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DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATISATION IN AFRICA: INSIGHTS FROM A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS, 1948-2024

Audrey Estelle Kaye Yamtcheu^a

Abstract: This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research on democracy and democratisation in Africa, using 7,892 Scopus-indexed documents from 1948 to 2024. Employing VOSviewer and Bibliometrix, we map the intellectual landscape in order to identify dominant trends, contributors, and thematic clusters. Findings reveal three publication phases aligned with continental political shifts: post-independence, the 1990s democratisation wave, and current democratic backsliding. Although South Africa, the USA, and the UK dominate the scholarly output on democracy and democratisation in Africa, a persistent North-South bias marginalises African-based researchers. While elections and governance are central, digital authoritarianism and military rule remain underexplored. The article advocates for a paradigm shift toward causal analysis and a more inclusive research agenda, addressing both geographical and epistemological gaps in the field to advance the future of African studies.

Keywords: *democracy, democratisation, Africa, bibliometrics, research trends*

Introduction

How has the international academic community studied democracy and democratisation in Africa? What does this body of work reveal about the priorities, blind spots and evolving concerns within this field? Surprisingly, this question has been the subject of very few systematic studies. Although the volume of research on African democracy has increased considerably since the early 1990s, no bibliometric study has yet mapped out the landscape of this output as indexed in the Scopus-indexed research. This article aims to fill this gap.

The process of democratisation in Africa has been shaped by a combination of colonial legacies (Ayittey 2010), post-independence ideologies, and the contemporary forces of globalisation and digitalisation (Cheeseman and

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Sishuwa 2021). Prior to its adoption, most African states were entrenched in an authoritarian single-party system (Robinson 1994). With the imposition of foreign aid conditionality as a lever for democratic governance in Africa (Vidal 2023), the failure of authoritarian regimes and structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s (Cheeseman and Fisher 2019), the early 1990s saw the emergence of a broad democratisation movement (Bratton 1997). This movement was greeted with enthusiasm (Ake 1991). Several states then embarked on processes of political transition, often described as a “wave of democratisation,” to use Samuel Huntington’s term (1991). The aim was to eliminate dictatorial rule and the one-party system, giving the people the opportunity to choose their leaders.

The national conference, a key mechanism in this process of change, has become one of the most emblematic instruments of this period of transition for certain African countries (Otayek 2001). Originally merely instruments of consultation (Chike, Ngonadi and Chike 2023), national conferences soon took a radical turn. From the outset, debates intensified and the demand for popular sovereignty took centre stage (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). Conference participants demanded a complete overhaul of the Constitution and a reorganisation of the country’s institutions (Daloz and Quantin 1997). These demands were accompanied by calls for free and transparent elections and far-reaching economic and political reforms.

For other states, however, the democratisation process involved anticipating demands. This dynamic gave rise to two main democratisation strategies: the offensive strategy and the defensive strategy (Mann 2024). The offensive strategy referred to a process of democratisation whereby the state anticipated popular demands. States chose to undertake constitutional or political reforms to respond to the aspirations of civil society before these escalated into open crisis or violent protests (Ukaegbu, Idowu and Chukwuma 2024). This strategy was often used proactively by governments seeking to legitimise their power while opening up politically (Tom 2024).

Conversely, the defensive strategy was characterised by a process of democratisation in which the ruling regime did not engage in dialogue, but undertook constitutional and political reforms under intense pressure, often following internal or external crises. Reforms carried out in this context were more often dictated by specific circumstances, such as mass strikes, popular demonstrations or international pressure (Arkin and Chappell 1985). Unlike the offensive strategy, which was proactive, the defensive strategy was more reactive.

For other countries, such as Senegal, The Gambia, Cape Verde, Mauritius and Lesotho, which had already embarked on reform processes well before the early 1990s (García-Ponce and Wantchekon 2024), this transition process was part of an early trend towards political openness.

Whatever path was taken, the process of democratisation in Africa has led to the establishment of democratic institutions, notably a multi-party system (Walzer and Roman 1997), political, economic and trade union pluralism, the holding of contested elections, and the drafting and adoption of new constitutions. An examination of the new constitutions revealed the predominance of "techniques of freedom" over techniques of authority. It was through the force of law that political actors sought ways and means to bring about genuine change (Chabal 1998). This was driven by National Conferences, constitutional conventions, democratic transitions and multiparty elections (Mann 2024).

However, the results of this vast undertaking are mixed. Democracy takes time to learn, and resistance of all kinds still needs to be overcome (Recchia 2020). Indeed, the rule of law is constantly undermined by despotism (Orkin 1995) and attempts to return to authoritarianism (Bourne and Veugelaers 2022). Many countries do not fully embody democratic principles (Butler 2005). Some experiments are undermined by persistent underdevelopment, armed conflict, leaders' desire to remain in power, underdevelopment and military coups (Ahluwalia 2024). Although democratic principles were championed at conferences, most leaders established oppressive regimes after independence (Ayittey 2010). Similarly, the ethnic diversity of African states fosters a competitive environment based on the mobilisation of ethnolinguistic groups in order to secure political support (Mann 2024). Despite sophisticated constitutional frameworks, structural challenges (instability, erosion of public trust) undermine democratic consolidation.

The complexity of implementing democracy in Africa may lie in the fact that the concept of "democracy" has not yet been given a universally accepted or consensual definition. Since ancient times, this concept has never been linear or monolithic. Although the meaning of democracy has evolved over time and across different contexts, its definition and meaning remain the subject of constant disagreement (Gallie 1955). Generally speaking, democracy represents the ideal system of governance or the ideal to be achieved, characterised by popular sovereignty, the rule of law, the accountability of those in power, and the protection of human rights (Ake 1992).

The study of democracy in Africa is a complex field of research due to the diversity of the continent's political, historical, and cultural contexts. This

study is of paramount intellectual importance and undeniable political urgency. Since the early 1990s, African states have undergone successive political transformations: from multiparty transitions to competitive authoritarianism, from hopes of democratic consolidation to the harsh realities of democratic backsliding (Diamond 2015). The study of democracy in Africa is of paramount intellectual importance and undeniable political urgency. Since the early 1990s, Afrobarometer data have consistently shown that, across the continent, a majority of citizens favour democratic governance and express dissatisfaction with how it functions (Lavallée 2006). Understanding how researchers have approached these realities, which themes they have prioritised, which voices have influenced the debate, and which questions remain unanswered is essential for advancing research and public policy.

The present bibliometric study provides a quantitative methodology for examining trends in scientific publishing, including article authorship, citation networks, collaboration patterns, and shifts in research focus (McBurney and Novak 2002; Hood and Wilson 2001). This approach makes it possible to identify the intellectual foundations of a field, reveal structural inequalities in knowledge production and highlight research areas that are systematically neglected. To achieve this, we have structured this work as follows. The section entitled '*Collaborative Networks*' provides an overview of research on democracy and democratisation in Africa: the themes addressed, the theoretical frameworks employed and the critiques formulated. The subsequent section presents the methodology and research materials utilised in this article. The section titled '*Bibliometric Analysis and Results*' outlines the bibliometric findings across four axes: publication trends, collaboration networks, citation patterns, and thematic clusters. The following section acknowledges the limitations of the study, while the final part presents the discussion and future research directions.

The aim is to make a threefold contribution: first, to produce an exhaustive bibliometric mapping of this field of research; second, to highlight a systemic tension between the predominance of researchers from Northern countries in citation statistics and the contributions of African theorists of democracy; and third, to propose a concrete research programme focused on causal analysis, geographical diversification, and epistemological inclusion.

The State of Research on Democracy and Democratisation in Africa

To put the following bibliometric findings into context, it is necessary to identify what researchers have actually been studying in this field, not the

development of democracy in Africa as a political phenomenon, but the academic debate itself including its major themes, dominant frameworks, and ongoing discussions.

Main Research Themes

The concept of "democracy" has its roots in ancient Greece, where both the word and the practice originated, with the system defined as popular power or rule by the demos (Shivji 1991). In modern literature, the foundations of liberal democracy were laid by social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Ake 1992). They conceptualised democracy as a voluntary association centred on property rights, individualism, and the rule of law, a model that became the political counterpart of the market (Ake 1992). While democratisation is the path taken, democracy is the quality of the resulting institutional framework (Clapham 1993). Conversely, democratisation is defined as a process of transition, a historical movement aimed at transforming an autocratic, military or single-party regime into a pluralist system (Kratou and Laakso 2022).

The academic literature on democracy and democratisation in Africa is multidisciplinary and thematically diverse. The following themes form the core of the field. Electoral processes and regime transitions constitute the oldest and most extensive area of research. Researchers such as Bratton and Van de Walle (1994), Lindberg (2006), and Cheeseman and Sishuwa (2019) have studied multiparty elections, neo-patrimonial governance, and the conditions under which competitive elections either strengthen or, conversely, undermine democratic consolidation. This literature is extensive: Lindberg's book, *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (2006), is among the most cited works in the Scopus corpus analysed here.

Democratic backsliding and competitive authoritarianism are becoming an increasingly significant trend, as the initial optimism regarding the African "third wave" has given way to an analysis of what Diamond (2015) terms the "democratic recession." Researchers are documenting the use of constitutional manipulation to expand executive power (Beardsworth, Siachiwena and Sishuwa 2022), the resurgence of military coups described by Mann (2024) as a return to the "khaki regime," and the rise of digital authoritarianism through internet shutdowns during election periods (Ngoa and Song 2024).

Governance, the rule of law, and civil society form an important whole. Researchers are studying the integrity of electoral commissions (Makunya 2022), the role of anti-corruption institutions and the dynamics of decentralisation

(Mohmand and Loureiro 2017), and the relationship between corruption and public trust (Lavallée 2006).

There is growing interest in gender, women's rights, and the quality of democracy. Studies are examining the impact of gender quotas, women's participation in social movements, and the intersection of democratisation with public health outcomes such as maternal and neonatal mortality (Phillips et al. 2024; Ngoa and Song 2024).

Political economy and redistribution form a central thematic focus in the works of Claude Ake and Issa Shivji. Ake (1991, 1992) argued that liberal democracy, as it has been transplanted to Africa, serves the interests of the elites without regard for the material conditions of the majority, giving rise to what he termed an "alienation of democracy." Similarly, Shivji (1991) emphasised that, without a redistributive dimension, democracy remains an empty shell. These arguments have influenced a strand of research that establishes a link between the quality of democracy, economic inequalities, and structural dependence.

International influences and geopolitics are an emerging theme. Studies examine how the conditionality of Western aid shapes democratic reform (Vidal 2023), how Chinese and Russian engagement offers African leaders alternatives to Western political conditionality (Li 2017), and how diaspora communities contribute to political polarisation through digital advocacy. The impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) is an emerging topic (Ngoa and Song 2024). The literature examines how the internet and social media foster citizen mobilisation while enabling a new form of "digital authoritarianism" through deliberate Internet shutdowns during election periods (Beardsworth, Siachiwena and Sishuwa 2022).

African democratic theory constitutes a fundamental yet under-represented strand of thought. Beyond Ake and Shivji, figures such as Ali Mazrui, Achille Mbembe, and George B. N. Ayittey have each proposed original analytical frameworks for understanding governance and political power in Africa. Mazrui's analysis of the intersection between ethnicity, religion, and state power (Mazru 1999); Mbembe's conceptualisation (2000) of postcolonial sovereignty and "necropolitics"; and Ayittey's critique of institutional dysfunction (2010) all have significant implications for democratic theory.

State of the Literature: Critical Assessments

The literature on African democracy has been the subject of several substantive criticisms. First, it is often described as being overly descriptive

and theoretical: many studies document democratic failures without drawing on formal social theory to explain the causal mechanisms at play (Mohmand and Loureiro 2017; Phillips et al. 2024). Second, the field exhibits a significant geographical imbalance: the majority of the most cited works are produced by researchers based in Northern countries, while African researchers face systemic barriers, including limited access to data and research funding (Mohmand and Loureiro 2017). Third, analytical tools developed for consolidated Western democracies are sometimes applied to African contexts without sufficient consideration of their transferability. Fourth, research tends to treat military coups as anomalies rather than examining how military regimes constitute and shape the political systems that succeed them (Mann 2024). Fifth, the role of women in liberation struggles and democratisation processes remains chronically understudied (Phillips et al. 2024).

The present analysis aims to map these trends quantitatively, providing empirical evidence to support claims regarding the structure of the field, its dominant voices, and its silences.

Research Materials and Methodology

We will now outline the data source and research strategy, as well as the analytical methods.

Data Source and Search Strategy

This study draws on data extracted from the Scopus-indexed research, one of the largest repositories of peer-reviewed scientific literature, covering a wide range of disciplines: social sciences, political science, law, and African studies (Klapka and Slaby 2018). The search query used was: TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORD ("democracy" OR "democratisation") AND ("Africa"), limiting the search to documents in English only. The search was conducted on 19 September 2024 at 3 :43 pm and identified 7,892 documents published between 1948 and 2024.

The choice of Scopus over Web of Science (WoS) is due to its broader coverage of the social sciences and its more comprehensive indexing of journals focusing on Africa. It is important to note, however, that both databases systematically under-represent non-English-language publications and journals from the Global South. This limitation has direct

consequences for the visibility of academic work in African languages and of Francophone or Lusophone intellectual traditions, particularly major works by authors such as Mbembe and Shivji, some of which are published in non-English formats.

The difference of 49 documents between the frequency of the term "democracy" (1,064 occurrences) and that of the term "Africa" (1,015 occurrences) in the keyword analysis warrants a methodological clarification. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that the co-occurrence analysis of keywords is based on keywords assigned by the authors, which differ from the search terms used to construct the corpus. A small subset of documents extracted by the search equation uses "democracy" as a keyword but does not mention "Africa" as a separate keyword; this is likely because the geographical scope is implied in the title or abstract, rather than being explicitly stated. These documents deal with democracy in African contexts and are legitimately part of the corpus.

Regarding the inclusion of the period prior to 1960: the analysis deliberately begins in 1948, the first year for which relevant indexed documents appear in Scopus, in order to provide a comprehensive historical overview of the development of the field. The virtual absence of documents between 1948 and 1959 is in itself instructive: it confirms that the systematic study of democracy in Africa did not precede decolonisation. Limiting the analysis to data from after 1960 would obscure this conclusion.

Analytical Methods

The analysis employs a combination of descriptive, quantitative and semantic techniques, in line with established bibliometric practices (Dharmani, Das and Prashar 2021). Three analytical dimensions are explored. The performance analysis examines publication output over time; the most productive authors, institutions, and countries; the citation impact.

Scientific mapping uses VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) and Bibliometrix (R package) to generate (a) co-authorship networks, identifying collaborative groups; (b) co-citation networks, identifying the intellectual foundations of the field; and (c) keyword co-occurrence maps, revealing the thematic structure.

The chronological analysis divides the corpus into three periods 1948-1989, 1990-2014, and 2015-2024 in order to track changes in themes, authors, and geographical focus over time.

An important methodological caveat applies to the interpretation of results

relating to keyword frequency. The terms "democracy," "democratisation," and "Africa" appear frequently in the corpus because they were used as search terms; their prevalence reflects the selection criteria rather than an independent finding. The analytically interesting results concern themes that were not preselected: "elections," "governance," "apartheid," "civil society," "gender," and "coups d'état". Therefore, the analysis of the thematic results focuses on these emerging terms.

Bibliometric Analysis and Results

Overview of the Corpus

Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the corpus of 7,892 documents.

Parameter	Value
Duration	1948–2024
Total documents	7,892
Annual growth rate	7.71%
Average age of documents	11,4 years
Average no. of citations per document	15,58
Total references	360,241
Articles	5,115 (64.81%)
Books	724 (9.17%)
Book chapters	1,406 (17.81%)
Reviews	390 (4.94%)
Total authors	8,809
Single-author documents	5,207
Co-authors per document (average)	1,53
International co-authors (%)	10.68%

Table 1. Key Information on Documents Published on Democracy in Africa in the Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024)

Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024)

The corpus is dominated by journal articles (64.81%), followed by book chapters (17.81%), and books (9.17%). The relatively high proportion of single-author documents (5,207 out of 7,892) and the low average co-authorship rate (1.53 authors per document) reflect the tradition of the humanities and social sciences that characterises much of the research in this field. The international co-authorship rate of 10.68% indicates limited transnational collaboration beyond established North-South academic partnerships.

Publication Trends: A Three-Phase Evolution

Figure 1 illustrates the annual output of documents in the corpus. Three phases can be identified analytically. During the first phase (1948–1989), research output was sparse and the context was colonial. The virtual absence of indexed publications prior to 1960 confirms that the systematic study of democracy in Africa did not precede decolonisation. This is an observation of definite methodological interest. Output remained modest throughout the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting both the dominance of single-party and military regimes on the continent and Africa’s relative marginalisation in Western social sciences during the Cold War.

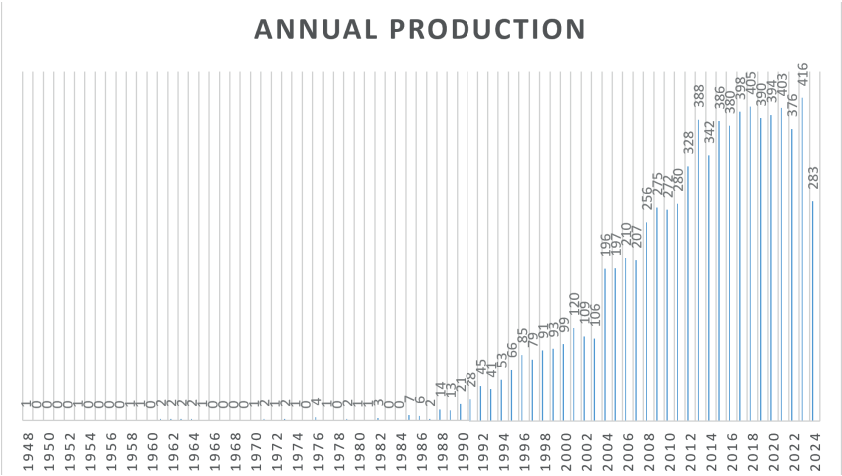


Figure 1. Annual Output of Documents on Democracy and Democratisation in Africa, Scopus 1948–2024
Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

In the second phase (1990–2014), which was characterised by the wave of democratisation and its consequences, the number of publications rose sharply from the early 1990s onwards, coinciding with the "third wave" of democratisation (Huntington 1991), the proliferation of multiparty elections, and donors' growing interest in democratic governance as a condition for their aid (Vidal 2023). This period saw the consolidation of studies on democracy as a recognised sub-discipline, with the emergence of specialist journals such as *Democratization* and *African Affairs*. The intellectual contributions of Ake (1991; 1992; 1993) and Shivji (1991) were particularly significant during this period, challenging the liberal-democratic paradigm exported from the West and emphasising the need for a democracy rooted in African socio-economic realities.

The third phase was characterised by democratic decline and new challenges. Academic output continued to grow, reaching 416 publications in 2023, with researchers focusing on a new political landscape marked by the resurgence of military coups (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon), the sophistication of electoral manipulation, the influence of digital technologies on political mobilisation and repression, and the growing role of non-Western actors, notably China and Russia (Li 2017; Mann 2024). The theoretical frameworks of Mbembe and Mazrui have taken on new relevance during this period, with analysts examining the postcolonial dimensions of the collapse of the state and sovereign authority.

Collaborative Networks

This section will examine, in turn, author collaboration, collaboration at national level, and institutional affiliations.

Author Collaboration

The co-publication network reveals seven distinct collaborative groups, operating largely independently of one another. The two most significant groups in structural terms are organised around Wasserman (the largest in terms of membership) and Southall (the most interconnected in terms of co-authored publications). An essential methodological clarification is required: the centrality of Wasserman and Southall reflects their structural position within the co-publication network that is, the frequency and density of their joint publications rather than their intellectual influence, as measured by the total number of citations. Researchers such as Diamond, Cheeseman, Lindberg, Bratton and Van de Walle have a greater impact in

terms of citations across the field as a whole, and figures such as Mbembe, Mazrui, and Shivji carry greater theoretical weight in African democratic thought, but their collaborative contributions within the corpus indexed by Scopus are structurally different. The over-representation of South African institutions in the co-publication network partly reflects their relative institutional capacity and their adherence to English-language publication standards.

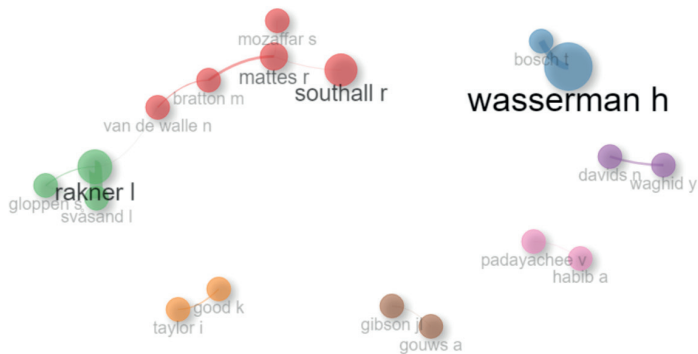


Figure 2. Author Collaboration Network, Visualised Using VOSviewer
Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024)

Collaboration at National Level

Rank	Country	Collaborative publications (%)
1	United States	11.00%
2	United Kingdom	9.16%
3	South Africa	8.99%
4	Canada	6.51%
5	Australia	5.89%
6	Germany	5.58%
7	France	4.18%
8	Kenya	3.10%
9	Sweden	2.94%

Rank	Country	Collaborative publications (%)
10	Ghana	2.48%
11	China	2.48%
12	Italy	2.32%
13	India	2.32%
14	Norway	2.01%
15	Cameroon	1.70%
16	Switzerland	1.55%
17	Denmark	1.24%
18	Tunisia	0.93%
19	Tanzania	0.93%
20	South Korea	0.93%

Table 2. The Top 20 Countries in Terms of International Collaborative Publications on Democracy in Africa

Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

Data on collaboration at the national level (Table 2) reveal a striking asymmetry: the United States (11%) and the United Kingdom (9.16%) alone account for more than a fifth of international collaborative publications on African democracy. South Africa is the only sub-Saharan African country to feature in the top three. This situation reflects broader structural inequalities in global knowledge production, which Mohmand and Loureiro (2017) describe as the dominance of "guest researchers" from Northern countries. This corroborates Ake's (1991) long-standing critique that African political science has been disproportionately influenced by external theoretical agendas. The virtual absence of research institutions from Central and West Africa within this network constitutes a significant gap, even as these regions experience some of the continent's most turbulent democratic upheavals.

Institutional Affiliations

South African universities, notably the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand, and Stellenbosch University, are the most productive institutions in the corpus. Their pre-eminence can be

explained both by historical factors (the post-apartheid democratisation process sparked keen interest among researchers) and by their institutional capabilities (South African universities have more advanced research infrastructure than most other African institutions).

