing system as a mode of professional practice
<p><b>Recruitment</b>                      Age Limit should be compulsory in the sense of political recruitment in each levels (Parliamentary and Local government)                      Should not nominate clergy as political candidacy                      Quota system for women &amp; youth should be increased and standardized                      Health condition should be included in the recruitment criteria as in other government positions                      Introduce quota system in giving nominations for family relatives in the political recruitment criteria.</p> <p><b>Legal &amp; Agreement</b>                      It should not be given any provision to change the political party after winning election.                      Financial expenses for campaign                      Police reports for candidates                      They should not be having convicted criminal offences &amp; not involved in anti-social activities.</p> <p><b>Societal practice</b>                      Limit the appointments for family members as personal staff                      Candidate should be a resident permanently at least five years in the particular electoral area.                      Introduce a maximum number of turns to contest as politicians.</p> <p><b>Awareness/Training</b>                      A specialized and appropriate training should be given for politicians.</p>

Table 7: Recommendations to be taken on policy decisions towards how to improve current political practicing system as a mode of professional practice.

Numerous studies have been done to check the educational levels as a proxy for quality on the assumption that better educated politicians are more intelligent, more knowledgeable and, therefore, they take good decisions and make sound policies [4-6]. This assumption was further proved by the selected power groups on this issue. The findings through the discussions with them can be summarized as: (1) politicians should be knowledgeable about politics, legal and constitutions as well as community needs and social developments; (2) politicians with proper educational background had contributed to creating better solutions for citizens' problems and needs; (3) it is important to utilize appropriate knowledge aiming at social developmental; effectively apply relevant knowledge to fit citizens and practice solutions; critically integrate knowledge on law and constitution where appropriate.

In 1919, Max Weber exemplified politics as a vocation or a profession [6,29]. This leads for further discussions about profession,

professionalism and professionalization. Professional politicians who are with a few knowledge on the real world scenario stand accused, even if their professional experience helps them to adapt more rapidly to the political life as an elected politician [30,31]. Prior political experience is a function of longevity in politics rather than a talent in any field and it enriches with the parameters such as commitment, knowledge and the track record which are likely to be benefited for a candidate in the recruitment process. The findings of the study suggest that the experience of the politician would be differed from person to person. These differences would be related to perceived disparities between skills and its application in to the practice. Many past studies have addressed the importance of some of the previous addressed characteristics. In particular, the findings highlighted the importance of personal characteristics such as the strength of candidate's character, appearance of the candidate, the ability to manage conversation, the

ability to influence and persuade as well as the candidate's patience and academic, scientific and technological qualifications and further individual's competence, goodwill and trustworthiness.

The second theme emerged the findings based on the skills for political practice. In this, the respondents had concluded that: (1) Insufficient or lack of skills what the politicians possesses in practicing politics have been perceived to exacerbate their behavior, personality, decision making and quality of leadership. (2) Soft skills, personality, management skills, technology and language as the most important skills for political practitioners; (3) Inexperience and lack of basic skills were conceived as being a disadvantage to politicians; acquiring skills were also viewed as being challenging; (4) the capacity to work as a skillful politician with best leadership and personality contribute to the development of the politicians as capable and professional practitioners. Furthermore, respondents felt in considering the skills for the political recruitment, it could potentially benefited for both politicians in different levels and the citizens. New insights were produced on the conditions for political professionalization as reflections at the focus group discussions. It also seemed to be consensus to the fact that new insights would lead to different approaches in future political practice.

The third theme highlighted the importance of value base for political practice. Findings indicated that all political practitioners in parliamentary, provincial, local government should be guided with proper ethics and integrate professional values in practice. Respondents stated that (1) social justice, human dignity and equality are major components of a value based practice; (2) the necessity of professional codes of ethics to practice among the politicians. Application of the professional practice values of citizen self-determination, individualization, non-judgmentalism and acceptance are the essential components to be in practiced. Though politicians are in some ways of sui generis, there is enough commonality between them and professional groups for an account of professional ethics to illuminate the political role [32]. In contrast, practically, there is a closer relationship between corruptions and the background of the politicians. Respondents had evidences and incidences about the unethical behaviors of politicians. Politicians criticized each other in bad manner using unethical words and not much aware of core competencies within their own profession. Recognizing the rights of the voters, confronting one's personal biases and works to be accepting of diverse others in professional practice, confronting values on conflicts and ethical dilemmas in parliamentary practices, demonstrating ability to examine with the citizens' consequences of decisions and self-determination are the key points what the respondents had given their concerns. Particularly, the focus group with clergy highlighted the essentials of monitoring ethical issues and resolving ethical dilemmas with effective decision making strategies. Some studies have outlined the effectiveness of values, ethics for political practice [23,33]. The findings of this study do not directly indicate about the ethical principles which guide to professional practice.

Empirical findings of the study suggested that citizens' in Sri Lanka are in a position for a change of the current political practice system and political recruitment procedures. Subsequently, citizens expect the benefits of change of professionalized political practice system in Sri Lankan context. Professionalization would positively affect to the politicians, party system, legislature and motivation to work in future shared work settings. A surprising finding in the study was that political professionalization is most relevant for their practice in micro, macro and mezzo levels.

The findings of the study indicate how citizens perceived

political professionalization. More studies are needed to track and to identify the importance of the concept of professionalization of political practice which contributes to new solutions and professional development within political practice arena. The findings suggested that even introducing those identified components into the political parties and relevant authorities can be effective in fostering positive attitudes towards practice professionally. Furthermore, it is possible that embedding the recruitment of qualified people to professional practice, pay attention about competencies for recruitment, training for current politicians about how to practice in professional manner, introduce code of conduct for political practice system, and introduce the concept of professionalization into the training institution when training politicians will result in to modify as professionals. These potential explanations require further exploration using qualitative methodologies and prospective, long-term studies. The respondents have suggested policies related to recruitment which required for each candidate (Table 7). Establishing policies would be appropriate to build professionalized politicians.

The research objectives were to determine what extent politics and nature of political culture affect the citizens' needs and social development. On the views of the academicians, politicians play a key role on social development and it should be recognized by the professional body. The findings of the study show that the participants have distinguished between current political practice and the concept of professionalization. The responses of the participants in the study give a strong indication of the criteria which needs to be introducing political professionalization. Professionalization would be promoted good governance, maintain democracy, and minimize political malpractices. The impression is that selected power groups, in general, express positively about political professionalization. It is hoped that this study can inform future policies for political practice and add evidence to why politics can benefit from being professionalized.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

This study has no conflict of interest.

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