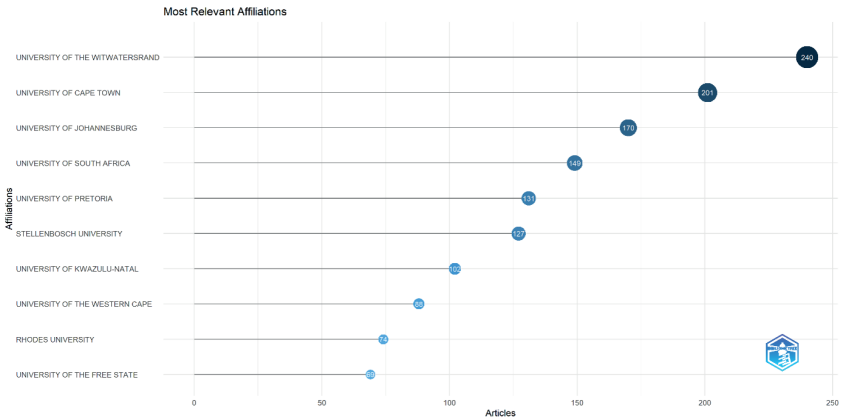


Figure 3. The Most Productive Institutional Affiliations in the Corpus
Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

Publication and Citation Patterns

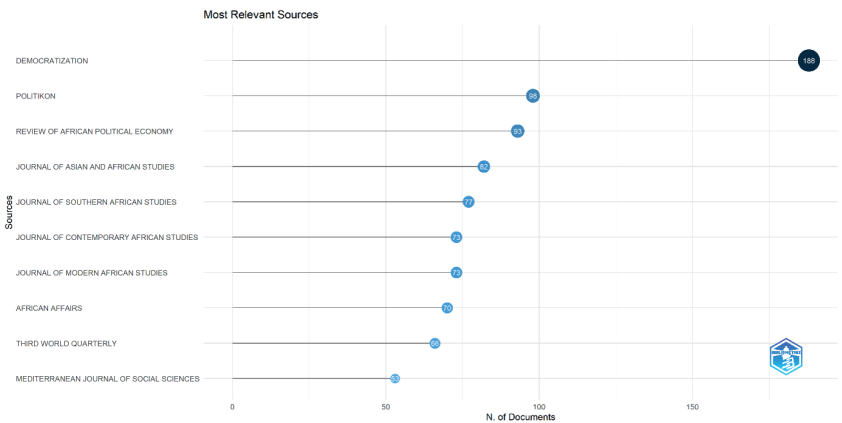


Figure 4. The Most Relevant Sources in the Corpus
Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

The most prolific journal in the corpus is Democratization (188 articles), followed by Politikon (98) and Review of African Political Economy (93). The predominance of Democratization reflects the field's affiliation with comparative politics and transition studies. The importance of Review of African Political Economy is significant. Founded in 1974, this journal has always been a vehicle for disseminating critical perspectives in political economy, notably thanks to contributions from researchers such as Shivji and Ake, who are less prominent in traditional citation statistics. This suggests that the traditions of political economy and African theory are present in the corpus, but they are structurally under-represented by citation-based indicators.

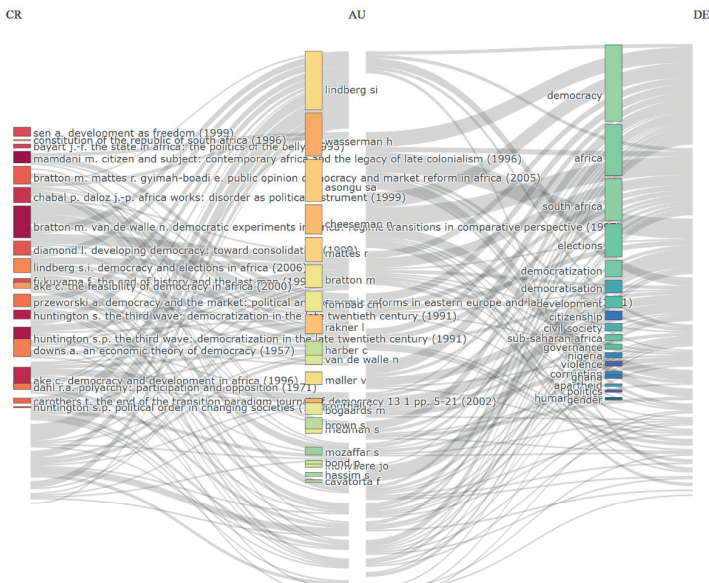


Figure 5. Three Field Plot

Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

The three-panel diagram of Figure 5 illustrates the relations between the most cited works (left), the most cited authors (centre), and the most frequently associated themes (right). Among the most cited seminal works are Huntington's *The Third Wave* (1991), Lindberg's *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (2006) and Sen's *Development as Freedom* (1999). The most frequently cited authors are Lindberg, Diamond, Bratton, and Mamdani. The themes associated with these authors revolve around

elections, governance, civil society and the comparative analysis of political regimes.

One notable observation: while Ake and Shivji are founding theorists in the field and feature in this corpus, their citation counts are lower than those of Bratton or Lindberg, partly because some of their key texts circulate outside English-language databases and partly because their critical framework lies outside the dominant paradigm of comparative politics. This bibliometric result should not be interpreted as a measure of intellectual importance, but rather as an artefact linked to database coverage and disciplinary hegemony.

Thematic Analysis

This section will present the keyword co-occurrence map, analyse the clusters relating to democracy and democratisation in Africa extracted from the Scopus database, and examine the evolution of these themes over time

Keyword Co-Occurrence Map

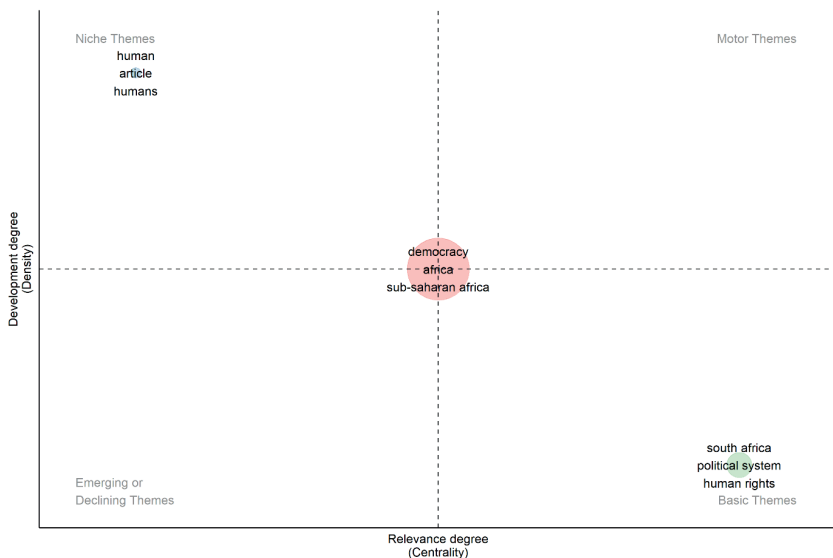


Figure 6. Thematic Map

Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

The thematic map of Figure 6 organises keywords along two axes: centrality (relevance within the field) and density (internal development). Four quadrants identify driving themes (high centrality and density), fundamental themes (high centrality and low density), niche themes (low centrality and high density), and emerging or declining themes (low centrality and density).

The absence of a driving theme as a central, well-developed subject that guides the field of study is in itself significant from an analytical perspective. It suggests that the field lacks a dominant, structuring research agenda, with efforts instead being scattered across multiple parallel discussions. "South Africa," "political systems," and "human rights" emerge as fundamental themes: essential to the field of study, but insufficiently developed given their importance. These are areas that require more sustained and theoretically rigorous work.

The co-occurrence analysis of keywords identifies the following emerging themes, which were not pre-selected, as the most analytically relevant: "elections" (1,247 co-occurrences), "governance" (934), "apartheid" (876), "civil society" (521), "gender" (389), "coups d'état" (312), and "corruption" (298). These themes, which were not included in the search equation, represent the true research priorities in the field. Among them, coups d'état and gender are particularly under-represented given their political significance, a finding consistent with the thematic gaps identified in the section on the state of research on democracy and democratisation in Africa.

Cluster Analysis

The VOSviewer clustering analysis identifies seven thematic clusters within the corpus. The analysis below describes each cluster based on its constituent keywords, with a focus on emerging (non-preselected) terms that are of analytical significance.

Group 1 (Pink, 272 items): South African democracy and the post-apartheid transition. The dominant terms in this group, apartheid, racial inequalities, education, and reconciliation reflect research focused on South Africa's democratic experience since 1994. This is the largest group, reflecting the country's disproportionate presence in the corpus. Although this body of work is substantial, its sheer volume risks giving the impression that South Africa's trajectory is representative of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

Group 2 (Green, 260 entries): Electoral processes and authoritarian transitions. Keywords include elections, authoritarianism, regime transitions, multiparty

systems, and North Africa. This group follows the core comparative tradition, analysing transitions from one-party and military regimes to competitive electoral systems. The inclusion of North Africa is noteworthy and reflects inter-regional comparative work.

Group 3 (Blue, 214 items): Political systems, human rights, and gender. This group encompasses governance, the rule of law, human rights, and women's rights, reflecting the intersection between democratisation and rights-based frameworks. The inclusion of gender confirms that this is an established, yet still underdeveloped, research theme.

Group 4 (Yellow, 166 items): Economic development and democratic quality. The keywords establish a link between democratisation and economic growth, redistribution, poverty, and structural adjustment. Intellectually, this group follows the tradition of critical political economy established by Ake, Shivji, and Ayittey, although the frequency with which these authors are cited in Scopus-indexed publications remains lower than their theoretical influence would warrant.

Group 5 (Purple, 85 members): State-building and institutional development. Focusing on the capacity of African states to sustain democratic institutions, this group addresses issues of decentralisation, administrative reform, and citizen participation.

Groups 6 and 7 contain only two and one element respectively ("world", "hemisphere", "festivals") and represent either isolated thematic nodes or thematic nodes in decline.

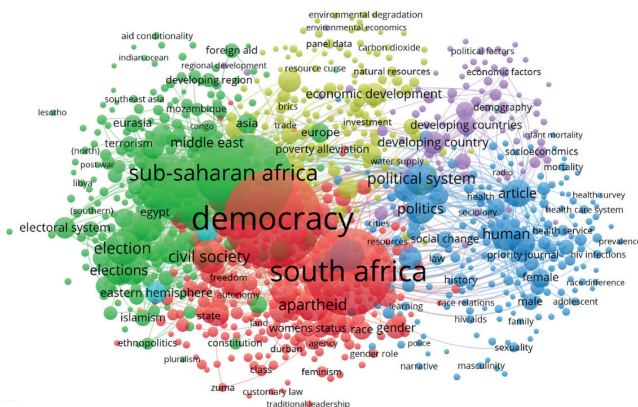


Figure 7. Cluster Classification
Source: Scopus-Indexed (1948–2024).

Changes in Themes Over Time Across Three Periods

A temporal breakdown of the keyword co-occurrence data across the three periods identified in the subsection entitled *Publication Trends: A Three-Phase Evolution* reveals significant shifts in thematic focus.

Before 1990, the limited literature available focused mainly on independence, state-building and the theoretical legitimacy of the one-party system themes addressed in the seminal works of Ake, Mazrui, and the first generation of African political scientists.

Between 1990 and 2014, research shifted radically towards elections, transitions and civil society. The works of Bratton, Diamond, and Lindberg came to dominate the field. Gender began to emerge as a research topic. The tradition of political economy persisted, but remained somewhat on the fringes of the mainstream of comparative politics.

Between 2015 and 2024, several emerging themes have taken on considerable significance: military governance and coups d'état (Mann 2024), digital authoritarianism and internet shutdowns (Ngoa and Song 2024), the influence of China and Russia (Li 2017) and academic freedom as a prerequisite for democratic resilience (Kratou and Laakso 2022). This period is also marked by a renewed interest in African democratic theory, with researchers exploring non-Western analytical frameworks in order to explain dynamics that liberal-democratic models struggle to account for.

Limitations

This research has certain limitations inherent to bibliometric analyses. First, this study relies solely on the co-occurrence of keywords to identify themes and trends, which could be influenced by the indexer. Second, we used integral counting methods in co-author networks, which could lead to slightly different results if fractional counting were used. We developed the cluster using VOSviewer; other software may yield different results. Finally, other publications on democracy in Africa were not included in this analysis, as they are not indexed in the Scopus-Indexed. Future studies may consider other databases such as Web of Science (WOS). Despite these limitations, our study provides useful insights for academics and practitioners interested in democracy in Africa.

Third, the use of full counting rather than fractional counting in co-authorship networks means that papers with multiple authors are each given

full credit in the tally for each author, which may overestimate the output of prolific contributors.

Fourth, VOSviewer represents only one possible partitioning of the thematic space; other software or parameters may produce slightly different clusterings. The results should therefore be regarded as illustrating general trends rather than definitive thematic boundaries.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive quantitative basis for understanding the structure of academic output on democracy in Africa – a basis which, to the author’s knowledge, did not previously exist in this specific field.

Discussion and Future Research Directions

The aim here is to analyse the thematic gaps in the field of democracy in Africa and to propose a programme for future research.

Thematic Gaps in the Field

Bibliometric analysis both confirms and challenges current understandings of the field. This is due to its multidisciplinary nature, its growth in tandem with political shifts, and the prominent place of elections and governance amongst the central research themes. It also confirms the structural inequality in knowledge production that critical researchers have long highlighted: institutions in the Global North produce and receive the lion’s share of citations, while researchers based in Africa, particularly those outside South Africa, remain under-represented in globally indexed publications, based on data extracted from the Scopus-Indexed.

Beyond the lack of theoretical knowledge, the analysis identifies several thematic areas that are under-represented relative to their political significance.

Military governance and democratic continuity: Mann (2024) argues that military regimes are not merely interruptions in democratic trajectories, but rather represent the political systems that succeed them. Research has tended to view coups d’état as anomalies rather than as constitutive political events. The current wave of coups d’état in the Sahel demands a systematic academic response.

Similarly, digital authoritarianism such as Internet shutdowns, manipulation (Phillips et al. 2024) and surveillance technologies is reshaping the landscape of political protest in Africa. Although this theme has emerged in the most recent period studied, it remains under-theorised given its scale.

Furthermore, despite the growing literature on gender and democratic quality, the specific role of women in liberation struggles, transitional justice, and the building of democratic institutions remains chronically under-documented (Mohmand and Loureiro 2017).

The overwhelming concentration of research on South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, compared with North Africa, Central Africa, and the Horn of Africa, may obscure significant variations in democratic trajectories across the continent.

Future Research

The prevalence of descriptive studies that focus on describing events rather than explaining their causes constitutes the main intellectual limitation of this field. Future research should focus on a systematic causal analysis of democratic failures, drawing on comparative methods, natural experiments, and longitudinal data. The question is not whether Africa is democratic or not, but which specific institutional, historical, economic, and social configurations lead to the resilience or collapse of democracy.

Epistemological diversification: the field would benefit from more deliberately integrating African democratic theory into mainstream comparative analysis. This is not a plea for cultural exceptionalism, but for theoretical pluralism.

Geographical diversification: researchers should pay closer attention to Central and West Africa, where democratic turmoil has been most intense in recent years, and to North Africa, where the aftermath of the Arab Spring continues to provide significant comparative cases.

Methodological pluralism: bibliometric analysis provides an overview of the field. Future research should complement this with qualitative methods, ethnographic approaches, and analyses at sub-national and municipal levels where citizens have direct experience of democratic or non-democratic governance (Mohmand and Loureiro 2017).

The structural marginalisation of researchers based in Africa is not merely a bibliometric phenomenon; it reflects real inequalities in research

infrastructure, funding, and access to publication. Institutional support for African universities, open-access publishing, and the indexing of African journals in major databases would profoundly transform the knowledge landscape described in this study.

Conclusion

This article provides a comprehensive bibliometric mapping of academic research on democracy and democratisation in Africa, as indexed in the Scopus. Analysing 7,892 documents published between 1948 and 2024, the study identifies three major phases in the evolution of this field, highlights structural inequalities in knowledge production, and reveals significant thematic gaps, particularly regarding the treatment of military governance, digital authoritarianism, the role of women in democratisation, and the contributions of African theorists of democracy.

These findings have two main implications. Methodologically, they demonstrate the value of bibliometric tools in identifying the invisible structure of a research field: its dominant voices, its collaborative structures, and its silences. In substance, they argue for a field that evolves from description towards causal analysis, from a body of work centred on Northern countries towards a genuine pluralism of voices and perspectives, and from a focus on democratic procedure towards a concern for democratic substance as well as the material conditions and institutional realities that make meaningful popular participation possible or impossible.

The struggles for democracy in Africa are not an exception that can be explained by the failure of imported institutions. They rank among the major political phenomena of the contemporary world and deserve a field of study that does justice to their complexity.

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RIPPLE EFFECTS OF WITCHCRAFT-RELATED VIOLENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH AFRICAN VICTIMS

Lebogang Mpuru^a and Shandre Jansen van Rensburg^b

Abstract: This article explores the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence on families in rural Limpopo Province, South Africa. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 28 women who experienced witchcraft-related violence directly or indirectly, the study uses thematic and narrative analysis to examine how participants understood and described these experiences. Drawing on Arthur W. Frank's complementary perspectives on narrative forms (linear, fragmented, and chaotic) and narrative typologies (chaos, restitution, and quest), participants' stories were interpreted and constructed. The findings show that the effects of witchcraft-related violence extend beyond those directly accused, with family members experiencing family victimisation, secondary victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, and stigma. These processes contribute to ongoing fear, social exclusion, displacement, and insecurity within families and communities. By conceptualising these experiences as ripple effects, the article demonstrates how witchcraft-related violence unfolds across family relationships and contributes to a broader understanding of victimisation within rural South African communities.

Keywords: *family victimisation, secondary victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, institutional inaction*

Introduction

Witchcraft-related violence remains a persistent harm in many communities, particularly in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where belief systems continue to shape social interactions and responses to misfortune (Ehigie 2025: 307; Dein 2025: 12; Kelkar and Nathan 2020: 4; Uche et al. 2025: 232). While the direct consequences for those accused have been widely documented, less attention has been given to how such violence extends beyond the individual to affect

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family members and broader social networks (Bartholomew 2023: 148; Sanou 2017: 34). The concept of ripple effects describes how harm originating from a single act of violence spreads outward through relational networks, resulting in interconnected psychological, social, and structural consequences over time (Abiola 2022: 4; Danzer 2024: 1). This framing recognises that victimisation is not confined to the primary target but may be experienced indirectly through exposure, association, and ongoing community responses. Literature highlights that witchcraft accusations are often accompanied by violence, stigma, and social exclusion, with severe consequences for those directly accused (Awortwe et al. 2025: 174; Kabelenga 2020: 56). The effects frequently extend to family members, who may experience reputational damage, social isolation, and long-term psychological distress. These implications are often compounded by fear, uncertainty, and the breakdown of social cohesion within communities (Faki and Ahmed 2025: 523; Finlay et al. 2025: 1). Moreover, the justice system faces challenges in addressing witchcraft-related accusations because such claims cannot be substantiated through conventional forms of legal evidence (Owusu 2024: 119).

Despite growing scholarly attention to witchcraft-related violence, there remains limited focus on how these harms unfold within family systems, particularly from the perspectives of those indirectly affected. This gap is especially evident in rural South African contexts, where communal belief systems may intensify both the spread and persistence of such harm. The present article addresses this gap by examining victims' perspectives on the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence on families and communities in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Moreover, it examines how the effects of witchcraft-related violence extend beyond the individual to shape family and community experiences. It considers how harm is lived, interpreted, and sustained within relational contexts, with particular attention to processes such as secondary victimisation, collective blame, stigma, and secondary targeting. In doing so, the article engages in how these experiences are understood and articulated by those affected. This perspective shifts the focus from individual incidents to the broader ways in which harm is experienced within families and communities. Subsequently, it shows how the effects of such violence are shared, extended, and sustained over time.

Nature of Witchcraft-Related Violence and Accusations

Witchcraft-related violence has existed for centuries and in many rural communities worldwide and still exists today (Adinkrah 2015: 10;

Gottschalk 2005: 100). Niehaus (2010: 70) describes witchcraft as a context through which people interpret misfortunes, illness, and death. Scholarly authors contend that witchcraft is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, while others link it to supernatural beliefs (Cohan 2011; Munu and Yusuf 2023). Still others emphasise socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, unemployment and economic inequality (Geschiere 1997). Similar perspectives include the view that it is a gendered phenomenon (Abukari 2025), where women are disproportionately targeted and occurring in areas that are plagued by poverty and unemployment (Abdullah et al. 2025; Singh and Msuya 2019). Geschiere (1997: 25) has argued that witchcraft is rooted in intimate relations and kinship due to beliefs about maternal or generational inheritance. As a result, harm travels along family lines, with the entire family suffering accusations, victimisation, and ostracism rather than the individual accused. According to Niehaus (2018: 418), accusations often arise from close social networks as tensions surrounding maternal inheritance, jealousy, and reciprocity proliferate. The lack of consensus in these studies demonstrates how witchcraft has become pervasive and how multiple factors related to witchcraft intersect. This strengthens the South African Law Reform Commission's (SALRC) (2022: 45) assertion that the persistent belief in witchcraft from various sectors of society makes the enforcement of the law against witchcraft seem impossible.

As such, both historical and contemporary literature from Africa and Asia reveals the continued persistence of witchcraft-related violence. In Nigeria, accusations are associated with persecution, including assaults and killings (Eboiyehi 2017: 248), whereas in Ghana, they have contributed to the establishment of “witch camps,” where approximately 1,000 women seek refuge from violence (Mutaru and Sekyi 2023: 9; Singh and Msuya 2019: 105). Similarly, although witch hunting has been criminalised in India, cases remain underreported, suggesting that legal prohibition may not effectively eliminate witchcraft-related violence (Severyns 2021: 1).

Scholars who studied witchcraft in South African apartheid era found that it was influenced by socio-political and economic inequalities (Petrus 2017: 180; Niehaus 2010: 66; Niehaus 2018: 421). According to Niehaus (2010: 66), witchcraft in the apartheid era was fraught with suspicions of whether it existed, resulting in efforts from the government to eradicate discourses through the law and Western education. Nevertheless, such attempts seem to remain inconsistent in curbing the beliefs about witchcraft due to the cultural sensitivity associated with the phenomenon. Police statistics recorded a significant rise in witchcraft-related cases from 1,093 to 1,293

in Limpopo during the years 1994-1995 (Pelgrim 2003: 87). Similarly, Hund (2000: 366) reports that at least 3,000 witchcraft-related violent incidents were recorded in the Northern Province during the years 1987 to 1999. Between 2015 and 2022 about 312 people were killed, including ritual murders (Health-e News 2022: 1). Literature reveals that South Africa continues to face challenges associated with witchcraft-related violence despite existing interventions to curb this phenomenon (Petrus 2017: 188; SALRC 2022: 45). Recent studies highlight the pervasiveness of witchcraft-related violence in rural villages of the Eastern Cape and Limpopo where elderly women are predominantly targeted (De Jong and Ka Menziwa 2022; Maromo 2024). The most common methods of violence against suspected witches in these provinces are damage to property and forced relocations (SALRC 2022: 45). As Mabefam (2023: 357) highlighted, such forced relocations reveal the harsh realities of prejudice and discrimination against those accused of witchcraft because of their age, gender, and economic status. It further reveals that while manifestations of witchcraft vary across historical and cultural contexts, accusations of witchcraft continue to function as mechanisms of marginalisation and victimisation.

Impact of Witchcraft-Related Violence on Families

Chari (2025: 94) argued that the term “witch” evokes fear not only for the individual accused, but also for their family, who may experience estrangement from support structures. Similarly, Aryal (2022: 1) highlighted that the stigma surrounding the label “witch” can lead to both physical and psychological harm. These findings align with a broader understanding of stigmatisation, which some authors describe as negative attitudes towards an individual based on perceived differences that justify discriminatory actions (Jacobs et al. 2022: 893). As such, those who are stigmatised may be isolated and neglected by their families and communities (Nyanyuki 2022: 6). Families affected by stigma may experience social exclusion, bullying, loss of reputation, and social division (Finlay et al. 2025: 14).

The literature highlights that the impact of victimisation extends not only to the individual who experiences it but also to those who witness it (Jimenez et al. 2021: 1). Research has established that in most cases, the entire family may be accused and targeted because of one family member (Munu and Yusuf 2023: 155; Niehaus 2018: 419). In many cases, the emotional burden of supporting affected individuals during recovery can strain family relationships (Danzer 2024: 1). Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014: 314) argued

that witchcraft accusations can cause conflict and disrupt relationships within the family. This is because individuals accused of witchcraft may experience isolation from both extended families and community members, leading to fear of being attacked or killed (De Jong and Ka Menziwa 2022: 1; Niehaus 2018: 421). While some individuals are publicly accused, others may be suspected without their knowledge (Azongo et al. 2020: 31). Consequently, witchcraft accusations can affect innocent individuals, particularly in contexts where there is often a lack of evidence (Baloyi 2015: 4). Violence frequently results in bodily harm, including killing, torture, and displacement, which may lead to psychological and symbolic trauma. In some cases, this may disrupt children's education and contribute to school dropout (Mathews and Benvenuti 2014: 26). Another form of trauma with long-term effects on children is "vicarious trauma," which may arise through exposure to traumatic incidents (Yazdani and Shafi 2014: 59). Jimenez et al. (2021: 1) relate symptoms of vicarious trauma to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), associated with secondary exposure to traumatic events. According to Finlay et al. (2025:2), stigma attached to witchcraft accusations can contribute to the impact of vicarious trauma within families. Nonetheless, the impact of violence on families extends beyond trauma and may include financial strain, loss of income, loss of a breadwinner, and the need for psychological support (Baloyi 2015: 3-4).

Methodology¹

Qualitative research design was used to gain in-depth insight into victims' experiences of witchcraft-related violence (Fouché et al. 2021: 11). The research was situated within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, which is well-suited to exploring how individuals understand and make sense of their lived experiences within particular social and cultural contexts. This perspective allowed for a closer examination of how participants interpret and attach meaning to experiences of violence, victimisation, and stigma. To examine these experiences, the research drew on a narrative inquiry approach. This approach emphasises participants' accounts to understand how meaning is constructed through storytelling (Clandinin 2022: 122). It provided space for participants to describe their experiences of witchcraft-related violence in relation to their own cultural, historical, and personal contexts. In doing so, their narratives offered insight

1 The findings presented in this article form part of a larger study conducted by the first author and supervised by the second author as part of a PhD thesis.

into how they make sense of their identities and social realities (Pemberton et al. 2019: 393). The sample consisted of 28 female participants, aged between 18 and 79 years, who had experienced witchcraft-related violence either directly or indirectly. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure that those included had relevant lived experiences. Access to participants was facilitated by social workers, who also helped establish rapport. Data were collected by the first author through semi-structured interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025, continuing until data saturation was reached. This format allowed some flexibility while ensuring key areas of interest were covered. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes at times that suited them. The first author shares common values with the participants regarding cultural background, language, race, and ethnicity. Trust and rapport were established with the participants by providing reassurance that their experiences would be understood. Therefore, interviews were conducted primarily in Sepedi, the participants' language and the researcher's home language.

Where necessary, participants who required further explanation were assisted by a bilingual social worker who was fluent in Sepedi and English. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in Sepedi before being translated into English by the researcher. Some interpretations of the findings might have been subjective, influenced by the researcher's cultural background and knowledge of the subject matter. However, both authors remained as objective as possible throughout the research process in order to minimise bias, ensuring that their interpretations faithfully reflected the participants' experiences. The translated transcripts were further checked against the audio for consistency and accuracy. The following table outlines the biographical details of the participants, including the community where they resided (or were exiled to), age, gender, marital status, education, and employment status (see Table 1).

Name of participant	Community	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Educational status	Employment status
Meikie	Ditobeleng	73	Female	Widowed	Grade 9	Unemployed
Pinky	Tjibeng	20	Female	Single	Grade 11	Still in school
Moloko	Scoornord	65	Female	Widowed	Grade 10	Traditional Healer
Letica	Driekop	50	Female	Married	Grade 12	Traditional Healer
Mmabotho	Diphale	33	Female	widowed	Grade 11	Unemployed

Name of participant	Community	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Educational status	Employment status
Nankie	Diphale	48	Female	Single	Tertiary education	Employed
Grace	Diphale	25	Female	single	Grade 11	Unemployed
Mapula	Diphale	39	Female	divorced	Grade 11	Employed
Milicent	Ga-Kgoete	55	Female	Widowed	Tertiary education	Self-employed
Kamogelo	Steelpoort	43	Female	Single	Grade 10	Unemployed
Patricia	Driekop	28	Female	Married	N4 Mechanical engineering	Employed
Portia	Driekop	47	Female	Married	Tertiary education	Self-employed
Betty	Elandsdraal	33	Female	Single	Grade 12	Unemployed
Kgabo	Ditobeleng	38	Female	Single	Grade 11	Unemployed
Mpho	Elandsdraal	18	Female	Single	Grade 10	Discontinued schooling
Gali	Ditobeleng	41	Female	Single	Grade 12	Unemployed
Tlou	Ditobeleng	19	Female	Single	Grade 12	Unemployed
Pontsho	Tjibeng	46	Female	Single	Grade 11	Unemployed
Pitsi	Ga -Mpheti	68	Female	Widowed	Grade 11	Traditional Healer
Thami	Elandsdraal	40	Female	Widowed	Tertiary education	Self-employed
Nthabi	Schoornord	21	Female	Single	Grade 12	Still in school
Bongie	Steelpoort	20	Female	Single	Grade 9	Still in school
Linda	Steelpoort	73	Female	Married	Grade 12	Unemployed
Kgaugelo	Ditobeleng	45	Female	Married	Grade 10	Traditional healer
Marry	Ga Kgoete	79	Female	Widowed	Grade 12	Pensioner
Lethabo	Madikelang	32	Female	Married	Grade 12	Traditional Healer
Aphiwe	Elandsdraal	35	Female	Widowed	Grade 11	Unemployed
Judy	Elandsdraal	71	Female	Widowed	Grade 9	Unemployed

Table 1. Study Participants

The biographical details of the participants are further explained below.

Study Areas and Context

The research took place in eight rural villages in rural Limpopo Province: Diphale, Ga-Kgoete, Elandskraal, Steelpoort, Ga Mpheti, Schoonoord, Ditobeleng, and Madikeleng. These communities are largely Sepedi-speaking and operate within established traditional leadership structures. Living conditions across these areas are generally constrained by high levels of poverty and unemployment, with some residents residing in informal settlements (Thesnaar 2024: 3). Within this context, everyday challenges and experiences of misfortune are often interpreted through local belief systems, including those related to witchcraft (Adolfsson et al. 2024: 391).

Participants' Profile

All participants were Black and resided in Limpopo Province, where most of the population is Black. The participants in this study range from 18 to 79 years. Although witches are assumed to be women, there is no inherent gender in witchcraft. However, existing literature confirms that women are the majority to be accused of witchcraft-related practices (Gershman 2022: 4). In this study, most of the participants accused of witchcraft were unemployed, while some were retired or on a pension. In addition, most participants had an average level of education. Although education does not determine whether an individual will be accused of witchcraft, it does play a significant role in witchcraft beliefs. According to the findings of this study single women were more frequently accused, often due to their association with individuals already accused of witchcraft.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using a combination of thematic and narrative approaches to provide both breadth and depth in understanding participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was employed as the primary analytic strategy to identify patterns across the dataset. This involved familiarisation with the data, initial coding, and the development of themes aligned with the research aim (Naeem et al. 2023: 1). Through this process, key themes such as family victimisation, secondary victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, and stigma were identified. To complement this, a narrative analytic lens was applied to examine how participants constructed and conveyed their experiences. Drawing on narrative inquiry principles (Clandinin

2022) and Frank's (1995, 2013) typology of illness narratives, attention was given to what participants experienced and also to how these experiences were structured, interpreted, and communicated. This included analysing narrative form (e.g. coherence, fragmentation, temporality), positioning (how participants positioned themselves in relation to events and others), and meaning-making processes. Narratives were further examined for patterns consistent with chaos, restitution, and quest forms (Frank 1995: 97-98). Chaos narratives were characterised by disjointed sequencing, emotional intensity, and a lack of resolution, often reflecting ongoing trauma. Quest narratives were identified in which participants attempted to derive meaning from their experiences or emphasised endurance and survival. While restitution narratives were less evident, their relative absence was analytically significant, suggesting limited opportunities for recovery or restoration within participants' contexts. Accordingly, the study applied both Arthur Frank's narrative forms (linear, fragmented, chaotic) and narrative types (chaotic, restitution, quest) as distinct categories to examine how participants structured and interpreted the stories (Frank 1995, 2013, 2016, 2019). The integration of thematic and narrative analysis enabled a layered understanding of the data. While thematic analysis captured recurring patterns across participants' accounts, narrative analysis provided insight into how individuals made sense of their experiences, how trauma shaped storytelling, and how identities were constructed within contexts of violence, stigma, and exclusion.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the University of South Africa, facilitated by the ethics committee, with ethical clearance no. ST105-2022. In addition, approval was obtained from the Department of Social Development under project no. LPREC/19/2024: PG. Due to the study's sensitivity, ethical considerations, such as anonymity and confidentiality, were implemented to protect participants from harm. In addition, debriefing was utilised, with assistance from a social worker, to ensure that participants were protected from re-traumatisation. Some participants were undergoing a court trial, and the researcher ensured that field notes were used instead of a tape recorder. Participants' anonymity was protected, and codenames such as Betty, etc. were used. According to Kang and Hwang (2023: 2), ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of participants enhances the credibility and reliability of the study.

Study Limitations and Challenges

The study encountered significant limitations and challenges. The study's findings were limited to specific villages and do not represent those of villages from other provinces. As part of a larger doctoral study, the inclusion criteria were limited to only females who were direct victims of witchcraft violence or accusations. For this article, excluding males and other genders might have limited the universality of the findings, especially since they may also be impacted by witchcraft violence, as family members of the accused. For the first author, some of the experiences shared by participants were both traumatising and disturbing. According to Wallace and Rowtham (2026: 63), researchers can also suffer from vicarious trauma, as they can become emotionally engaged with the stories, trauma, and experiences of participants. Fortunately, the first author was accompanied by a social worker, who assisted both the victims and the first author in dealing with the subsequent emotional distress.

Findings

This section presents the findings organised around key themes, namely family victimisation and impact, secondary victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, and stigma. These themes reflect the ways in which witchcraft-related violence extends beyond the direct victims to family members and broader social relationships. In addition to thematic patterns, attention was also given to how participants narrated their experiences, which is addressed in a subsection below.

Family Victimisation and Impact

The findings show that the impact of witchcraft-related violence extends beyond the primary victim to affect family structures. In this study, family victimisation refers to the ways in which harm is experienced collectively, affecting individuals who are directly and indirectly exposed to violence within familial contexts. Participants' accounts describe emotional and psychological harm experienced by family members, particularly where they witnessed acts of violence.

Mmabotho described how her children witnessed the killing of their grandmother and the destruction of their home:

“We are still mourning the death of our mother, who was brutally killed in front of us. Now the community has torched our house. We don’t know what our sin is in this village. We are saddened, and the children are traumatised after seeing their grandmother being thrown into the burning house. We don’t have a home, and we are not safe anymore.” *[Mmabotho, 33 years old, victim of witchcraft-related violence, the direct victim was her mother]*

Mmabotho’s account describes the death of her mother, the destruction of the family home, and the emotional impact experienced by the family, including the children who witnessed the incident. Other participants described similar experiences of witnessing violence against family members. Mapula recalled:

“I was so terrified that day when I saw them holding guns. I immediately knew that something bad was going to happen. When my mother was being attacked and shot at [Mapula pauses] ... I quickly ran to hide and had to stop myself from crying because they would have found me. You can imagine how hard that must have been. I couldn’t cry out. That day was very painful.” *[Mapula, 39 years old, direct victim of witchcraft-related violence]*

Grace described her experience of witnessing the abuse of her mother:

“Being called names when she was busy being dragged was so cruel and inhumane. I could still hear her cries as she was insulted and beaten. I could not sleep for days.” *[Grace, 25 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her mother]*

The participants’ accounts describe experiences of witnessing violence against family members, emotional distress, fear, trauma, displacement, and feelings of being unsafe following the incidents.

Secondary Victimization

Secondary victimisation emerged through participants’ interactions with the criminal justice system, particularly in relation to perceived insensitivity, victim-blaming, and a lack of institutional support. In this study, secondary victimisation refers to the additional harm experienced by victims through their engagement with formal systems intended to provide protection

and justice. Participants' accounts describe experiences in which these interactions were perceived as unsupportive.

Participants described dismissive and accusatory responses from police officials when reporting incidents. Moloko recounted:

"Immediately after they started attacking us, I ran straight to the police station to report that the community was attacking us, and they said, 'What did you do? Oh, it's you people again, going around bewitching people. So, they finally caught you.'
[Moloko, 65 years old, victim of witchcraft-related violence]

Similarly, Bongie described being mocked by a police officer:

"One of the police officers was busy mocking me, saying, 'So you go around giving people poison, come and poison me as well. I am ready for you.'
[Bongie, 20 years old, victim of witchcraft-related violence]

These accounts describe participants' experiences of disbelief, ridicule, and blame during interactions with police.

Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with legal processes. Pitsi stated:

"When we got to the court, they didn't tell us anything. They just said the trial has been cancelled. Go home. We were shocked that they let them go just like that – how could they just cancel it after what we went through with no explanations, whatsoever."
[Pitsi, 68 years old, victim of witchcraft-related violence]

Participants reported dissatisfaction with legal processes, including limited communication about court proceedings. Some participants also reported reluctance to report incidents or seek assistance. In some cases, participants reported not seeking help despite being injured. Moreover, the participants' accounts describe experiences of secondary victimisation through interactions with police officials and the criminal justice system, including perceived victim-blaming, ridicule, dissatisfaction with legal processes, and reluctance to seek further assistance.

Secondary Targeting

Witchcraft accusations not only pose a direct threat to the accused individual's safety and well-being but also extend to family members, who

may bear the consequences of the accusation. In this study, secondary targeting refers to violence directed at individuals due to their association with the accused. Participants' accounts describe how family members, including children, were exposed to or directly affected by violence associated with such accusations. In some instances, individuals were targeted for attempting to intervene, while in others, they were attacked due to their familial connection.

Nthabi described how she became a target of violence following accusations against her mother:

“My mother was accused of killing a 13-year-old child who was found dead next to the river. I was crying that day when they attacked us, as I hid in a corner till my neighbour spotted me, and came towards me, carrying me on his shoulders to throw me in the burning house. I was busy fighting and screaming, and then he put me down, took a wooden chair and hit me on the head. He didn't even care I was bleeding. When he went to fetch something else to hit me with, I fled and ran to the nearest mountain. I hid there until they left. That man was heartless; he did not care that I was a child. They were busy saying, ‘nonyana engwe le engwe efofa le ngwana wa yona (a Sepedi idiom meaning ‘each bird takes flight alongside its mother’)”² [Nthabi, 21 years old, indirect victim of witchcraft-related violence, the direct victim was her mother]

Similarly, Grace described witnessing extreme violence and being forced to flee for her safety:

“They killed my mother in such a horrible way; they were so ruthless that they handcuffed, dragged her, she was all bloodied, and they proceeded to burn her with a tyre. It was so horrible that I just stood there, all frozen. When they started enquiring about me, I quickly ran and hid on the nearest mountain until the police came.” [Grace, 25 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her mother]

These accounts describe violence directed at family members and children following accusations of witchcraft against a relative. Participants described being physically attacked, witnessing violence, fleeing for safety, and hiding

2 The idiom has a similar meaning to the view that children inherit witchcraft from their mothers (Adinkrah and Cody 2024: 5).

from perpetrators. Some participants also referred to beliefs that witchcraft could be transmitted within families, particularly along maternal lines.

In addition to children, participants described how other family members were targeted in the absence of the accused. Moloko reflected on the killing of her husband:

“My husband was a prophet and used to attend an apostolic church. He was a very good person and liked helping others. I think his only crime was being the husband of a sangoma [an isiZulu term referring to a traditional healer and diviner], because I think they killed him because of me. When I managed to run away, he refused and said he would not leave his home; he’d rather die. He was killed ruthlessly by our own people. Community members found him on the streets when he had just returned to fetch firewood. I was told that one of them just took a big stone and hit his head. Others joined in with machetes. They took the same firewood he had, put it on top of his body, and set his body alight.” *[Moloko, 65 years old, victim of witchcraft-related violence, the direct victim was her husband]*

Moloko’s account describes the killing of her husband following accusations directed at her and her belief that he was targeted because of their relationship.

Participants’ narratives reflected both linear and fragmented forms. Nthabi’s account follows a largely linear structure, describing the accusation, the attack, and her escape. Grace’s narrative is more fragmented, moving between descriptions of the violent event and her immediate responses. Moloko’s account combines both linear and fragmented elements, beginning with a description of her husband before recounting the violent incident and her understanding of why it occurred.

The participants’ accounts describe secondary targeting as involving violence against family members associated with individuals accused of witchcraft, including children and spouses, as well as experiences of physical violence, displacement, and fear.

Collective Blame

Participants’ accounts illustrate how witchcraft accusations extend beyond individuals to entire families, resulting in collective blame, social exclusion, and, in some cases, forced displacement. In this study, collective blame

refers to the process through which responsibility for alleged witchcraft is attributed not only to the accused individual but also to family members, thereby extending suspicion across the family unit. Participants described accusations that spread beyond the individual accused and affected other family members.

Pontsho described how she, her daughter, and her sister feared for their lives when they were surrounded by community members seeking justice for learners who were alleged to have been poisoned through space cookies.³ She explained how individuals from surrounding areas gathered to ensure that her child was expelled from both the school and the community:

“When I arrived there, I was shocked to find my child surrounded by community members, like some criminal who had just stolen something. The parents of the children started accusing me, saying I was the one who sent her to kill their children. I witnessed firsthand that it is horrifying to see angry community members gathered around you and ready to kill. I’ve heard some stories that people from this community are very dangerous; they don’t show mercy. When they say to you, ‘We are going to burn you and kill you,’ just know they will do it. Their belief in witchcraft is too rife; when they hear such cases, they don’t even waste time. At those times, when they tried to beat us, I immediately thought in my heart, it’s over for us and prayed silently. Before they could harm us, we were rescued by the police. When the charges were dropped, they ensured that she was expelled from both the community and the school. My sister took her away to another province because they chased her out of the community.” *[Pontsho, 46 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her daughter]*

Patricia similarly described how accusations affected her entire family:

“Three children were hospitalised in our community due to poisoning. My family was accused of poisoning those children using witchcraft. This is after our neighbour’s child claimed that it was my mother who gave her the muthi [traditional medicine or medicinal substance] to kill them. Before the incident, we were living in harmony with our community members until they accused us of witchcraft. Some tried to be on our side while

3 Space cookies or muffins, also known as “drug muffins,” refer to baked goods mixed with marijuana, a substance reportedly used among high school learners (Sedibe and Hendricks 2020: 341).

the community was bashing on us, and some just stood by as we were accused. However, in such situations, you can never be certain whom to trust or who is genuine. When the community surrounded us, you could see that they were baying for blood. Fortunately, the police arrived on time to save us from being killed by the community.” *[Patricia, 28 years old, indirect victim of witchcraft-related violence, the direct victim was her mother]*

Kgabo further described the broader social consequences experienced by her family:

“After that incident with my aunt, they think all of us are witches now and avoid us on the streets. Even my friends started becoming distant. You know what people think about witchcraft. When a family member that you live with is branded as a witch, you are also considered a witch.” *[Kgabo, 38 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her aunt]*

These accounts describe accusations extending beyond the individual to other family members. Participants reported experiences of social rejection, threats of violence, avoidance by community members, expulsion from communities, and displacement following accusations against a relative.

Participants’ narratives within this theme were predominantly fragmented, with individuals moving between descriptions of events, expressions of fear, and descriptions of the consequences of the accusations.

The participants’ accounts describe collective blame as involving the extension of witchcraft accusations to family members, accompanied by experiences of social exclusion, threats of violence, displacement, and changes in relationships within their communities.

Stigma

Stigma emerged as a persistent consequence of witchcraft accusations, affecting not only those directly accused but also their family members. In this study, stigma refers to the process through which individuals and their relatives are socially marked, devalued, and excluded based on accusations of witchcraft.

Participants’ accounts describe experiences in which stigma affected not only the accused individual but also relatives through association. Kgabo

described how stigma influenced both family dynamics and perceptions of safety:

“I am here to convince her to allow us to take her to an old-age home. We all want the best for her, but she won’t listen. She insists on staying here. We are also fearing for our lives because the accusations are affecting us as well. You know, when your family member is accused of witchcraft, you are also automatically considered a witch.” *[Kgabo, 38 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her aunt]*

Tlou similarly described how stigma was experienced in everyday interactions, including social rejection and direct threats:

“I think my aunt should stop going out because they will kill her. People are giving us nasty looks on the streets. You could see that they don’t want you close to them. They even threatened me on the street last time that they would beat her if they ever passed her on the street.” *[Tlou, 19 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her aunt]*

Gali described the fear associated with the accusations and concerns about future violence:

“She goes to people’s houses and climbs on walls. I want my grandmother to go to an old-age home so that she can be safe. We often fear that the community might turn against us one day and attack us. Because we do hear stories from the streets, and it’s frightening.” *[Gali, 41 years old, victim of witchcraft accusations, the direct victim was her grandmother]*

Portia further described changes in her mother’s social interactions following the accusations:

“My mother didn’t speak to anyone in the community, nor did she go to people’s houses, due to the accusations.” *[Portia, 47 years old, the direct victim was her mother]*

These accounts describe experiences of social exclusion, avoidance, changes in social interactions, fear, and threats of violence following accusations of witchcraft.

The participants’ accounts describe stigma as affecting both individuals accused of witchcraft and their family members through experiences of

social exclusion, avoidance, fear, and changes in relationships within their communities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence on families within rural communities in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The findings demonstrate that the consequences of witchcraft accusations extend well beyond those directly accused, creating interconnected forms of victimisation that permeate family relationships, community interactions, and institutional responses. Rather than functioning as isolated consequences, family victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, stigma, and secondary victimisation interact to sustain harm over time. These findings support the notion that the effects of violence spread across relational networks (Abiola 2022: 4; Danzer 2024: 1) but further suggest that witchcraft-related violence is best understood as a relational form of victimisation, in which harm is collectively experienced and reinforced through social relationships rather than confined to an individual victim. Thus, this study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that the ripple effects of witchcraft accusations are not merely additional consequences of violence but constitute a broader process through which victimisation becomes embedded within family systems.

Participants' accounts further illustrate that the impact of witchcraft-related violence evolves long after the initial accusation or violent incident. Family members described persistent fear, grief, insecurity, displacement, and uncertainty, indicating that victimisation continues to shape everyday life rather than ending with the immediate event. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that violence may generate enduring psychological and social consequences for families (Danzer 2024: 1; Jimenez et al. 2021: 1). However, the present study expands this understanding by showing that trauma is reinforced through continued exposure to community hostility, social exclusion, and the constant anticipation of further violence. Consequently, the ripple effects are not only temporal but cumulative, with successive experiences of victimisation compounding the original harm.

The experiences of children are particularly noteworthy. Existing research has shown that children who witness violence are at increased risk of long-term emotional and psychological difficulties (Downey and Crummy

2022: 1; Alagarsami, Kannekanti and Rajan 2024: 37). Participants' narratives confirm these findings but also reveal a more complex pattern of victimisation. Children were not merely passive witnesses to killings, assaults, and the destruction of family homes; they frequently became secondary victims through displacement, loss of security, and ongoing exposure to fear. In several instances, children were also directly targeted because community members believed that witchcraft could be inherited through family bloodlines. This reflects broader research showing that children associated with alleged witches are vulnerable to stigma, abuse, and exclusion (AFRUCA 2017: 12; Bussien et al. 2011: 22; Uche et al. 2025: 246). Therefore, the findings suggest that children's victimisation extends beyond vicarious trauma and is shaped by culturally embedded beliefs that transfer suspicion across generations. Family membership itself becomes a basis for victimisation, irrespective of any personal involvement in the alleged acts.

The findings further indicate that institutional responses may be shaped by broader sociocultural beliefs surrounding witchcraft. As reflected in participants' accounts, some officials appeared to endorse or reproduce these beliefs, thereby legitimating harmful attitudes towards those accused. This aligns with research indicating that reluctance to intervene, whether due to personal beliefs or fear of community reprisal, may perpetuate collective violence against victims (Uche et al. 2025: 249). It further aligns with Ashforth's (2005: 8) concept of spiritual security, which examines witchcraft and its controversies in the post-apartheid era. Ashforth (2005: 5) argued that widespread spiritual insecurity, combined with limited institutional capacity to provide effective spiritual security, led to community mistrust in formal justice. This is because claims about witchcraft fall outside the evidential standards of the justice system, leading to police officers dismissing such cases. As a result, community members would feel rejected, neglected, and doubted by institutions that are supposed to provide spiritual security. The findings demonstrate that secondary victimisation extends harm within institutional contexts. Rather than interrupting cycles of violence, these responses may reinforce vulnerability, undermine trust, and contribute to the continued marginalisation of individuals accused of witchcraft and their families.

This process is closely connected to the findings on collective blame and secondary targeting. Rather than representing separate forms of victimisation, these processes appear to operate sequentially. Niehaus (2018: 418) demonstrates that tensions in family relations breed suspicion of witchcraft among those perceived to be jealous, envious, and resentful.

Once an accusation is directed at one individual, suspicion often spreads to spouses, children, and extended family members. Collective blame, therefore, functions as the mechanism through which violence spreads across family networks, while secondary targeting represents the behavioural expression of these beliefs. Similar observations have been made by Kabelenga (2020: 51), Chari (2025: 94), and Awortwe et al. (2025: 175), who argue that accusations often become communal rather than individual, legitimising violence against those associated with the accused. The present findings strengthen this understanding by illustrating how these processes become mutually reinforcing, transforming isolated accusations into sustained patterns of family victimisation that disrupt relationships, undermine social belonging, and create lasting insecurity.

The findings also demonstrate that the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence are reinforced by institutional responses that fail to acknowledge the broader victimisation experienced by affected families. Participants described encounters with law enforcement and other authorities that were characterised by dismissal, inaction, or limited intervention, leaving families to navigate threats, displacement, and social exclusion with little formal support. These experiences reflect secondary victimisation, whereby victims experience further harm through inadequate institutional responses following their initial victimisation (Campbell and Raja 1999: 262; Orth 2002: 314). While previous studies have documented mistrust of criminal justice institutions in cases involving witchcraft-related violence (Gilbert and Postel 2022: 523; Niehaus 2010: 66), the present findings suggest that institutional failures extend beyond ineffective service delivery. When allegations are treated as private family disputes or culturally accepted community matters, institutional inaction may inadvertently reinforce the marginalisation of victims and contribute to the continuation of violence. Consequently, the absence of meaningful intervention not only prolongs victims' vulnerability but also legitimises the conditions under which further victimisation occurs.

Closely linked to these institutional experiences is the pervasive stigma that emerged throughout participants' accounts. Although stigma has previously been identified because of witchcraft accusations (Cimpric 2010: 44; Awortwe et al. 2025: 174), the present findings illustrate how it functions as an enduring social process rather than a temporary reaction to an accusation. Participants described being labelled, avoided, excluded from community activities, and judged solely through their association with an accused family member. These experiences often persisted long

after the initial accusation, disrupting social relationships, and limiting opportunities to rebuild their lives. Importantly, stigma was not confined to those directly accused but extended across family networks, affecting spouses, children, and extended relatives irrespective of their own actions. This finding reinforces Goffman's (1963: 5) conceptualisation of stigma as a socially constructed identity that fundamentally alters how individuals are perceived and treated, while also demonstrating how witchcraft accusations facilitate the intergenerational transmission of social exclusion within rural communities.

The findings indicate that family victimisation, collective blame, secondary targeting, stigma, and secondary victimisation are not discrete outcomes but interconnected processes that sustain the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence. Collective blame extends accusations beyond the individual, secondary targeting translates suspicion into continued intimidation and violence, stigma entrenches social exclusion, and institutional failures reduce opportunities for protection and recovery. Rather than occurring in isolation, these processes interact to reproduce victimisation across multiple domains of victims' lives. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of moving beyond individualised understandings of victimisation towards approaches that recognise the relational and collective nature of harm within communities where accusations of witchcraft remain socially embedded.

This study contributes to the empirical literature by demonstrating that the consequences of witchcraft-related violence extend beyond the accused individual to affect entire family systems. Conceptualising these experiences as ripple effects provides a broader understanding of victimisation within rural South African communities and underscores the importance of responses that recognise the needs of affected families.

Narrative Constructions of Trauma and Victimisation

The narrative analysis provides further insight into how participants understood and communicated the consequences of witchcraft-related violence. Drawing on Frank's (2013: 53) typology of illness narratives, participants' accounts were predominantly characterised by chaos and quest narratives, while restitution narratives were notably absent. Rather than representing distinct categories, these narrative forms frequently overlapped, reflecting the complexity of participants' lived experiences.

Chaos narratives were evident in participants' descriptions of sudden loss, displacement, fear, and the disruption of everyday life following accusations of witchcraft. Their accounts were often fragmented and emotionally charged, illustrating experiences that remained unresolved long after the initial acts of violence. These narratives reflected not only the immediate trauma associated with the accusations but also the enduring uncertainty created by ongoing threats, social exclusion, and strained family relationships. Similar observations have been made by Frank (2013: 97), who argues that chaos narratives emerge when individuals struggle to impose order or coherence on traumatic experiences.

Quest narratives were also present, although less prominent. Despite profound adversity, some participants described efforts to rebuild their lives, protect their families, or derive meaning from their experiences. These narratives reflected resilience rather than recovery, as participants continued to negotiate the long-term consequences of victimisation while attempting to move forward. In this context, meaning-making was closely associated with maintaining family unity, protecting children, and preserving personal dignity despite continued marginalisation.

The limited presence of restitution narratives is particularly significant. Frank (2013: 75) suggests that restitution narratives are characterised by an expectation that life will return to its previous state following adversity. Such narratives were largely absent from participants' accounts, reflecting the enduring nature of the ripple effects identified in this study. Persistent stigma, collective blame, secondary targeting, and limited institutional support meant that participants rarely described experiences of complete recovery or social reintegration. Instead, their narratives revealed that victimisation remained embedded within everyday family life, with the consequences of witchcraft accusations continuing long after the initial event.

When interpreted in conjunction with the broader finding, the narrative analysis demonstrates that witchcraft-related violence is experienced as an ongoing social process rather than a discrete traumatic incident. The predominance of chaos and quest narratives, coupled with the absence of restitution narratives, reinforces the study's central argument that the ripple effects of witchcraft-related violence are relational, cumulative, and sustained through continued social and institutional processes. Therefore, the narratives provide an important interpretive lens through which the enduring consequences of witchcraft-related violence on families can be understood.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that witchcraft-related violence affects not only those directly accused but also their families, with consequences that extend into wider community relationships. Family victimisation, secondary victimisation, secondary targeting, collective blame, and stigma emerged as interconnected experiences that continued long after the initial accusation or violent incident. These findings indicate that the impact of witchcraft-related violence extends across family systems through ongoing social and institutional processes.

Conceptualising these experiences as ripple effects provides a broader understanding of how victimisation is experienced within rural South African communities. This perspective extends existing knowledge by showing that the consequences of witchcraft-related violence unfold across family relationships rather than being confined to the individual accused. Moreover, the findings highlight a fundamental challenge in addressing witchcraft-related accusations through the justice system, as claims of witchcraft cannot be objectively established or verified using conventional forms of legal evidence. The findings also highlight the need for responses that address the wider impact of witchcraft accusations through family-centred support, community engagement, and institutional responses that recognise the experiences of affected families.

The study was limited to women from selected rural communities in Limpopo Province. Future research should explore the experiences of male family members, children, and other relatives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how witchcraft-related violence affects family systems. Comparative studies across different provinces and cultural settings could determine whether similar patterns emerge in other contexts. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine how these effects develop over time and to identify factors that support recovery among affected individuals and families.

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No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Statement of Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA) Ethics Review Committee (ERC Reference No. ST105-2022).

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CHANGING LAWS, UNCHANGING ENVIRONMENT: POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING LAWS IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: Political party financing is a critical determinant of electoral integrity, democratic accountability, and political competition. This study examines the evolution, adequacy, and implementation of Nigeria's political finance laws in the Fourth Republic and the factors driving non-compliance. Guided by Clientelism Theory, it adopts a qualitative approach using key informant interviews and documentary analysis. The findings reveal that although Nigeria has relatively comprehensive legal provisions regulating political finance, weak enforcement, institutional weaknesses within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political interference, inadequate monitoring, and entrenched patron–client networks undermine compliance. The study concludes that legal reforms alone are insufficient without stronger enforcement and accountability. It recommends empowering INEC, establishing an election offences commission, enhancing financial transparency and monitoring, enforcing automatic sanctions, and promoting greater civic oversight.

Keywords: *Fourth Republic, party financing, clientelism, oligarchs, patronage system*

Introduction

The funding of political parties is an important pillar of a competitive electoral democracy. Liberal democracy in the 21st century strives to provide an accountable and transparent electoral process that exudes credibility and integrity (Norris 2018: 15). As most countries in the world practise electoral democracy today, individual states have enacted different laws on the rules of the game (Ohman 2018: 6). Democracy must be guided by existing laws and principles to continue to guarantee the freedom of the governed. One of the

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ways to protect democracy from abuse by actors is to pass laws on party funding (Piccio and Biezen 2018: 7). Party financing is an essential aspect of the electoral process, where parties and candidates representing their platforms seek to reach out to voters to secure support for victory (Walecki 2017: 1). Party funding varies from democracy to democracy but generally takes the form of public funding, private funding, and public-private funding (Ohman 2014a: 7). Party funding involves a range of laws, regulations, monitoring, enforcement, compliance, and sanctions to create a level playing field for candidates and parties while safeguarding the interests of weak and vulnerable groups (Wulff 2017: 11).

Nigeria is recognised as one of the African countries with comprehensive party financing laws (Ohman 2014a: 7; Sule 2021: 161). Party funding laws in Nigeria derive from the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended, and the Electoral Act 2002, later amended as the Electoral Act 2006, which was later amended by the Electoral Act 2010, the Electoral Act 2022 as amended, and 2026 Electoral Act as amended (see Federal Government of Nigeria 1999, 2020; Federal Government of Nigeria and Independent National Electoral Commission 2006, 2010, 2022, 2026).

The Constitution and the Acts have sections and subsections on expenditure limits, prohibition of donations, disclosure, foreign donations, monitoring, sanctions, and numerous other provisions. Many studies (Adetula 2008: 29; Davies 2021: 341; Nwagwu et al. 2022: 6; Sule 2023: 25) report multi-dimensional problems of party funding in Nigeria, including laws, money politics, violations, overspending, and electoral corruption, but important gaps remain.

The present study finds that although the laws are formulated, there are several gaps in their content and context of application. Policymakers assumed that the problems of party funding in Nigeria, leading to corruption in elections and politics, were due to the inadequacy of the laws. This is one of the gaps identified in this study; the laws have been inadequate, but not so poor as to require constant change while the environment remains static. Most of the studies mentioned above have succumbed to this view. Our study examines the fact that party funding laws in Nigeria continue to undergo transformation, probably within a shorter period. However, one phenomenon remains constant, and that is the main starting point of the argument: the actions and attitudes of politicians. This study therefore examines the trend that party financing laws in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2023) have changed at least three times in 18 years, but politicians continue their practice of encroachment unabated. The 2002 Electoral Act retained public funding as set out in Section 80(1-2) and Section 81(1-2), with grant disbursements approved by the National Assembly based on a percentage determined by

the performance of each party. The expenditure ceiling was raised by more than 100% from 2006 to 2010 and five times from 2010 to 2022. Therefore, the main arguments of the present article are to analyse the relation between the changing party funding laws and the reactions of politicians in terms of compliance with the laws, and how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the electoral management body in Nigeria, discharges its task of monitoring, ensuring compliance, and imposing sanctions.

International Perspectives on Political Party Financing

To reach out to their supporters and woo the votes of the electorate, political parties undertake a rigorous tour of the campaign areas where elections are held. This routine is no easy task, as the road to political support involves enormous financial burdens. Financing of political parties refers to funds used for the organisation's internal activities. Campaign financing, by contrast, refers to obtaining funds and allocating them to political campaigns (Ohman 2014a: 11). The sum of all the processes involved in fundraising and spending by parties and candidates during the election campaign is called party funding (Ohman 2014a: 11). Activities include spending on media advertising, billboards and posters, rallies, paying for the intrigues of party agents and loyalists, and other related expenses (Ohman 2014a: 12). However, party funding is not limited to the activities of parties and politicians. Regulations, laws, and monitoring by Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), as well as sanctioning of violations, are part of the deal (Piccio and Biezen 2018: 68). There are different forms of party funding, such as public funding, where states provide grants to parties based on a set formula; private funding, where parties and candidates are free to raise (legal) funding but are properly regulated by state laws such as setting a spending cap or contribution limit; and public-private funding, where both forms exist (Sule 2023: 41). Parties raise funds from various sources, such as the sale of forms, donations, fundraising and fines, administrative charges, foreign donor support, grants, and other means (Ohman 2018: 9).

Party financing is a global problem and a burden on democratic accountability and transparency. This is because both advanced and emerging democracies are not immune from the risk of circumventing regulations, overspending, or the effects of flexible or weak regulations that allow loopholes for violations (Walecki 2017: 2). Some countries have relaxed laws to avoid rigidity and allow for convenient monitoring and compliance. Others take an intermediate approach, and some struggle with weak or non-existent laws and have only recently been helped to forge one (Wulff 2017: 11). Patterns and problems related to party funding vary from one region to another, depending on

the level of democratic institutionalisation, political organisation, and legal frameworks. In Africa, for example, funding is mostly mixed involving grants from governments and private funding, but the process is fraught with patronage, patrimonialism, vote-buying, illegal financing, external influence, and foreign interference in the electoral process due to external financing and excessive money politics due to the cash economy (Ohman 2014b: 25). In Asia, the situation is somewhat different. Public funding is significant in Asia, but private funding, especially from corporations, dominates the phenomenon. Similar to Africa, weak regulations, misuse of state funds, corporate financing, regulatory violations, money politics, patronage, and corruption are reported in Asia (Ufen 2014: 83).

In Europe, a major difference can be observed between the developed Western European states and the Eastern and Central European states in the practices and regulations of party financing. Western Europe is the most effective in terms of monitoring with flexible laws, but the region is influenced by excessive money politics, which are reinforced by economic prosperity. The party financing system is mostly private sector-oriented (Piccio and Ohman 2014: 179). Party funding in Central and Eastern Europe is weak compared to Western Europe because only recently has there been an attempt to fully democratise it. Private sector sponsorship and kickbacks, money politics, vote buying, illegal financing, regulatory violations, and a lack of transparency are evident in European party financing (Smilow 2014: 82).

One region that is unique in party funding is Latin America and the Caribbean, where there is an equal balance between public and private funding. The long experience of authoritarianism has produced corrupt democratic regimes that have resulted in the misuse of state resources, weak regulations and enforcement, noncompliance, and violations. Parties and candidates financed themselves through donations, private income, restrictions on contributions, the state treasury, and illegal means (Londono and Zobatto 2014: 38). However, the Anglophone democracies of North America and Oceania, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America exhibit patterns similar to those of Western Europe due to cultural similarities and similar political systems (Nasmacher 2014: 255). In these regions, private funding dominates, while in several cases, money politics, excessive spending, patronage, and political corruption are reported alongside regulatory violations (Jacob and Smith 2016: 1; Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016: 5). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), some regulations on party funding are gradually being enacted as democratisation efforts are renewed. Reforms are occurring, but political corruption in party financing, misuse of state funds, vote buying, and

weak regulations combined with overspending and ineffective monitoring are evident in the region (Ohman 2013: 17).

Party funding typically leads to electoral and political corruption (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka 2016: 6; Norris 2018: 16). A major failure is noncompliance and lack of enforcement. (United States Agency for International Development 2005: 2). Factors that typically lead to non-enforcement include loopholes, ambiguous laws, ambitious laws, weak or lax penalties, lack of administrative capacity of a regulatory agency, lack of a transparent and neutral judiciary, immunity clauses, weak oversight, interference in EMBs, and unknown or overly complex laws (Sule 2023: 50). The alarming situation of corruption in party financing has led to reactions from countries, regional organisations, and international institutions. These responses have been successful in regulating and curbing electoral corruption, but they are far from being realised.

Overview of Political Party Financing in Nigeria

Party financing in Nigeria has undergone structural and constitutional changes since colonial times. The first democratic election was held in 1922 under colonialism. Therefore, party financing is divided into the colonial period, the post-colonial period before the Fourth Republic (1999–2023), and the Fourth Republic era. During the colonial period, there were no specific guidelines, rules, or regulations on party financing. The British Representation of the People's Act 1948/1949 and the Nigeria Electoral Provisions Order-in-Council LN 117 of 1958, enacted by the British Parliament, were the sources of the electoral laws that governed the conduct of elections in colonial Nigeria. Private funding was the predominant practice (INEC 2005: 5). However, some incidents indicated corruption and violations, as reported by the Foster Sutton Tribunal of Enquiry in 1958, which investigated financial misconduct by some politicians who belonged to the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon, later the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and were business partners of the African Continental Bank (ACB) (INEC 2005: 6). Party funding in the First Republic (1960–1966) involved private money without any law or regulation. Bribery and corruption were also reported during this period, such as the Coker Commission of Inquiry in 1962, which investigated the illegal political financing of some politicians involving six Western Nigerian public companies allegedly in misconduct with some members of Action Group (AG) (Sule 2023: 53).

The postcolonial party funding system in Nigeria featured moderate public funding. This period covered the years 1979–1983 (Second Republic) and 1990–

1992 (Aborted Third Republic; popularly called so because the transition process to democratisation began in 1990 under the military government of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida but was abolished midway through the 1993 Presidential Election, in which Chief MKO Abiola was said to have been in the lead). The government, through the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), disbursed grants to parties that participated in elections based on the fulfilment of certain established rules, such as national circulation, performance, and strength. Political corruption, patronage, godfatherism, vote-buying, exceeding donation limits, looting the Treasury, and accumulation have been reported (Adetula 2008: 2). Just as in the Second Republic, there were no organised regulations or laws on party funding in the Aborted Third Republic, except that the government provided some grants to the only two parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Secretariats for each of the parties were also established in each of the 589 local governments. In the absence of basic laws on party funding, private funding was also allowed.

The Fourth Republic (1999–2023) represents an important period for the study of party financing laws and regulations in Nigeria. Sule (2023) notes that during this period, Nigeria succeeded in enacting various party financing laws that are comprehensive, well-drafted, and adequate to guide campaign financing. Sule (2023: 56) further notes that despite many amendments and innovations, the party financing laws are far from satisfactory and are insufficient to capture the all-encompassing nature of Nigerian money politics and electoral competition. Three different sets of laws govern the process of party financing in the Fourth Republic. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, where Section 225(1-6) and Section 226(1-5) set out INEC's powers to set spending limits for parties, determine legal sources of revenue for parties, impose bans on donations, and monitor and sanction parties, in order to examine the statements of accounts of the parties and demand accountability from them. The other source of law is the Electoral Act. The Electoral Act was first enacted in 2002, amended in 2006, 2010, 2022 and 2026. The law currently in force is the Electoral Act of 2026, but it will be practiced from 2027 on. Both public and private financing were practiced in the Fourth Republic. In the period from 1999 to 2010, there were public grants paid by the government to political parties as provided by Electoral Act 2002 in Section 80-81. The 2010 Electoral Act abolished public funding and recognised only private funding. Other important changes were also made. The expenditure ceiling, the limits on donations, and other laws were revised upward. As in previous republics, massive allegations of corruption, misconduct, and violations of party funding were commonplace in the Fourth Republic. The Company and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 is the third source of law of party financing.

Political Party Financing Laws in Nigeria

As noted earlier, the party financing laws derive their legitimacy from three important sources: the Nigerian Constitution of 1999, as amended, the Electoral Act 2022, and the Company and Allied Matters (CAMA) Act 2020. The main provisions of the Constitution are found in sections 225 and 226 and their subsections, as indicated in Table 1.

Nigerian Constitution of 1999, Sections and Sub-Sections	Regulations and Provisions
Section 225(1)	Mandates every political party to submit to INEC its published statement of assets and liabilities.
Section 225(2)	Requires every political party to submit to INEC its annual analysis of sources of funds, assets, and expenditures.
Section 225(3)	Prohibits every political party from holding funds or assets outside Nigeria and retaining them sent from outside Nigeria.
Section 225(4)	Provides that the funds or assets in Section 225(3) must be forfeited to the INEC within 21 days.
Section 225(5)	Provides that INEC can give directions to political parties regarding the records of their financial transactions and their scrutiny.
Section 225(6)	Provides that INEC has powers to delegate auditors to audit political parties or members of its staff.
Section 226(1)	Makes it mandatory for every political party to prepare its annual statement of account and balance sheet and submit it to INEC
Section 226(2)	Provides that INEC must ensure whether proper records of accounts of political parties are kept or not, prepare the records, and send them to the National Assembly
Section 226(3)	Provides that every INEC official has powers to request the financial statement of political parties and must have unlimited access to them at all times in the discharge of his duties

Table 1. Sections 225 and 226 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution on Finances of Political Parties and Annual Auditing

Source: Nigerian 1999 Constitution (extracted and tabulated by the authors in 2023).

As shown in Table 1, the laws here emphasise INEC's role to monitor, audit accounts, and seize any prohibited funds from parties. These laws are inadequate because they do not provide regulations and penalties for maximum expenditures, contribution limits, disclosures, and other financial matters. All of this is supplemented by the Electoral Act.

The Electoral Act itself has undergone several reforms. The Electoral Act of 2002 was amended in 2006, 2010, 2022, and 2026. The one in 2026 is the current law. Since most of the provisions and sections have remained the same, this section focuses only on the spending limit and the contribution limit, since those are the sections that were amended in 2010, 2022, and 2026. The Electoral Act 2002 did not specify any spending limit for parties. Instead, it provided for grants to be determined by the National Assembly and disbursed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) based on parties' performance in general elections. Some sections of the Electoral Act 2006 were deleted when the Electoral Act 2010 was amended, such as Section 90 Grants to Political Parties for Elections and Section 91 Annual Grants to Political Parties for their Operations. This is because, as of 2010, public funding has been eliminated. Apart from this important change, other provisions such as monitoring, disclosure, audit of financial statements, and prohibition of foreign donations remain the same in the 2006, 2010, 2022, and 2026 election laws, except for a slight shift in sections. For example, the power to limit contributions to a political party is found in the Electoral Act 2002 in Section 83, in the Electoral Act 2006 in Section 92, in the Electoral Act 2010 in Section 90, in the Electoral Act 2022 in Section 88, and in the Electoral Act 2026 in Section 92(9). The main areas of significant change in the laws are the limitation on campaign expenses and the power to limit donations to a political party. This is the area that our article focuses on, as shown in Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
1.	93(2),10(a)	Presidential Candidate	N500Million (\$3,886,513.80)	A maximum fine of N1,000,000.00(\$7,773.03) or imprisonment of 12 months or both
2.	(93(3),10(b)	Governorship Candidate	N100Million (\$777,330.15)	A fine of N800,000.00(\$6,218.36) or imprisonment for 9 months or both
3.	93(4),10(c)	Senatorial Candidate	N20Million (\$155,464)	A fine of N600,000.00(\$4,660) or imprisonment for 6 months or both

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
4.	93(4),10(d)	Member Federal House of Representatives	N10Million (\$77,730)	A fine of N500,000.00(\$3,886) or imprisonment for 6 months or both
5.	93(5),10(e)	State House of Assembly Members	N5Million (\$38,865)	A fine of N300,000.00(\$2,332) or imprisonment for 5 months or both
6.	93(6),10(e)	L G Chairmanship Candidate	N5Million (\$38,865)	A fine of N300,000.00(\$2,332) or 3 months imprisonment or both
7.	93(7),10(f)	L G Councillorship Elections	N500,000 (\$3,886)	A fine of N100,000.00 (\$777.30) or 1 month imprisonment or both

Table 2. Election Expenses Limit on All Elective Offices in the Electoral Act 2006

Source: Electoral Act 2006 (extracted and tabulated by the authors in 2023). The conversion into USD was computed by the authors using the official rate in 2006.

Four years after the operation of this section and its sub-sections, it was reviewed upward to meet the challenges of the current reality of the financial needs of parties during the campaign, as shown in Table 3.

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
1.	91(2),10(a)	President	N1, 000, 000, 000 (\$6,666,666)	A fine of N1, 000,000(\$6,600) or imprisonment of 12 months or both.
2.	91(3),10(b)	Governorship Candidate	N200, 000, 000 (\$1,330,672).	A fine of N800, 000(\$5,280,000) or imprisonment for 9 months or both
3.	92(4),10(c)	Senatorial Candidate	N40, 000, 000 (\$266,347)	A fine of N600, 000(\$3,990) or imprisonment for six months or both

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
4.	92(4),10(d)	House of Representatives	N20, 000, 000 (\$132,000)	A fine of N500, 000(\$3,330) or imprisonment for five months or both
5.	92(5),10(e)	State Assembly Election	N10, 000, 000 (\$66,000)	A fine of N300, 000(\$2,000) or 3 months imprisonment or both
6.	92(6),10(f)	Chairmanship Election	N10, 000, 000 (\$66,000)	A fine of N300, 000(\$2,000) or 3 months imprisonment or both
7.	92(7),10(g)	Councillorship Election	N1, 000, 000 (\$6,600)	A fine of N100, 000.00(\$660) or 1 month imprisonment or both

Table 3. Election Expenses Limit on All Elective Offices in the Electoral Act 2010

Source: Electoral Act 2010 (extracted and tabulated by the authors in 2023). The conversion into USD was computed by the authors using the rate in 2010.

As noted above, after about 12 years, policymakers found it necessary to revise the expenditure ceiling upward due to inflation, the trending and continuous depreciation of the Naira against the Dollar, and rising campaign costs. The Electoral Act 2010 was amended in 2022, and currently in 2026, and one of the main areas that changed was the maximum level of campaign expenses for elective offices, as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
1.	88(1),10(a)	Presidential Candidate	N5 billion (\$6,220,000.00)	N50 million (\$62,200.00) or 12 months in jail or both
2.	88(2),10(b)	Governorship Candidate	N1 billion (\$1,244,000.00)	N10 million (\$12,440.00) or 12 months in jail or both
3.	88(3),10(c)	Senatorial Candidate	N100 million (\$124,400.00)	N1 million (\$1,244.00) or 12 months in jail or both
4.	88(4),10(d)	House of Representatives	N70 million (\$87,080.00)	N700,000 thousand (\$870.80) or 12 months in jail or both

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
5.	88(5),10(e)	State House of Assembly	N30 million (\$37,320.00)	N300,000 thousand (\$373.20) or 12 months in jail or both
6.	88(6),10(f)	Chairmanship Candidate	N30 million (\$37,320.00)	N300,000 thousand (\$373.20) or 12 months in jail or both
7.	88(7)	Councillorship Elections	N5 million (\$6,220.00)	N50,000 thousand (\$62.20) or 12-months in jail or both

Table 4. Election Expenses Limit on All Elective Offices in the Electoral Act 2022

Source: Electoral Act 2022 (extracted and tabulated by the authors in 2023). The conversion into USD was computed by the authors using the rate in 2023.

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
1.	92(2),9	Presidential Candidate	N10 billion (\$7,349,973.00)	N100 million (\$73,505.09) or 12 months in jail or both
2.	92(3),9	Governorship Candidate	N3 billion (\$2,204,991.90)	N30 million (\$22,043) or 12 months in jail or both
3.	92(4),9	Senatorial Candidate	N500 million (\$367,525.45)	N5 million (\$3,674) or 12 months in jail or both
4.	92(4),9	House of Representatives	N250 million (\$183,762)	N2,500,000 million and five hundred t thousand (\$1,837) or 12 months in jail or both
5.	92(5),9	State House of Assembly	N100 million (\$73,505.09)	N1 million (\$735) or 12 months in jail or both
6.	92(6),9	Chairmanship Candidate	N100 million (\$73,505.09)	N1 million (\$735) or 12 months in jail or both

S/No.	Section	Position	Spending Limit	Sanction
7.	92(7),9	Councillorship Elections	N10 million (\$7,350.51)	N100,000 thousand (\$73.55) or 12-months in jail or both

Table 5. Election Expenses Limit on All Elective Offices in the Electoral Act 2026

Source: Electoral Act 2026 (extracted and tabulated by the authors in 2026). The conversion into USD was computed by the authors using the rate in 2026.

Table 5 shows that the political class is aware of laws that will reduce penalties for themselves while disregarding sanctions that could deter them. Although the maximum spending limit has been increased tenfold, the sanction remains minimal, with only a 1 percent fine of the total expenditure, or twelve months in jail, or both. These penalties are rarely enforced by INEC due to its weakness, lack of full autonomy, and the deceptive practices of politicians. The INEC Chairman himself, as noted by an informant in category D (INEC Officials), stated, “Political parties spent beyond the set limit in the 2023 General Elections, and they have failed to disclose their financial statement” (in-depth interview with a Category D informant, INEC official, on 16 March 2023).

The second area that underwent significant changes from the Electoral Acts of 2006, 2010, and 2022 is the power to limit contributions to political parties. A comparison of the increase in the limit is shown in Table 6.

S/No.	Section	Electoral Act	Amount	Difference
1.	93(9)	Electoral Act 2006	No individual or other entity shall donate more than N1,000,000 (\$7,770) to any candidate	
2.	92(9)	Electoral Act 2010	No individual or other entity shall donate more than one-million-naira N1, 000, 000 (\$6,600) to any candidate	None
3.		Electoral Act 2022	No individual or other entity shall donate to a candidate more than N50, 000,000 million (\$62,200.00)	An increase of N49,000,000 (\$60,956.00) (5000%) from the 2010 Electoral Act

S/No.	Section	Electoral Act	Amount	Difference
4	92(8)	Electoral Act 2026	No individual or other entity shall donate to a candidate more than N500,000,000 million (\$30,211,480.35 million)	An increase of N450,000,000 million (\$ 27,190,332.32 million) (900%) from the 2022 Electoral Act

Table 6. Changes in the Power to Limit Contribution to Political Parties in Electoral Acts 2006, 2010, and 2022

Source: Electoral Acts 2006, 2010, and 2022 (extracted, tabulated, and computed by the authors using the rate at each period).

The third source is Company and Allied Matters Act (2020). The Company and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 provides on party financing the following rules: “Except to the extent that the company’s memorandum or any enactment otherwise provides, every company shall, for the furtherance of its business or objects, have all the powers of a natural person of full capacity. (2) A company shall not have or exercise power either directly or indirectly to make a donation or gift of any of its property or funds to a political party or political association, or for any political purpose, and if any company, in breach of this subsection makes any donation or gift of its property to a political party or political association, or for any political purpose, the officers in default and any member who voted for the breach shall be jointly and severally liable to refund to the company the sum or value of the donation or gift and in addition, every such officer or member commits an offence and is liable to a fine equal to the amount or value of the donation or gift” (CAMA 2020: Section 43(1-2 in Federal Government of Nigeria 2020).

The above tables point to an important problem: party funding laws are changing rapidly and significantly in Nigeria, leading to an increase in maximum spending and the prohibition on donations. The laws carefully consider the changing environment of Nigerian politics and the changing standard of living combined with growing political awareness, media campaigning, and most importantly, the declining value of the Naira, which is pegged to the Dollar exchange rate. However, the present study differs from previous works (Wakili et al. 2008: 10; Eme and Anyadike 2014: 22; Aluigba 2015: 5; Lawal 2015: 12; Onyekpere 2015: 10; Nwangwu and Ononogbu 2016: 614; Olorunmola 2016: 3; Onah and Nwali 2018: Ayeni 2019: 4; Okeke and Nwali 2020: 238; Davies 2021: 341; Nwangwu et al. 2022: 6; Sule 2023: 6) because it focuses on analysing party funding laws against

most of them, which emphasises corruption and violations in the process. Second, in contrast to most previous works, notably (Sule 2021: 168; Sule 2023: 11), which were bent on the inadequacy of the laws, our study argues that the laws are not flawed as expected, but that the actors who apply the laws and those who are bound by the laws refused to adapt to play within the rules, making the reforms unworkable while the laws continued to change. The fundamental gap here borders on the low level of autonomy of relevant democratic institutions and agencies, especially the INEC. There are contradictions in some provisions of Nigeria's electoral laws. Such contradictions have been worsened by the regulatory weaknesses of INEC which the politicians and parties continue to exploit to their benefit. This is discussed in detail in the discussion section below.

Methods

A qualitative approach was adopted for the study. In essence, it is a specialised case study, as it is limited to the case of Nigeria, and particularly to the laws on party financing. Data were obtained from in-depth informant interviews conducted between February and June 2023. Various categories of informants were interviewed, including politicians, public office holders, national party executive leaders, senior INEC officials, academics, legislators, and civil society groups. The informants selected for the interviews consisted of some politicians who ran for higher political offices between 2003 and 2023. This period marks the reforms era, during which electoral acts and other regulatory frameworks on party financing were enacted. Four of them were interviewed in category A. Category B interviewed national party executive members where the leaders of two major ruling parties, APC and PDP, were consulted. In each party, two members were interviewed. Category C interviewed a Senator and a Member of the House of Representatives in a northeastern state in February 2023. The Senator was the former Chairman of the Senate Committee on INEC and Electoral Law Amendment, while the member of the House of Representatives was the former Chairman of the House Committee on INEC and Electoral Law Amendment. Category D consists of senior INEC officials, two of whom were interviewed in Abuja. Category E are the academics, of whom 3 were interviewed, and Category F are members of various civil societies who were interviewed in Abuja on 25 March 2023, in a workshop organised by ACLED UK. In this category, five members of different civil society groups were interviewed. Thus, a total of 20 informants were interviewed. About 3 of the informants were interviewed

via WhatsApp call for confidentiality reasons, as they could not be reached in the field due to tight schedules. Constituents were not included because the survey covered a large geographic area in Nigeria and resources were not available to conduct even a cluster geographic survey. Instead, civil society members are considered active representatives of the electorate.

Informants were identified and selected for interviews based on three criteria. The first was accessibility. Those who were accessible to the researcher were used for the interview because some informants in the above categories were difficult to reach. The second criterion was the possession of quality information and familiarity with the subject of the study. This allowed the generation of a large amount of high-quality data that was coded and simplified for analysis. The third criterion was the consideration of the number required for a qualitative interview. Here, some scholars (Sharan 2009: 9; Creswell 2014: 41; Yin 2018: 19) argue that for a topic where there is sufficient literature and only a small gap remains uncovered, 2 to 4 informants can provide the needed information. For a topic that requires even more information and data to present a new perspective, a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 30 are needed. Our study is still new in the Nigerian context, as there has been little literature since the release of the Political Party Financing Act in 2006. In order to ensure accessibility and quality of data, 20 informants were selected for the study.

Data were collected by means of unstructured questionnaires. Unstructured questions were designed as an interview guide to allow flexibility in responses. The interview guide was validated as reliable and valid by an expert in the field of study. The unstructured questionnaires were administered by presenting the interview guide to the selected informants. Informants were either sent the questionnaires in advance so that they could study the questions before administration, or they were interviewed in person, with the questions asked directly in the interview guide. In addition to the interview source, documented sources were also used for a literature review to identify and fill the knowledge gaps. The collected data were discussed using content analysis. The qualitative data were reviewed, coded, and organised into meaningful classifications and themes. Patterns, associations, and concepts were noted and interpreted in order to derive significant findings relevant to the aims of the research.

Data analysis involved thematic coding using open, axial, and selective coding procedures to identify key patterns and relationships within the interview data. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional

ethics committees, and informed consent, both verbal and written, was obtained from all participants. Reliability and validity were enhanced through data triangulation, expert review of interview instruments, cross-verification with documentary sources, and member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of interpretations.

There were several challenges to overcome during the data collection process. Except for categories D and E, which were easily accessible, informants in other categories were difficult to reach. In other cases, some of them were reluctant to give out information. Informants were reluctant to answer when the questions asked were critical, e.g. how they procured their campaign expenditure, who donated to them, what INEC’s position was on them, how they dealt with offences as regulators, and why no sanctions were imposed. Another challenge was the financial constraints. The researchers’ institutions and the country could not provide funding, although such research is urgently needed as part of the investigation of democratic accountability and transparency. However, the researchers made sacrifices and used the meagre resources available to them to overcome the challenges and we present the results as part of our contribution to society. A summary of the informants selected and their categories is presented in Table 7.

S/No.	Category	Frequency
A	Politicians	4
B	Party Executives	4
C	Former serving lawmakers	2
D	Senior INEC Officials	2
E	Academics	3
F	Civil Societies	5

Table 7: Categories of Selected Informants

Source: Fieldwork 2023.

Framework of Analysis: Clientelism

Clientelism is an analytical framework that has been developed by numerous scholars over time. Due to the dimensions that Clientelism takes on and the plethora of case studies that generate new models and applications, it is essentially a work in progress. The Latin terms “cluiere” (to listen and obey), “clientela” (a group of people who had proxies who

supported them for the common good), and “patronus” (the patron who supported the aristocrats through various covert arrangements) are the origins of Clientelism. While the clients support, promote, and protect the patron's political interests, the patron provides jobs, material benefits, support, resources, and favours (Muno 2014: 3). In contemporary terms, Clientelism refers to the political economy of power struggles and the interactions that take place between elected officials and the public when they take office (Darabont 2010: 21).

In its simpler and more ambiguous meaning, Clientelism refers to a political conspiracy and grandiose tactics used by politicians to win an election at any cost, such as vote-buying, poaching opposing voters and rewarding them for defecting to a particular candidate, and misusing public resources and positions for political purposes. Clientelism required a self-serving and unfair return for the friends and clients who supported the incumbents, rather than fairness, equity, and justice in the distribution of public office, appointments, allocation of resources and projects (Gans-Morse et al. 2014 415). In this sense, political ambition and personal wealth are sacrificed on the altar of merit and the proper use of resources and tasks. According to an opposing viewpoint, Clientelism is not always a profitable endeavour for both parties. In order to achieve their goals, patrons occasionally use coercion and intimidation against their clientele. One form of political corruption is the offer of financial compensation in return for support in elections. By violating processes and undermining all legal means, including illegal party funding, bribery and corruption, the patron conspires with his clients, either directly or through the brokers, to win an election.

Scholarly endeavours establish a link between Clientelism and Nigerian politics, elections and party funding. Clientelism has been persistent and pervasive in Nigerian politics since the beginning of the Fourth Republic and has impacted on core democratic values and practises such as accountability, transparency and the provision of quality government and services to citizens (Osumah 2010: 276). In Nigeria, Clientelism is practised under the politics of godfathers (Balogun 1997: 237). The oligarchs, who have formed a cartel of political and economic interests, including the military, politicians, capital owners, traditional rulers, and the religious class, control the state and its resources. They endeavour to gain unprotected access to the national wealth. According to this view, the aggressive penetration of the oligarchs into the state has enabled them to amass enough wealth to influence their clients and consequently create a patronage relationship that protects them

from criticism and threats to their political aspirations (Ibrahim 1995: 5; Diamond 1995: 19; Joseph 1995: 6).

The use of money politics and violations of party funding in elections are two examples of this, according to Sule (2023: 69). The institutions and agencies responsible for enforcing the rules are too small and ineffective to respond as expected. Clientelism theory explains why, despite changes in laws on the financing of political parties in Nigeria, the patronage system persists. In other words, political actors continue to provide each other with economic favours and support through the exchange of money or other benefits in return for political favours.

Results

Based on the majority statements of informants interviewed during the interviews, our study reports that Nigeria has shown a strong will and great effort in drafting laws on party financing, especially since 2002. Nigeria is one of the states that has experienced both public and private financing simultaneously and separately. Most informants and a study by Sule (2023: 217) have also found that Nigeria has comprehensive and partially drafted laws on party funding, especially in Africa. Nigeria is believed to have amended some sections on party financing in the Electoral Act, which is advisable, but the reactions of parties and politicians remain constant: violation of regulations, excessive spending, donations beyond the set limit, vote buying, and other prohibited means of legally raising campaign funds and expenses. However, most informants indicated that the main problem with party funding laws in Nigeria is not the laws themselves but ineffective enforcement, compliance, monitoring, and sanctioning. Other studies (Aluigba 2015: 6; Onyekpere 2015: 20; Olorunmola 2016: 6; Nwangwu and Ononogbu 2016: 614; Okeke and Nwali 2020: 238; Sule 2021: 169; Nwangwu et al. 2022: 7; Sule 2023: 219) support the finding that the laws themselves are not adequate, but they are good enough to ensure accountability and transparency if there is effective enforcement, compliance, monitoring, and sanctioning. Thus, the study found that while the laws regarding the spending cap and the contribution limit are constantly changing, policymakers either intentionally or unintentionally fail to enforce, comply with, monitor, and sanction them. This is the main argument in this article. It is not the weaknesses in the laws themselves that impede accountability and compliance, but the actions of the key players.

Discussion of the Results

Three main themes were identified from the above results, which are presented for discussion below.

Changing Laws – Unchanging Environment

Both previous studies and the informants interviewed agreed that party funding laws in Nigeria are subject to change and reform but that the environment in which they operate remains constant. This means that there has been significant progress in reforming the laws. Prior to the adoption of the 1999 Constitution, for example, there were no specific laws on party funding, monitoring, and sanctioning in the Nigerian Constitution. The 1999 Constitution contains the relevant laws in Sections 225 and 226 and their subsections. Furthermore, a major step was taken in 2002 when the Electoral Act 2002 was enacted with specific laws on electoral matters, party funding, monitoring, disclosure, sanctions, and other related matters. Recognising how unrealistic and impractical the provisions of the Electoral Act 2002 were regarding the maximum spending limit, the laws were revised and amended in 2006 and 2010. The transition from public-private funding to fully private funding was realised in the 2010 electoral law. Recently, the Electoral Act 2022 came into force, which was used to conduct the 2023 parliamentary elections. Another amendment, Electoral Act 2026, is now in operation for deployment in the General Elections of 2027. These changes mean that the laws are revised at regular intervals to take account of changing situations, such as the increase in the spending limit and the ban on donations. For example, the maximum expenditure limit for a presidential candidate in the 2010 Electoral Act was N1 billion but it was raised to N5 billion in the 2022 Electoral Act, and to N10 billion in the 2026 Electoral Act while the donation limit in the 2010 Electoral Act was N1 million but is now N50 million in the 2022 Electoral Act and N500 million in the 2026 Electoral Act.

As mentioned, it is the responsibility of INEC to formulate laws and impose sanctions. However, one informant states that “INEC is failing in its duties due to unqualified staff, inadequate staffing, lack of neutrality and political interference” (in-depth interview with a Category C informant on 5 March 2023). This can be interpreted as meaning that although the laws are good, there is a lack of competent hands to implement them. According to another Category B informant, “INEC is endeavouring to change and

improve the laws, but politicians continue to sabotage the process through vote buying, bribery, corruption and subversion of the process. This means that while the laws continue to change, the country is not experiencing any positive change because those affected by the new laws are not willing to abide by the laws.”

But that is not the main problem here. The main problem is that the laws keep changing, but the environment in which they operate remains unfathomable because of the changes. For example, the ineffective monitoring, excessive spending, and violations identified in the 2002, 2006 and 2010 Acts continue. In essence, Sule (2023: 219) reports that the existing laws are not enough but good enough to ensure accountability and transparency in the Nigerian electoral process and party funding if applied appropriately. This is also the opinion of most informants in their comments. For example, a Category A informant (politician) stated that “the laws cannot change the practice in Nigeria because the sanctioning bodies like INEC and the National Assembly are not ready to implement them. Basically, what is wrong with the previous laws if they can be amended and applied? Are they not adequate?” (in-depth interview with a Category A informant on 25 May 2023). Similarly, a Category C informant (INEC official) reported that “Even the previous laws of 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2022 are good enough to ensure transparency in party funding, but the constant attitudes of politicians and parties in Nigeria prevent the laws from being implemented” (in-depth interview with a Category C informant on 21 April 2023). However, a Category D informant (academic) has a different view. According to him, “the laws are inadequate and contain numerous loopholes and ambiguities that do not justify decisive application. For example, what is meant by legal sources of funding, and how are they identified and distinguished from illegal ones?” (in-depth interview with a Category A informant on 5 March 2023) The same view of a Category D informant is shared by many Category E informants.

The failure of politicians and political parties to change their attitudes and respond positively to legislative changes is facilitated by the personalisation of parties and the culture of money politics. Political parties in Nigeria are not based on ideology but on personal control by some powerful, rich cabals. As a result, the parties are ideology-free, unprincipled, disorganised, uncoordinated, and poorly institutionalised. Therefore, the only motive is to win the elections at any cost, including money politics, vote-buying, bribery, and violations of all due process. This leads to excessive spending, violations, weak sanctions, and ineffective monitoring, as described below.

Ineffective Monitoring

Sections 225 and 226 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution support the electoral body, INEC, to monitor the activities of political parties, ensure compliance and sanction violators, and determine the maximum amount parties can spend and the sources. However, there is evidence of how ineffective INEC is at monitoring parties. For instance, Sule (2021: 181) reports that INEC failed to monitor the main APC and PDP parties in the 2015 General Election, leading to massive bribery and corruption, illegal sources of funding and expenditure, and non-sanctioning amidst confirmed violations. Government funds amounting to 2.1 billion dollars earmarked for the procurement of arms to fight the Boko Haram insurgency were illegally diverted by the PDP for campaign funding in 2015 (Sule 2021: 181). This points to illegal sources and funding. INEC officials were bribed with N34 billion by the former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Allison-Maduekwe, during the 2015 General Election to rig the elections in favour of the ruling PDP, but INEC did not punish the PDP for this act (Sule 2021: 181). In addition, overt vote-buying and local bribery in the conduct of elections by various parties were reported to INEC, but no action was taken (Aluigba 2015: 12). Aluigba (2015: 12) attributed INEC's inability to monitor excessive expenditure and violations and ensure compliance to a shortage of staff in the Commission, obsolete equipment for operations, a lack of expertise and training, as well as the dubious slipperiness of Nigerian political parties and politicians who keep finding alternative routes to circumvent regulations and realise their inordinate ambitions at all costs. The Chairman of INEC himself, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, mentioned in October 2023 that parties are closely monitored by INEC and offences are reported. He also lamented that the major parties were not complying with the disclosure and audit of their income and expenditure as well as their campaign expenditure as enshrined in the law (Sule 2023: 52). Yet, INEC has failed to penalise the lawbreakers. Why is this so?

The informants give several explanations. A category D informant (academic) stated that: "In a system where the INEC Chairman himself was appointed by the ruling party due to nepotism and money is seen as 'god,' how is the commission supposed to monitor offences? Against whom and by whom?" (in-depth interview with a Category D informant on 11 May 2023). A Category B informant (former Senator) has a different view: "Nigerians are impatient. If they allowed the nascent Nigerian democracy to grow, the laws would gradually become regular and appropriately complied with."

They don't expect INEC to muster the courage now and sanction politicians with unlimited powers, but they will in the future" (in-depth interview with a Category B informant on 15 March 2023). A Category E (civil society) informant took a different view, emphasising that: "INEC is not in a position to monitor political parties and campaign expenditure because corruption is rampant in the country. INEC officials are bribed by politicians and sometimes coerced with threats. When they have no other choice, they give in and overlook the offences committed by the parties and their sponsors" (in-depth interview with a Category E informant on 25 March 2023).

But even if INEC has succeeded in monitoring politicians as expected, the biggest problem is the compliance of corrupt politicians. A Category C informant reported, "Regardless of the role and efforts of INEC, corrupt politicians in Nigeria will never stop coming up with measures to circumvent the process and make their way by breaking the rules. New laws may emerge, old ones may be updated and tempered, but the old habits and methods of breaking them will persist as long as no collective action is taken to tame the actions of politicians" (in-depth interview with a Category C informant on 17 March 2023).

The above views express the effects, applications, and practical support of Clientelism as a model of analysis. Politicians use all possible means to secure victory, including manipulating and weakening INEC in order to keep it docile, ineffective, and unable to monitor and punish wrongdoers. This is realised through the sublime method of politicians to illegally amass wealth in office so that they can use these funds to bribe themselves at will.

Excessive Spending, Violation, and Weak Sanctions

The laws on party funding in Nigeria may keep changing, but if they are not put into practice to prevent excessive spending, the laws will remain inconsequential. There is evidence that parties and politicians have broken the rules and spent or donated excessively without any sanction. For example, President Obasanjo is reported to have said during the 2003 General Election that "Nigeria spent in campaign funding what will arrest a successful war" (Sule 2023: 207). Godfatherism, Clientelism, patrimonialism, vote-buying, bribery, and human rights violations have occurred in several cases. For instance, at the fundraising dinner for President Jonathan's election campaign in 2010, many individuals and companies donated N1 billion and above, although the maximum donation limit was N1 million (Nwangwu

and Ononogbu 2016: 614). Also, a businessman, Alhaji Abdussamad Rabi'u, donated N250 million to President Jonathan in 2010 instead of the maximum donation limit of N1 million. A similar violation occurred for President Jonathan in 2014. Surprisingly, the business mogul insisted that he had done nothing illegal, as the donations came from many people in his family (Ohman 2014a: 20). Excessive spending above the limit is also reported in the Fourth Republic. For instance, the PDP spent about N9 billion on media advertising alone, while the APC spent about N3 billion in the 2015 Presidential Election (Onyekpere 2015: 11). The maximum limit for expenditure by a presidential candidate under the Electoral Act 2010 is N1 billion, which means that gross misconduct and violations have taken place.

In this sense, most informants in all categories agreed that excessive spending, offences, and weak sanctions are the major hurdles to party funding in Nigeria, rather than the laws themselves, which are relatively good for a young democracy like Nigeria. However, one prominent view worth mentioning comes from a Category A informant (politician) who stated that “With the current trend of money politics in Nigeria, it is a dream to assume that rich candidates will adhere to a spending limit or donate less or not at all” (in-depth interview with a Category A informant on 9 May 2023). Another important statement is that of a Category C informant (INEC official) who openly admitted that: “We are aware of extreme spending, violations, and other irregularities, but we are unable to monitor or punish the perpetrators because they belong to a powerful political class that always escapes the clutches of the law” (in-depth interview with a Category C informant on 16 April 2023). This informant's interpretation shows that INEC officials are currently unwilling to monitor and punish lawbreakers. This means that even if the laws are changed annually, this has no impact on the process, as compliance and enforcement are not guaranteed.

The phenomenon of sanctions should not be limited to politicians. A dissenting opinion by a Category C informant lamented that “while the emphasis and demands have always centred on the political class, other classes that are also neglected and not put forward for severe sanctions are the vote sellers, the electorates, INEC officials and security agencies that condone or overlook the procedures, as well as party agents and political parties themselves. If all these categories and others are not severely penalised, we should not expect the political class to comply” (in-depth interview with a Category C informant on 16 April 2023). This extraordinary view generalises the offence of violating party funding rules to all actors involved

and not just the political class, which is always in the spotlight of censorship. Again, excessive spending and regulatory violations amidst ever-changing regulations without the desired impact by the electoral authority is further evidence that the Clientelism model explains the context of the study in theory and practice. This is because the violations go unpunished and affect all sections of society, including politicians, political parties, INEC officials, voters, security agents, and other key stakeholders involved in the electoral process. All those involved in the cycle of patronage-broker-patronage relationships have violated the regulations with impunity.

Conclusion

The present study critically examines the laws on party funding in Nigeria and the problems associated with them. The research, based both on field research and on existing studies, shows that Nigeria has comprehensive party funding laws. As an emerging democracy, Nigeria has succeeded in enacting regulations and laws on party funding within a short period. Our study concludes that party funding laws are regularly reformed, making the laws flexible, realistic, and progressive. However, it also concludes that the existence of laws does not mean that people are satisfied with them. The laws have many loopholes that need to be revised over time. Moreover, we noted that not the reforms or the inadequacies of the laws are significant but the unchanged attitude of the parties and politicians during the reformed laws. The political actors have maintained their behaviour towards the laws in terms of excessive spending and violations, while the electoral body, INEC, remains weak in its response to the violations and irregularities.

It is therefore appropriate to take plausible and politically relevant measures to curb this threat and improve accountability and transparency in the democratic process. One measure proposed in our study is to change the process of appointing the INEC Chairman and other Commission executives so that they are detached from politics and politicians. This will enable them to wield the big stick against offenders. Another suggestion is that civil societies closely monitor the activities of political parties and politicians and bring abuses to the attention of the public. This will drastically reduce the number of rights violations. International donors and staff working in the field of elections should increase pressure on parties and politicians to respect the rule of law.

Another recommendation is to strengthen INEC's independence and enforcement powers. INEC should be granted prosecutorial powers and a dedicated electoral offences commission should be established to ensure swift punishment of campaign finance violations. Another measure is to introduce real-time digital disclosure systems. Political parties and candidates should be legally required to disclose all donations and expenditures through a publicly accessible digital platform managed by INEC. This would enhance transparency, facilitate public scrutiny, and reduce opportunities for illicit financing.

It is also recommended to enhance monitoring and audit capacity. INEC should establish a specialised campaign finance monitoring unit staffed with forensic accountants, auditors, financial intelligence experts, and data analysts. Collaboration with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), and financial institutions should be institutionalised. Mandatory and deterrent sanctions should be imposed. Violations of campaign finance regulations should attract automatic sanctions, including substantial fines, disqualification from elections, forfeiture of illegally acquired funds, and criminal prosecution where necessary. It is also advisable to promote civic oversight and whistleblower protection. A special electoral finance tribunal should be established. A specialised tribunal dedicated to campaign finance and electoral offences should be created to ensure speedy adjudication.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Statement of Ethics

This study complied with institutional and internationally recognised ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from the ethics committee of the Department of Public Management and Political Studies, University of Namibia as derived from the University central ethics committee on research, before data collection. Participation was made voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality, anonymity, and data security was strictly maintained, particularly given the politically sensitive nature of party financing. Participants were protected from political, professional or social

risks. Researchers maintained neutrality, avoid coercion and deception, and report findings honestly. Data were used solely for academic purposes, with all sources and participants' contributions appropriately acknowledged. The data obtained from interviews were stored in an external hard disk of the leading researcher for record purpose as for future consultation under a highly confidential and secured system of record keeping.

Data Availability Statement

The present study has used primary data, namely in-depth interviews conducted with informants from six selected categories. No data apart from the interviews was used and, due to the confidential and ethical process of data collection, the data collected was transcribed, coded, and decoded into themes where they are extracted and referred to in areas where they are needed. They are well referred to with unequivocal explanation of the sources and the informants.

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CONSTRAINTS TO REFLEXIVE GOVERNANCE OF SAND MINING BY STATE INSTITUTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: Illegal sand mining continues to cause severe social and environmental degradation in Zimbabwe despite legal frameworks intended to regulate the sector. This qualitative case study of Harare Metropolitan Province examines constraints to the reflexive governance of sand mining by state institutions. Guided by the reflexive governance framework, the study employed semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants, including government officials, industry representatives, community leaders, residents, and illegal sand miners. Findings reveal that reflexive governance is constrained by macroeconomic, political, and institutional barriers, particularly weak law enforcement, limited stakeholder participation, and resource shortages. Corruption, bribery, and political interference further undermine regulatory effectiveness and sustain illegal operations. The study concludes that governance systems lack the adaptability needed to address unemployment-driven informality and recommends formalising informal sand mining, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and enhancing institutional capacity for sustainable mining practices.

Keywords: *reflexive governance of sand mining in Zimbabwe, illegal sand mining, sustainable sand mining, stakeholder engagement, resource scarcity*

Introduction

Internationally, sand mining governance is framed by instruments such as UNEP's (2019) "Sand and Sustainability" report and the African Mineral Governance Framework, which emphasise sustainability, inclusivity, and adaptive governance. These principles align closely with Sustainable Development Goals 8, 11, 12, and 15, providing a normative lens for assessing national governance practices. Despite the existence of comprehensive legislative and institutional frameworks governing extractive resources,

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illegal sand mining continues to proliferate in many African cities, generating severe socio-environmental consequences. These governance frameworks emphasise principles such as sustainability (ensuring resource use does not exceed ecological limits), inclusivity (involving affected communities in decision-making), and adaptive governance (the ability of institutions to learn and adjust policies in response to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions). In practice, this means that sand mining governance should not only regulate extraction but also account for local livelihoods, continuously monitor environmental impacts, and revise policies in response to emerging challenges. Estimates suggest that a significant proportion of global sand mining occurs outside formal regulatory systems, with illegal extraction accounting for nearly one-third of total production annually (UNEP 2014; Mahadevan 2019). This persistence of illegality points to deeper governance failures rather than mere regulatory absence. It raises critical questions about the reflexivity of sand governance, that is, the capacity of state institutions to learn, adapt, and respond to evolving socio-environmental risks associated with sand extraction. These include land degradation, water pollution, social conflict, and criminal networks, which all reveal a governance paradox in which intensive regulation coexists with escalating environmental harm and institutional ineffectiveness (Komnitsas 2020; Azhary et al. 2020; Mark 2021).

These global governance challenges are particularly pronounced in Zimbabwe, where prolonged economic crisis and urban informality have reshaped natural resource use. The Zimbabwean mining and environmental laws require sand miners to obtain permits, conduct Environmental Impact Assessments, and comply with local authority by-laws (Mandondo 2000; Chigudu and Chirisa 2020). Enforcement responsibilities are shared between the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), local authorities, and the police, theoretically enabling coordinated oversight across extraction, transport, and land-use planning. The present article argues that the persistence of illegal sand mining in Zimbabwe reflects not only enforcement failures, but deeper constraints in the reflexive capacity of state institutions to adapt governance practices to evolving socio-economic realities. Illegal sand mining has emerged as a critical livelihood strategy for unemployed and informally employed youths. Particularly, Harare Metropolitan Province, home to over two million residents, is characterised by high unemployment, expanding informal settlements, and declining urban services. These conditions have intensified reliance on informal livelihood activities, including sand mining, particularly in peri-urban

areas such as Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza (Mushonga 2022; George and Steven 2022). Rather than viewing sand mining solely as criminality, this study situates it within broader processes of economic decline, informality, and survival, while still interrogating the capacity of governance systems to manage its socio-environmental impacts.

Guided by the reflexive governance framework, this study examines how institutional, political, and socio-economic constraints shape the governance of illegal sand mining by state institutions in Harare Metropolitan Province. By foregrounding sand mining, an often overlooked but ubiquitous extractive activity, this study extends reflexive governance debates beyond large-scale mining to everyday urban resource extraction, offering new insights into governance under conditions of informality and economic stress.

Study Area

Figure 1 illustrates the spatial distribution of the study sites within Harare Metropolitan Province. The highlighted areas represent identified hotspots of illegal sand mining, based on prior studies (Mushonga 2022) and preliminary field observations. The different colours on the map distinguish administrative boundaries and land-use zones, including peri-urban settlements where informal economic activities are concentrated. These zones are particularly relevant to this study because they combine high population pressure, weak land-use control, and the presence of accessible sand deposits, making them highly susceptible to illegal extraction. The map, therefore, provides a spatial context for understanding where governance challenges are most acute and why these sites were selected for in-depth investigation.

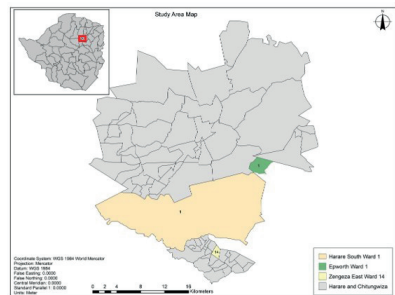


Figure 1. Map of Zimbabwe Showing Study Sites within Harare Metropolitan Province
Source: first author

Literature Review and Research Framework

Reflexive governance is a key factor in addressing global socio-environmental issues (Zahiri et al. 2022; Asare et al. 2021; Hasibuan et al. 2021; Mekuria et al. 2021). According to Brown and Marsden (2013), reflexive governance

refers to governance arrangements that enable institutions to critically reflect on existing rules, learn from societal feedback, and adapt policies in response to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions. Vadrot et al. (2022) add that reflexive governance involves the development of capacity among the governed to influence the construction of governance objectives. Similarly, Desportes et al. (2016) assert that reflexive governance is characterised by the participation of both formal and informal actors in making decisions implemented through both formal and informal structures. All the scholars emphasise that engaging indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance promotes stewardship, responsibility, and accountability of their own resources – and this ultimately results in sustainable development.

The governance challenges associated with illegal sand mining can also be understood through the lens of common-pool resource (CPR) theory. Ostrom (1990) highlights those natural resources, such as sand, which are difficult to exclude users from and are subtractable in use, are highly vulnerable to overexploitation under weak governance conditions. Ostrom's design principles, including clearly defined boundaries, collective-choice arrangements, monitoring, graduated sanctions, and conflict-resolution mechanisms, provide a useful framework for analysing institutional weaknesses in sand mining governance. In contexts such as Zimbabwe, where enforcement is inconsistent and stakeholder participation is limited, the absence of these institutional design principles contributes to unsustainable extraction and regulatory failure.

However, various factors influence reflexive governance success, such as resource availability, human effort, and commitment (Gondo et al. 2019), and technologies (Gavriletea 2017). Leal Filho et al. (2021) asserted that transfer of investment technologies from source countries is associated with high environmental impacts, which recipient countries may not be able to withstand due to limited resources and appropriate technologies. In Zimbabwe, a study by Rajah et al. (2012) revealed that governance of environmental management is marred by institutional inefficiencies, resource scarcity, and lack of transparency. Many studies confirm that poor enforcement and corruption are the main barriers to sustainable mining governance (Chevallier 2014; Chilamkurthy et al. 2016; Chen 2017). Chilamkurthy et al. (2016) point out the lack of monitoring systems; regulatory policies, and environmental impact assessments for indiscriminate mining and environmental problems. Green (2012) noted that the regulatory regime in South Africa was undermined by regulatory

conflicts, local governance failures, and deficient compliance monitoring and enforcement systems. In similar studies, lack of reflexive by-laws (Pölönen et al. 2020), lack of adequate information on the level of impacts of illegal sand mining (Shaji and Anilkumar 2014), and lack of scientific mining methodologies and technologies for environmental management (Saviour 2012) emerged among other key issues constraining reflexive governance of natural resources in developing countries.

Despite significant studies examining governance issues in the extractive sector and natural resources (Pahl-Wostl and Patterson 2021; Poncian 2021; Asare et al. 2021; Beevers 2019; Franco and Ali 2017; Mandondo 2000), the above authors focused on either governance in general or on other extractive natural resources – and not on sand. In Zimbabwe, no study has examined the reflexive governance of sand mining despite the growing concern over illegal sand mining.

Reflexive Governance Framework

The study utilises a reflexive governance framework to examine the constraints to reflexive governance of sand mining in Zimbabwe using a case study of illegal sand mining in Harare metropolitan province. Governance has eight major characteristics that include participation, consensus-oriented, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusivity, and the rule of law (Pahl-Wostl & Patterson 2021; Moore 2021). Building from the governance concept, Feindt and Weiland (2018) noted that reflexive governance entails reflexive adaptation of regulations or policies by institutions. These scholars emphasise that reflexive governance should involve rules that allow for reflexive learning and capacity building within a given normative framework. Using these definitions, reflexive governance is a governance tool that institutions can use to promote sustainable development across sectors.

In our study, institutional practices and issues for addressing illegal sand mining including the roles of various stakeholders are examined. As noted by Vadrot et al. (2022), reflexive governance involves capacity building of the governed to influence the construction of governance objectives. That way, reflexive governance can address the socio-ecological vulnerabilities of societies, fragmented governance regimes on human-nature relations, and conditions for sustainability transition. In Zimbabwe, sand mining is regulated by local authorities and the Environmental Management Agency.

However, illegal sand mining remains problematic and causes a myriad of socio-environmental problems in society. Against that backdrop, the study unpacks key constraints to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining with a focus on stakeholder participation, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law among other elements of good governance. Particularly, reflexive governance provides an analytical lens through which institutional practices are assessed against criteria such as stakeholder participation, adaptability, transparency, and responsiveness, allowing empirical findings to be systematically interpreted.

Methods

Informed by interpretivism philosophy, a qualitative research approach was utilised (e.g., Creswell 2014), with purposively sampled officials from the government, non-governmental organisations, industry, and local community (see Table 1). Sample sizes for key informants and the local community that include residents and illegal sand miners were determined by official responsibility in sand governance, and saturation respectively. Qualitative data were collected using face-to-face and telephone interviews in non-permissive workplaces due to COVID-19, for the latter from three selected hotspots namely Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza. The identification of these hotspots was informed by a combination of secondary data and preliminary field insights. Specifically, prior studies (e.g., Mushonga 2022; George and Steven 2022), reports from local authorities and the EMA, and initial scoping visits by the authors identified Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza as areas with high concentrations of illegal sand mining activities. These areas are characterised by readily accessible sand deposits, high levels of informality, and documented environmental degradation, making them appropriate case sites for examining governance dynamics.

Hence, the researchers observed all World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on the COVID-19 pandemic. Although telephone interviews equally provided room for interrogations and clarifications, face-to-face interviews relatively provided for more in-depth data collection. Open-ended interviews utilised provided room for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss related issues in more detail. Hence, the researchers were able to probe into potentially sensitive illegal issues from the illegal sand miners to link mining drivers, implications, and governance with conflicts. All the interviews were scheduled and conducted after

informed consent was acquired. The researchers developed a set of respective interview guides to keep them aligned with the research questions during interviews. Interview guides focused on governance roles, enforcement practices, stakeholder engagement, and perceptions of sand mining impacts. Grounded theory techniques were used to code and group emerging themes (Charmaz 2014). Methodological limitations include access constraints and potential response bias due to the illegal nature of the activity.

To enrich data quality and reliability of findings, all interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder after informed consent of participants. A diary was also used to prepare some notes after each interview. Each interview was fully transcribed, using the notes and interview recordings.

Target population	Name of organisation	Participants' Codes	Number of interviews conducted
Government Officials	Environmental Management Agency (EMA) Local authorities (Harare city council, Epworth local board, and Chitungwiza municipality)	GE GL	9
Local Community Leadership	Ward Chairpersons: Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza East	CL	3
Local Residents	Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza East	CR	10
Industrialists (Mining company officials)	Derbyshire Quarry and Eye Court Quarry	IN	3
Illegal Sand Miners	Epworth, Retreat, and Zengeza (self-employed)	IL	15

Table 1. Interview Data

Results

The study noted that reflexive governance of illegal sand mining was restrained by a combination of macroeconomic, political and institutional factors in Zimbabwe. Economic obstacles include resource scarcity and high unemployment while institutional obstacles include corruption and bribery and limited stakeholder engagement. Politically, the interference of political actors in land access and use processes constrained reflexive governance of sand mining. Analysis of interview data generated five dominant themes: poor law enforcement, limited stakeholder engagement, resource scarcity, corruption and bribery, and political interference.

Poor Law Enforcement

Results indicated that there is poor law enforcement by responsible authorities such as the EMA and local authorities. Multi-stakeholder blitz operations conducted to monitor and regulate illegal sand mining activities have a very low frequency rate. The lag between inspections and monitoring exercises in hotspots such as Retreat is too large paving the way for rapid illegal sand extraction. Interviews conducted with the local community exposed the inadequacy of enforcement to curb illegal mining in Harare Metropolitan Province. Informant IL 14, a resident and illegal sand miner from Zengeza (Personal Communication, 13 August 2020) noted that,

“EMA visits these areas but not often. We can operate for two weeks or more without seeing any EMA official here. Sometimes EMA comes with police, but we have since established with most police officers such that this doesn’t affect our operations much. We talk to them and continue operating.”

The above excerpt reveals a limited frequency of on-site regulatory exercise by responsible institutions. This is further worsened by counteracting mechanisms adopted by offenders in the case of on-site raid operations. The syndicated system of communication makes it difficult for police and regulators to conduct successful raids. Explaining the syndicated system, Informant CR 8, resident of Zengeza East (Personal Communication, 5 August 2020) highlighted that,

“Some council officers connive with illegal sand miners with whom they work in the sand business and alert their peers on dates and times a blitz will be conducted. By the time officers

come on the sites the state of activity would have already changed including temporary vacation of miners and removal of any heaps of sand at homes and sites.”

Even illegal sand miners themselves confirmed that they have adopted communication systems that alert and protect them against police or any law enforcement personnel visiting their sand mining sites. Informant IL 4, resident and illegal sand miner from Retreat (Personal Communication, 10 August 2020) noted that,

“Even when the police come with EMA, it doesn’t really work because once their car is spotted along First Street in Waterfalls, we call each other and alert each other by cell phones. By the time they arrive here, we would have vacated the mining sites. Some of their officers also alert us, so literally it’s a waste of their time. It will not work.”

The narration above exposes the complexity in apprehending illegal sand miners. There are clear acts of omission and commission by both offenders and law enforcement officers respectively. This also suggests weak regulation systems by responsible institutions. Confirming these findings, Informant IL 13, a resident and illegal sand miner from Zengeza (Personal Communication, 14 August 2020) affirmed that, “We have never seen EMA’s presence here,” he says. “If they come and teach people about the importance of the environment, I am sure we will see an improvement in our environment.”

Affirming the foregoing sentiments, industrialists also attributed illicit sand mining activities to the weak local governance system in the country. Due to poor law enforcement by EMA and local authorities, and persistent illegal sand mining activities, most officials highlighted that they have since adopted their own self-defence systems against illegal sand miners. Informant IN 3, Deyshire Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) explained that,

“Umm, these government offices no longer perform as we expect. EMA used to come and check with us on these issues more regularly and even assess our level of compliance, but they no longer come here more often. I do not remember the last time EMA came here but it’s a long time since they last came. The same applies to municipal officers; they no longer come here more often. We have since assumed local authority

responsibility to protect our territories on our own. We have turned all open spaces around these premises into plantations in order to deprive illegal sand miners of sand endowments.”

The above excerpts clearly expose the governance gap on illegal sand mining in Zimbabwe. Limited activity monitoring creates a fertile space for illegality, and in response, the private sector has implemented alternative sand mining restrictive measures. Even the local community expressed concern over the poor governance of illegal sand mining by authorities. Informant CR 5, resident of Zengeza East (Personal Communication, 7 August 2020) noted that, “the police relatively come here more often than EMA and council. The latter can go for a month before coming here to check on these illegal and informal activities.”

Weak enforcement of environmental laws is a key restraint to reflexive governance of sand mining in Zimbabwe.

Limited Stakeholder Engagement

Besides poor governance, limited stakeholder participation in governance processes emerged as a key restraint to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining in Zimbabwe. Key stakeholders such as the local community, industry, civil society, and other non-governmental organisations are generally marginalised in either planning, implementation, or review processes. Few observed engagements often involve government-to-government institutions such as environmental authorities, police, and local authorities under the purview of government mandates. Exposing the limited engagement stakeholder gap, Informant GE 5, EMA official (Telephone Interview, 18 August 2020) noted that,

“In terms of illegal sand mining, so far, we have only worked with police and office of the DA. We have not worked with any community except just raising awareness to the public. As for local authorities, we work with them on several programs, but we have not implemented sand mining program together yet. The feedback from local authorities is not positive.”

Evidence above suggests that there is very limited stakeholder participation such as the local community and local authorities in sustainable sand mining matters. This is despite empirical evidence suggesting that the local community experiences the worst impacts of illegal sand mining such as

land degradation, displacement, and health hazards. The lack of community participation in designing and implementing solutions for sustainability suggests far fetching, non-inclusive, and non-reflexive governance system.

In our study, the community's experience of a myriad of socio-economic and environmental problems caused by illegal sand miners, coupled with limited engagement, fuelled socio-environmental conflicts. Most participants, the residents of all three selected areas lamented over their marginalisation in the decision-making process over local environmental issues affecting them. Informant CR 1, resident of Retreat (Personal Communication, 12 August 2020) cited that,

“...we only know that EMA and Council officers come here chasing the illegal sand miners. I do not remember any program when these authorities engage our communities or conducting any public consultations.”

The findings above expose the inadequacy of local community participation in decision process on sand mining issues. The same applies to industrialists who lamented over poor engagement programs by the government's environmental authorities in addressing illegal sand mining issues affecting them. Despite government authorities routinely visiting mining premises, the study noted that the industry is not much involved in the decision-making process on illegal sand mining issues. This is despite the industry's ever attempting to find assistance from responsible authorities on illegal sand mining issues affecting their operations. Pinpointing gaps in public-private engagement in sand mining governance, Informant IN 3, Eye Court Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) lamented that,

“...when they [local authorities] come here, they visit our premises asking a few questions about our experiences with illegal sand miners but as for planning and consultations through workshops, I can't remember the last time we were consulted. It's a couple of years ago.”

The narration highlights the inadequacy of the consulting industry, particularly mining companies affected by illegal sand mining. This also emerged in other interviews held with key informants from the industry. Informant IN 1, Debyshire Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) explained that,

“We are actually surprised that local authorities, such as community leadership, EMA, and local authorities mandated

to deal with such illegal sand mining issues, are silent. We thought they would involve us in planning on how we can best address these issues since we are equally the victims. EMA last came here last year, but as part of their general environmental inspections. In some cases, authorities are only visible when they receive reports from the community. To me, we are neglected; we are marginalized yet seriously affected by territorial abuse, environmental destruction, and competition.”

Together, these findings show that there are no specially designed government engagement programs with industry, community, and other key actors to address illegal sand mining issues. Lack of adequate stakeholder participation in sand mining governance processes was one of the key barriers to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining. This further suggests that existing measures to curtail illegal sand mining were either ill-informed or non-reflexive of the current needs of society. In this study, such collaboration is deficient suggesting that industry remains a victim of illegal sand miners through environmental degradation and market loss.

Resource Scarcity

Results also indicated that a lack of adequate resources impeded effective governance of illegal sand mining in Harare Metropolitan Province. Despite being embedded in contemporary ideologies for sustainability, most institutions were not able to fully execute their environmental mandates due to limited resources. Viewed from wider macro-economic problems faced by the country, most participants pointed to the lack of adequate funds to support programs such as consultative workshops, capacity building, education, and awareness. Institutions such as EMA grappled with resource challenges to conduct on-site regulation that often involves multi-stakeholder blitz operations and requires adequate funds and equipment. Informant GE 2, EMA official (Personal Communication, 14 August 2020) highlighted that,

“The major challenge we have in organising successful programs towards illegal sand mining is limited funds. Usually, these programs for example blitz involve working with various actors, such as the community, media, and police, so once we plan to conduct them, there should be adequate resource support. At times, resources may not suffice. This explains why at times we take a long time before we conduct these programs.”

Similar to sentiments from EMA, local authorities confirmed that resource scarcity has a significant effect on institutional engagements in addressing illegal sand mining. Informant GL 1, HCC official (Personal Communication, 25 August 2020) noted that,

“We are trying our best to deal with illegal sand mining but sometimes resources pull us back. We have a shortage of vehicles to conduct frequent monitoring of all illegal sand mining sites. Some of our programs require approval and even financial support from the ministry, so as long we have no funds disbursed, it we can't make any no progress. At times, we even fail to cooperate with EMA because of resources. We need to work with EMA and other key partners in devising long-term solutions to illegal sand mining. We hope it will be a thing of the past soon.”

This empirical evidence clearly reveals that resource scarcity is indeed one of the obstacles to good governance of illegal sand mining. Resource scarcity affected the capacity of responsible authorities or institutions to effectively and efficiently enforce laws that protect communities and the environment. The prevailing harsh socio-economic conditions in the country have added the burden of reflexive governance challenges on local authorities.

Corruption and Bribery

The study also identified corruption and bribery as impediments to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining in Harare Metropolitan Province. Most participants lamented that government officials get bribes from illegal sand miners to allow them to continue mining sand illegally without apprehension. Communities criticise joint inspections and patrols for being mere assumptions of duty rather than realistically serving the mandate of responsible organisations. Informant CR 1, resident of Retreat (Personal Communication, 3 August 2020) noted that,

“These government officers are just bribed with money and the deal is closed. They do visit these sites but surprisingly no mining stops at times. They receive bribes and no longer act. Only a few officers are genuine and when those ones do come, most illegal sand miners disappear because they surely apprehend you.”

Another informant, CR 4, Retreat resident (Personal Communication, 3 August 2020), affirmed that, “...close sources in Harare say capital city's top

municipal officers are accused of cashing in on sand poaching.” The industry also confirmed that local authorities and law enforcers perpetrate illegal sand mining through suspected corruption. Informant IN 3, Debyshire Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) highlighted that,

“The problem is everyone including the officials themselves, especially the ones from ZRP and Council, are greedy for money, so they always accept bribes and make relations with illegal sand miners. They are the same officers that communicate with the illegal sand miners about any on-site raids that will be planned.”

Whilst there are some notable stakeholder engagements between police and other stakeholders from the industry and the government, the above evidence suggests that corruption is inherent in local governance processes. The non-stop illegal sand mining activities irrespective of the presence of law enforcement personnel, reveal there was deliberate violation of the rule of law through corruptive practices. This is even though rule of law is an element of good and reflexive governance.

Political Interference

Political interference in land use and governance also emerged as an obstacle to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining in Harare Metropolitan Province. Political figures, such as war veterans, use political muscle to violate the property rights of private mining companies creating territorial conflicts between landowners and illegal sand miners. Despite concerted efforts by victims of illegal sand mining, and particularly the industry or mining companies, responsible authorities also find it difficult to exercise regulatory or enforcement powers for state-owned land. The chaotic land use, land rights, and mining systems prohibit efforts to address illegal sand mining in such areas. This is an obstacle to reflexive governance of sand mining, as emerged from concerned industry officials as Informant IN 3, a Debyshire Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) expressed,

“This area is dominated by war veterans. Sometimes when we raise our heads over illegal operations in our premises, they intimidate us trying to pacify us. Recently, we filed a case against one of the war vets who refuted formal warnings against operating in our premises.”

Clearly, this response reveals that illegal sand mining is not only a socio-economic and environmental issue but a politically driven issue. Supporting the above views, mining officials from the private sector also castigated the government for not addressing their conflict with politicians. Informant IN 1, Eye Court Quarry official (Personal Communication, 28 August 2020) noted that,

“We are deeply concerned by the manner politics is used to manipulate us as industry. Our voices are not heard despite repeated efforts to seek assistance from both local authorities, such as councils and EMA, and even the community leadership. Everything is politicized and you would notice that some community leadership is part of the whole system of illegal sand business. Surely, how can policies work in societies where policy formulators perpetrate illegality?”

These narratives from the private sector indicate that politics is used as an instrument of both human and environmental rights violations rather than an instrument for promoting sustainable sand mining as espoused by the stakeholder theory, and good governance, as advocated by the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Even some government officials further stated that state land is very difficult to regulate, as there is much political dominance and freedom of activity. Informant GE 4, an official from EMA (Telephone Interview, 14 August 2020) explained that “Retreat Farm is state land, and this is why it is difficult to regulate illegal sand mining there. No one specifically owns it hence, rampant illegal sand extraction is taking place there.”

Indeed, political interference in land rights and mining rights is an obstacle to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining in Zimbabwe. As revealed by this study, politics was utilised for land acquisition and influence over sand mining rather than for promoting sustainable sand mining. The landowners used political power to override environmental laws at the expense of community welfare and environmental authorities creating stakeholder conflicts and restraining reflexive governance of sand mining.

Discussion

Findings from this study expose the urgent need for reflexive governance of sand mining in Zimbabwe. Despite the existence of a comprehensive legislative framework, institutions responsible for sand mining cannot combat illegal sand mining. Practices and programs adopted to address

illegal sand mining are not holistic, as evident in limited stakeholder engagement in planning, implementation, and review processes. Previous studies confirm that limited stakeholder participation is an obstacle to environmental policy integration (Lenschow 2002). Yet, research indicates that stakeholder participation is a key factor in the reflexivity of governance (Leonard and Lidskog 2021). In this study, key stakeholders such as the local community were not significantly engaged or capacitated to deal with illegal sand mining issues. Unfortunately, findings revealed that there was limited stakeholder capacity building towards sustainable sand mining. These findings also reflect the absence of key common-pool resource governance principles (Ostrom 1990), particularly in relation to monitoring, enforcement, and collective decision-making.

As noted by Feindt and Weiland (2018), reflexive governance is characterised by reflexive adaptation of regulations or policies by governments. Unfortunately, findings exposed the inadequacy of institutional practices in addressing illegal sand mining in Zimbabwe. Institutions such as EMA and local authorities lack adequate resources to apply mechanisms that are reflective of the current needs of sustainable sand mining. As a result, there is a general tendency to resort to old governance approaches and models that do not speak to environmental malpractices fuelled by harsh national socio-economic conditions in the country. As noted by Springer (2016), good governance requires a continual review of policies and practices to match societal needs. In contrast, existing policies neither speak to the prevailing socio-economic conditions that perpetuate corruption, social malpractice, and law defiance. Empirical evidence confirms that corruption is one of the obstacles to good governance (Cooray and Schneider 2018). Furthermore, the penalty system is not deterrent while provisions lack a serious call for stakeholder participation in policy formulation, implementation, and review. Clearly, these issues are a direct conflict with the reflexive governance framework. Illegal sand mining and subsequent malpractices are a deviation from the key elements of reflexive governance such as transparency, rule of law, accountability, and responsiveness.

As noted by Hendriks et al. (2007), reflexive capacity building is the ultimate goal for reflexive governance and is the means by which underlying assumptions, practices, and institutional practices are scrutinized and reconsidered. In contrast, results indicate that enforcement is generally weak, and rather allows offenders to successfully adopt a better system of counteracting such approaches. This has seriously affected the efficacy of enforcement efforts. Furthermore, politicians are also using their powers to override the law thus compromising effective

governance. Clearly, such circumstances cannot address the socio-ecological vulnerabilities of societies, fragmented governance regimes, and conditions of sustainability transition as noted by Vadrot et al. (2022). According to Leonard and Lidskog (2021), reflexive governance involves transition management and deliberative democracy for environmental governance and sustainability governance. In contrast, the transition management of natural resources, democracy in program, and policy implementation towards sustainable sand mining is hindered by political interference. Existing institutions including environmental authorities, mining authorities, local authorities, police, and political leadership remain fragmented in both policy and practice for reflexive governance. The findings further demonstrate that governance failures cannot be divorced from Zimbabwe's urban livelihood crisis, where informal sand mining functions as a survival strategy, complicating enforcement-led governance approaches

Conclusion

This study examined the constraints to reflexive governance of illegal sand mining in Harare Metropolitan Province using the reflexive governance framework, complemented by common-pool resource theory. The findings demonstrate that illegal sand mining cannot be explained simply by inadequate legislation or weak enforcement. Rather, it is sustained by interconnected institutional, political and socio-economic conditions that constrain the ability of state institutions to learn, adapt and respond to changing environmental and livelihood realities. Five interrelated constraints emerged: poor law enforcement, limited stakeholder engagement, resource scarcity, corruption and bribery, and political interference. These factors reinforce one another. Resource shortages limit monitoring and enforcement; weak enforcement creates opportunities for corruption; political interference undermines regulatory authority; and limited stakeholder participation prevents institutions from incorporating local knowledge and concerns into governance responses. Consequently, governance remains largely reactive rather than reflexive. From a reflexive governance perspective, effective institutions should critically assess existing practices, learn from societal feedback, and adapt policies as circumstances change (Feindt and Weiland 2018; Pahl-Wostl and Patterson 2021). The findings indicate that such capacities remain limited in Harare. Periodic enforcement operations have not adequately addressed the structural conditions that reproduce illegal extraction. The findings also demonstrate

the relevance of common-pool resource theory, particularly the importance of clearly defined rules, collective decision-making, monitoring and effective sanctions (Ostrom 1990).

The study further shows that illegal sand mining is embedded within Zimbabwe's wider socio-economic crisis. Unemployment and economic hardship make sand extraction an important livelihood strategy for some participants. Enforcement alone is therefore unlikely to provide a sustainable solution. While environmentally harmful and unlawful extraction should remain subject to regulation and sanctions, governance should also recognise the livelihood dimensions of informality and consider appropriate pathways towards regulated activities. Corruption and political interference are significant because they undermine transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Therefore, addressing illegal sand mining requires attention not only to miners but also to the institutional and political practices through which environmental and land-use decisions are made and enforced. Overall, the study demonstrates that reflexive governance requires more than stronger regulation: it requires institutional learning, meaningful participation, adaptive policy, accountability, and attention to the socio-economic conditions shaping resource use.

Recommendations

- *Strengthen multi-stakeholder participation.* The Environmental Management Agency, local authorities and other responsible institutions should establish continuing platforms involving communities, informal sand miners, industry, civil society and relevant government agencies. Participation should extend beyond awareness campaigns to include planning, monitoring, conflict resolution, and policy review.
- *Establish regulated pathways for appropriate informal sand mining.* Where environmentally suitable, local authorities should identify controlled areas for small-scale extraction and introduce simplified registration or licensing arrangements. These should include extraction limits, environmental safeguards, monitoring, restoration requirements, and enforceable sanctions. Formalisation should provide controlled access rather than unrestricted legalisation.
- *Strengthen institutional capacity.* EMA, local authorities, police and other responsible institutions require adequate financial, human, transport and technological resources to undertake regular monitoring. Enforcement

should move beyond intermittent blitz operations towards continuous and risk-based monitoring of known and emerging extraction sites.

- *Strengthen transparency and anti-corruption measures.* Inspection and enforcement procedures should be documented transparently, with accessible mechanisms for reporting and investigating suspected bribery, collusion, and regulatory misconduct. Accountability should apply to both illegal miners and officials who facilitate unlawful extraction.
- *Strengthen the rule of law and reduce political interference.* Land-use and sand-mining decisions should be based on transparent and consistently applied legal and environmental criteria. Clear responsibilities and coordination mechanisms are also required where environmental, mining, land-use, and local government mandates overlap.
- *Integrate livelihood considerations into policy.* Government responses should address unemployment and economic insecurity as drivers of informal extraction. Formalisation should therefore be complemented by livelihood diversification, skills development, and alternative employment opportunities where feasible.
- *Institutionalise policy learning and review.* Sand-mining policies and local by-laws should be periodically assessed against environmental outcomes, enforcement effectiveness, stakeholder experiences, and changing socio-economic conditions. Monitoring and stakeholder feedback should inform revisions to governance arrangements, thereby strengthening institutional learning and adaptation.

Taken together, these measures would shift sand-mining governance from a predominantly reactive and enforcement-oriented approach towards a more inclusive, adaptive, and accountable system. The central implication is that sustainable sand governance in Zimbabwe cannot be achieved through enforcement alone. It requires state institutions to address the institutional, political and socio-economic conditions that reproduce illegal extraction while enabling affected stakeholders to participate meaningfully in governing the resource.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Statement of Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of South Africa. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews, and participation was voluntary. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, and identifying details were anonymised to protect privacy. Given the sensitive nature of illegal sand mining, interviews were conducted with respect for participants' safety and dignity, and no coercion was applied. The research adhered to the World Health Organization's COVID-19 guidelines during fieldwork. The researchers acquired ethical clearance through the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES) Health Research Ethics Committee on 20 May 2020 (Reference: 2020/CAES_HREC/088).

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SCHOOL-LEVEL BRIBERY IN PUBLIC PRIMARY EDUCATION IN UGANDA

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Abstract: Despite stern anticorruption laws, and the government's pronounced ambition to offer education free of charge, there is evidence to suggest that many families in Uganda with children in public primary schools get solicited for bribes. The present study examines why ordinary Ugandan parents and schoolteachers recurrently become involved in the lose-lose game of bribery. Drawing primarily on household survey data, this case study takes a deep dive into the institutional “bad barrels” in Uganda, and discusses the dynamics of school-level corruption alongside its effects on policy implementation. For the purpose of this analysis, principal-agent, collective action, and institutional theory, as well as problem-solving functionality and collaborative-network perspectives, are integrated into an ecological framework. By combining these different but complementary theoretical approaches, the study highlights the interaction between social, economic, cultural, relational, and situational factors that may make bribery seem necessary, rational, and worth the risk.

Keywords: *primary school-level corruption, monetary bribery, undermining of meritocracy, social ecology, theories of corruption*

Introduction

Uganda is a culturally and economically vibrant African country with an exceptionally young population. According to UN data presented by Worldometer (n.d.), half of Uganda's approximately 50 million inhabitants are 17 years old or younger. The share of Ugandans that are under 15 years of age is well over 40 percent (United Nations Population Fund n.d.), and the

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number of children enrolled in primary school quickly approaches the ten million mark (Katushabe 2023; Uganda Bureau of Statistics n.d.). In other words, the issue of education may be crucial for Uganda's future welfare and prospects of prosperity. Uganda was also one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to introduce universal primary education, with school fees abolished back in 1997. The pronounced ambition with the reform was to reduce the financial burden for Ugandan families while making primary education available to all children, including those traditionally deprived of educational opportunities such as girls, children with disabilities, and orphans (Söderberg 2023; Ssekamwa 1999; Kim and Jun 2022: 2). In principle, the Ugandan Government's increasing commitment to invest in public primary schools has gone hand in hand with a decentralisation of the primary education sector (Kjær and Muwanga 2019), combined with legislative refinement, and the establishment of law-enforcement agencies to prevent financial mismanagement and corruption (Kakumba 2021, 2025: 8-9; Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 22-23).

However, there is evidence to suggest that Ugandan public education has not been exempt from corruption. In December 2021, the Inspectorate of Government in Uganda released the eye-opening report *Cost and Extent of Corruption in the Education Sector in Uganda*. The Office of the Inspectorate of Government is the main law-enforcement agency in Uganda that focuses on corruption within public administrations (Sharpe 2018: 9-10). The publication, which is the latest of its kind, was based on a face-to-face survey in which a nationally representative sample of 1,600 households were asked about their circumstances during the twelve months before the COVID-19 lockdown, thus before January 2020. Respondents with school-aged children were asked specifically about the situation for their eldest child. To begin with, a key revelation in the report was that Ugandan households pay an estimated total of 40 billion Uganda Shillings, equivalent to well over ten million US dollars, annually in bribes pertaining to children's education. Secondly, bribery was found to be the most prevalent within primary school (Inspectorate of Government 2021: vii, 9-12). The share of respondents that disclosed having paid what was characterised as an education-related bribe on behalf of their eldest child was nine percent. Out of those, almost two-thirds (64%) said that the recipients were teachers, and in more than nine out of ten cases (91%), the payment method for the bribes was cash money (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 9-12).

The problem of bribery in Ugandan primary education has also been highlighted in other surveys. A relatively recent study by Afrobarometer,

in which a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Ugandans were interviewed, showed that as many as over one-quarter (26%) of the respondents, who stated that they had had contact with public schools during the year prior to the study, had paid education-related bribes at least once in that period to a teacher or another school official (Kakumba 2021: 8). In comparison, data from another Afrobarometer survey suggest that about ten percent of Ugandan parents have paid bribes to get at least one of their children admitted to a specific primary school (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 26). In an earlier study by Afrobarometer it was found that a bit more than one in five Ugandans (21%), who had had contact with a public school during the twelve months prior to the interview, at least once in that period had given gifts, done favours, or paid bribes, to teachers or other school officials. In contrast, the corresponding 34-country, sub-Saharan African, average is about one in seven (15%), indicating that the bribery rate in Ugandan primary education is higher than in most other African countries (Krönke and Olan'g 2020: 14-15). However, in our opinion it is not necessarily the different surveys' specific numbers *per se* that is the main issue. It is also not always clear exactly how, for instance, the Inspectorate of Government's calculations were conducted, or if the Afrobarometer's researchers and respondents in all instances shared the same understanding of what constitutes a bribe. Instead, the bottom line is that bribery is presented by a Ugandan competent authority, as well as in independent research, as a significant problem in Uganda that arbitrarily raises the costs for pupils and parents, and thus undercuts public investments in education while restricting its availability, which in turn risks defeating the whole purpose of universal primary education (Kakumba 2021; Lugemoi 2019: 173; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 21).

The present study asks why Ugandan households pay bribes in public primary schools, and conversely why teachers solicit bribes from their pupils' families. Focusing on the outermost edge of education policy implementation, the main objective of the present article is to elucidate the drivers and mechanisms behind school-level corruption in Uganda, particularly the dynamics through which extortion for bribes becomes cast as justifiable for many teachers, and through which many ordinary parents become complicit. In a nutshell, the research question is why bribery persists in Ugandan primary education despite both stern anticorruption laws, and the government's pronounced ambition to offer education to all its citizens free of charge. The secondary aim of this study is to review how school-level corruption in a country like Uganda can be approached and conceptualised

theoretically. In this regard, an integrative model will be presented that attempts to see the pertinent interactions in their sociocultural, economic, and institutional context. Overall, the occurrence of different kinds of bribery in school settings is well-documented (Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva 2008; Heyneman 2004, 2010). Yet, to date the scholarly focus on this particular aspect of the implementation end of education reform in Uganda has been relatively limited, leaving the topic largely underresearched (Hossain and Hickey 2019). Notably, the theoretical understanding of what causes bribery may in general be intimately connected with preferences regarding what measures should be taken to counter the problem. To recommend specific remedies against primary-school level corruption in a country like Uganda is outside the scope of the present study. However, in the process of fulfilling its primary objectives, a few focus areas for preventive measures are identified and highlighted.

Definitions and Characteristics of Bribery in Ugandan Primary Education

To answer the research questions at hand, we begin by defining key concepts, and specifying our understanding of what constitutes school-level corruption in Ugandan public primary education. First of all, corrupt practices in education settings can be both monetary and non-monetary. Hence, corruption in education can generally be defined as the abuse of authority for both material and personal gain. Since education is a public good, school-level corruption always involves an element of professional misconduct (Heyneman 2025: 364-365; 2004: 637, 644; 2003: 1659), which can pertain to individuals as well as institutions (Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva 2008: 3). In a stratified system like public education, there may be entry points of corruption at every stage, that is from early grades of primary school and throughout the academia (Transparency International 2013: xx). Likewise, corruption in education may occur at any administrative level of authority (Mugellini et al. 2021: 8; Kimeu 2013: 45). Different forms of corruption in education in Uganda and elsewhere may range from sexual exploitation of students to conscription of ghost teachers, or involve illicit practices regarding teacher placement, accreditation and licensing of schools, procurement of scholastic materials, allocation of dormitory spaces, utilisation of school property for commercial purposes, etc. (Heyneman 2004; Inspectorate of Government 2021). In the present study we set a limitation by exclusively focusing on corruption in the form

of person-to-person monetary bribery at the implementation end of public policy, namely the service-delivery level of primary education (Mugellini et al. 2021: 7; Kimeu 2013: 45). Person-to-person corruption, as opposed to higher-level “grand” corruption schemes, here principally involves bribery of civil servants who perform comparatively routine tasks. Although the value of each transaction may be limited, it harms individuals and in the case of Uganda the aggregate sums are substantial (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 3-4; cf. Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 12).

Ugandans in general are no strangers to monetary corruption in relation to public administration. Based on survey data from Transparency International and Afrobarometer, it has been estimated that approximately 40 percent of Ugandans pay bribes for public services on a yearly basis, which is significantly higher than in most other sub-Saharan African countries (Sharpe 2018: 3-4). In fact, bribery is the most common form of corruption that ordinary Ugandans come across in their daily lives, and can in its simplest form be defined as the unlawful selling of a specific decision by the official decision-maker (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 3; Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 26, 10-11). However, based on effect and intention in the case of Uganda it is important to make a distinction between bribery and other kinds of informal payments. Since corruption in principle is covert, appreciation gifts openly awarded to deserving teachers are not bribes (Heyneman 2025: 363-64). In addition, Ugandan parents are recurrently asked to give unofficial, unreceipted, out-of-pocket “contributions” directly to public schools, or to Parent Teachers Associations, for extra scholastic materials, repairs or new facilities, meals, dormitory space, etcetera, some of which are within the grey area of what should be covered by the government (Kagoro 2024; Lugemoi 2019: 173; *Daily Monitor* 2018). Donations from parents to children’s overall learning environments may be a welcome compensation when the state funding for operating costs is insufficient. Nevertheless, when informal payments are made explicitly to first and foremost favour the donors’ own children it should be treated as corruption (Heyneman 2010: 16; 2025: 364).

In the Ugandan Inspectorate of Government’s (2021) report, the most often mentioned reasons for bribing teachers or other school officials are to ensure that certain children would get good grades, pass the exams, or be admitted to specific schools. Four in five (80%) of the respondents who had paid education-related bribes also believed that a refusal to do so would bring negative consequences, such as a child not being admitted to a school, being dismissed from school, receiving bad marks, or not passing a specific exam

(Inspectorate of Government 2021: 9-12). From a corruption perspective, it is our understanding that the most important exams in Ugandan primary education are the annual promotion tests and the Primary Leaving Examination. The promotion tests are taken before moving up a grade and can be administered locally, whereas the Primary Leaving Examination is administered by the Uganda National Examinations Board and is taken before completing primary school. Although the conduct of national exams is designed to contribute to social equity in Uganda (Heyneman 1983; Heyneman and Ransom 1990), this effect seems at least in part to be offset by the recurrent leakages of national exam papers. From what we have observed, leaked exam papers are sold beforehand to certain headteachers and schools, which in turn ask pupils for money to access the questions. The children then sit secretly in groups or individually with co-opted teachers to figure out the correct answers before taking the exam. Since the national exam papers persistently get leaked before distribution, national examination board staff, as well as government printery staff in Entebbe, appear to be complicit. To counteract cheating each district administration in Uganda coordinates the sending of designated invigilators to primary schools that can require, for instance, headteachers to open sealed envelopes with exam papers in their presence. However, the invigilators, who usually are teachers themselves, do not reach all schools in Uganda, and even when they do, they may get paid to look the other way. Hence, another form of primary school-level corruption is when teachers, in the absence of diligent invigilators, for a charge simply help their pupils to write the Primary Leaving Examination (Wenske and Ssentanda 2021: 11).

In the case of Uganda, it should be noted that the education quality, and thus learning outcomes, vary tremendously from school to school. The primary leaving examination results for each school often get published online or in local newspapers (see Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2024). In our experience, the school-level bribery in Ugandan public education is fundamentally related to the fact that some primary schools are much more attractive than others. For example, even when it comes to public education, popular primary schools can often afford to have a “cut-off point” in their annual promotion tests, such as 60 percent correct answers. When children, who fail to reach the required test result, nonetheless want to move up a class, or even stay in school, parents may be asked by teachers to pay hefty sums for “extra tuition.” In our assessment, this creates a vicious cycle in which high performing, and thus attractive, public primary schools in Uganda become incentivised both to off-roll underperforming pupils, and to extort various

informal payments from parents, including monetary bribes. In cases where children have already been forced out of a public primary school due to low test scores, parents may be particularly vulnerable to solicitation of bribes from headteachers for new admissions.

Another typical scenario in which school-level bribery occurs in public primary education pertains to the circumstance that early childhood education opportunities are neither available nor affordable everywhere in Uganda. Still, according to our observations, to enrol a child in the first grade of a popular public school may require results from a nursery school. In cases when parents are unable to declare such results, informal negotiations with headteachers often follow. Parents may be informed that since children with no or limited preschool background need more assistance to catch up, special admission money must be paid to “motivate the teachers.” Furthermore, similar instances of bribery in Ugandan primary schools may relate to transfers. When parents relocate and their children need to change schools, they may be told by school officials that they come from a low performing learning institution whose pupils do not “meet the standards” and therefore need more attention. In these situations, parents again can find themselves in informal negotiation situations where bribes framed as motivation money for teachers and headteachers get solicited.

Theory and Methodological Procedure

This study draws heavily on Transparency International’s profound *Global Corruption Report: Education* (2013). Besides highlighting the devastating effects of corruption on meritocracy around the world, the report depicts education as particularly susceptible to corruption. Primary education essentially bears important credentials that families almost universally demand, while at the same time being a limited good that is possible to trade illicitly (Transparency International 2013: 6, 4; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 5). Furthermore, Transparency International (2013) underscores that the key to victory in the fight against corruption is to understand and draw attention to its underlying dynamics, and thus in effect diagnose the “disease” rather than its “symptoms” (Milovanovitch 2013: 233). In this regard, it has been widely argued that corruption in education should be seen as a complex, intricate, and evolving phenomenon with various causal underpinnings. Hence, rather than monocausal or unidimensional theorising, the analysis of corruption in education requires a comprehensive, multifactorial, or even multidisciplinary, approach (McDevitt 2013: 229; cf. Heyneman 2003:

1659; Mugellini et al. 2021: 7; Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 11; Mukobi, Pillay and Mantzaris 2023: 206). In fact, one of our biggest takeaways from Transparency International's (2013) report is the pronounced need for theory development to grasp both the specifics and multilayered nature of practices such as school-level bribery.

The conceptualisation of corruption in primary education is far from merely an academic exercise. Instead, the respective theoretical understanding of the issue generally guides the selection of countermeasures, which ultimately may decide their outcomes (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 4, 6). For instance, based on in-depth interviews with more than 60 public officials, local NGO representatives, and journalists in Uganda and Kenya, the Swedish political scientists Anna Persson, Bo Rothstein, and Jan Teorell (2013) showed that there is a significant difference in terms of viewpoints among professionals in these countries, on the one hand, and the characterisation of corruption in many of the globally promoted, top-down, anticorruption programmes, on the other. In other words, the failure of many donor-driven anticorruption reforms in Uganda may be attributed to the inadequate theoretical foundations of their designs (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013; Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 2). Still, despite the repeated calls for comprehensive and elaborate theorising, the reviewed literature, including Transparency International's (2013) and Inspectorate of Government's (2021) reports, are in our opinion not entirely clear about what such a multilevel model would look like in respect of school-level corruption in a country like Uganda.

Crime is inexorably committed by individuals, and a theoretical framework should acknowledge the agency of individual actors (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 21-22; Mugellini et al. 2021: 4). Yet, since the perpetrators of school-level corruption in Ugandan education are mostly ordinary parents and schoolteachers, it would be an oversimplification to see their motives as solely triggered by opportunism and self-interest (Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235). According to survey findings, Ugandans in general attribute the widespread bribery in public administration less to greed and more to societal factors such as insufficient formal salaries (Sharpe 2018: 3-4). Likewise, although seemingly large shares of the population in Uganda have bribery-condoning attitudes (Awiti and Orwa 2019: 424; Awiti 2016: 1-2), the results are ambiguous, and people who engage in school-level bribery may not necessarily be driven by such attitudes. Instead, both actual corruption and bribery-condoning attitudes may be functions of incentivising social circumstances (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 27). In other words, it may primarily be the societal dynamics that cast what is

socially justifiable that need to be explored (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 2). Hence, for the purpose of this analysis, we propose an integrative model that brings into light the concept of ecology, which basically pronounces the interrelation between individuals and their environment. An ecological model may also potentially meet the asserted requirement noted above of a compound and multilayered conceptualisation of the reasons behind corruption in education (Bronfenbrenner 1979; McLeroy et al. 1988).

To take on the case of public primary education in Uganda, we have attempted to adapt and apply the ecological framework designed by the American public health scientist Kenneth McLeroy and colleagues' (1988). In our proposed version of the model, the social ecology relevant to the study of person-to-person corruption comprises five analytical levels, namely the individual, interaction, community, institution, and society. The overlapping circles illustrate the reciprocity between key factors of influence, and that these factors can be studied at different analytical levels. Arguably, this may offer a suitable starting point for conceptualising, for instance, how certain features of society are interlinked with organisational cultures of public institutions, and become entrenched in community-level network dynamics, which in turn can impact the atmosphere of interaction between individuals (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023; Appolloni and Nshombo 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). Variables such as interpersonal relationships, cultural influences, attitudes, ideology, or social and economic strain are not explicitly stated because they may operate on most, if not all, levels. However, the model is essentially schematic, and it does not explain corruption in education *per se*. Instead, it offers a mode in which different explanations and findings that pertain to bribery in Ugandan primary school can be integrated into one framework of analysis.

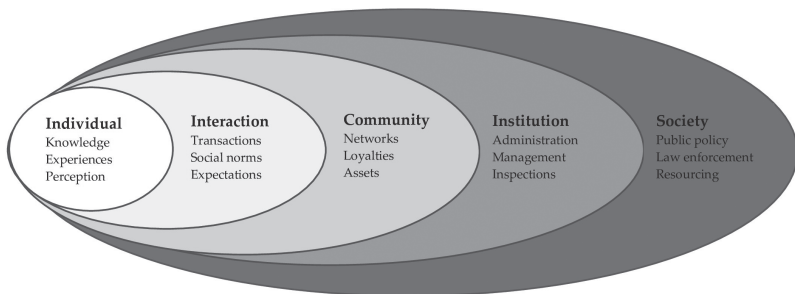


Figure 1. Ecological Model of School-level Corruption in Ugandan Primary Education.
Source: Compiled by the authors.

To paint a fuller picture of why Ugandan teachers and parents engage in school-level bribery, a more in-depth examination may be necessary into how factors operating on different levels of the ecology are interconnected (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023; Kaluya and Elliott 2018). In this regard, the academic acknowledgement of corruption-driving linkages between individual behaviour and the social context, has sparked the advancement of several theoretical approaches to deconstruct these relationships. In consecutive order, this study presents and discusses the five perspectives listed in the table below. Notably, each perspective focuses on slightly different analytical levels of the social ecology, and each of them points to a distinct focus area for preventing school-level corruption in a country like Uganda.

Theoretical perspective	Scholarly works (e.g.)	Analytical level	Focus area
Principal-Agent Problem	Groenendijk 1997	Interaction	Transparency
Collective Action Problem	Persson, Rohdstein and Teorell 2013	Interaction/Institution	Accountability
Problem-Solving Functionality	Marquette and Peiffer 2015	Interaction/Society	Resource distribution
Collaborative-Network	Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017; Kaluya and Elliott 2018	Interaction/Community	Integrity
Institutional	Zimmermann and Riegner 2023	Institution/Interaction	Organisational culture

Figure 2. Table of Theoretical Perspectives on School-Level Corruption in Ugandan Primary Education. Source: Compiled by the authors.

The selection of perspectives was made based on the set of theoretical standpoints suggested by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.), and the Ugandan Inspectorate of Government (2021) respectively. Both the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.) and the Inspectorate of Government (2021), put forward the use of principal-agent and collective action theory. The Ugandan Inspectorate of Government (2021) also proposes institutional theory, whereas the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.) adds the perspective of problem-solving functionality. Here game theory was excluded since it may mainly apply to corruption in public procurement. Instead, following the Uganda-born, American economist Michael Kaluya and political scientist Euel Elliot

(2018), as well as the experts on African corruption Cosimo Stahl and Claudia Baez Camargo, a collaborative-network perspective was brought into view to better match the particularities of the Ugandan empirical reality. In turn, the empirical data discussed in this study are predominantly based on household surveys conducted in Uganda by the Inspectorate of Government (2021), as well as the Afrobarometer as presented by their principal Ugandan researcher Makanga Ronald Kakumba (2025, 2021). Finally, a selection of important works in the academic field were reviewed, with their key findings sorted thematically and integrated into the analysis (Kyazike, Kanyamurwa and Babalanda 2022).

Corruption in Ugandan Primary Education as a Principal-Agent Problem

Starting at the interaction level of the social ecology, one way to theoretically approach the question why school-level corruption in Ugandan primary education occurs, is to view it as a so-called principal-agent problem (Klitgaard 1988; Groenendijk 1997). From this perspective, parents or other guardians of schoolchildren are cast as the “principals,” who turn to certain “agents,” that is teachers and headteachers, to provide education for their children. In an ideal scenario, the agents solely serve the interest they have in common with the principals, which is the delivery of the best possible primary education. However, under conditions in which agents relatively freely can distribute sought-after resources, and prescribe the pay-off rules in relation to the principals, there may be considerable incentives for agents to act in their own interests even when it is to the detriment of principals (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 4; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). In general, each stage of an education system can be understood as having “gatekeepers” such as persons who deal with exams or admissions to specific schools, and who subsequently may have considerable decision-making power over children’s continuation of studies (Transparency International 2013: 6, 4). When agents in the form of individual teachers and headteachers have full discretion over grades and exams, or can help pupils slip through the gates of attractive schools, they become enabled to exploit their position. Hence, school-level corruption in a country like Uganda may actually be described as a *double* principal-agent problem, where education policymakers are the first principals and families with schoolchildren are the second. Neither policymakers nor parents can fully steer or monitor

the actions of self-utility maximising education providers who use their bestowed agency for their own benefit (Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 4).

According to principal-agent theory, corruption is the most likely to occur when there is an asymmetry of information to the advantage of agents. In this case, that would imply that access to valid information is tilted in the favour of teachers and headteachers (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 4; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). In this regard, the issue with information asymmetry in Uganda may be illustrated by the circumstance that many parents are unaware of what constitutes an illegal charge (Transparency International 2013: xix). For instance, about one in seven (14%) respondents in the Inspectorate of Government's (2021) household survey, who objectively were found to have paid bribes to teachers or other school officials, did not describe them as illicit transactions but rather as appreciation gifts (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 11). Particularly in rural Uganda, some parents have different poverty-related vulnerabilities such as illiteracy, exposure to misinformation, or misconception of education policies, which may limit their abilities to in all instances fully see the motives behind school-level economic exchanges (Namara 2020). Hence, from a principal-agent standpoint, the focus area to remedy bribery in Ugandan school settings is transparency. To establish better mechanisms of transparency regarding the administration of public primary schools would potentially level the playing field in terms of information. Likewise, better transparency can reduce the discretionary power of individual teachers and headteachers to make life-changing decisions over pupils, which in turn may curb opportunities for school officials to act at the expense of schoolchildren and their families (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 4; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).

Corruption in Education as a Collective Action Problem

In African countries where corruption is widespread, countermeasures solely based on transparency-oriented frameworks may empirically not have had the lasting positive effects originally intended (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013; Groenendijk 1997). For example, in Uganda there is a system in place with so-called School Management Committees, in which different stakeholders such as parents, cultural and religious leaders, and other members of the local community, are welcomed to monitor the operations and financial affairs of individual primary schools (Kjær and Muwanga 2019: 158-159; Hossain and Hickey 2019: 14-15). However, it

has been reported that School Management Committees themselves often become involved in corrupt practices including bribery (Namara 2020: 5; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 30). In turn, the pervasiveness of corruption may illustrate the point that bribery in public sectors rather should be understood as a collective action problem (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013: 456-457). In this context, a collective action problem can be said to emerge when there are specific, short-term incentives for people to act in ways that undermine the long-term collective goal of adequate primary education. Whereas all stakeholders would be better off with a sound education sector, bribery may make it possible for some actors to reap benefits associated with primary education without making the proper investments. For instance, a headteacher who observes that bribery is commonplace and lucrative may conclude that it does not make much economic sense to be the only one who behaves honestly within a corrupt system (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 12; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 7). Likewise, even Ugandan parents, who recognise that corruption weakens meritocracy, may engage teachers in the lose-lose game of bribery, especially if they perceive that others are doing the same thing for their children to get ahead (Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 10; Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013: 456-457).

From the viewpoint of collective action, both principals and agents are understood as responding to other actors' expectations, while behaving according to their level of trust or distrust in the pertinent institutions' abilities to effectively tackle corruption. Hence, the concept of collective action keeps the analytical focus on the cost-benefit decisions of individuals, while including quasi-rational influences on behaviour such as social norms or collectively shared perceptions of the conduct of others. It also binds together social norms and perceptions, that guide transactions between individuals at the interaction level, with the social ecology's institution level. Subsequently, the focus area for counteracting corruption in primary education is accountability. The key question here is not so much the nature of the institutions themselves but rather whether people within the public education sector in Uganda perceive that person-to-person corruption may render in punitive action (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013: 456-457). Accordingly, to hold wrongdoers accountable through prosecution or other legal action would potentially pull the rug out from underneath school settings where cost-benefit decisions of individuals are skewed in favour of dishonesty (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 4; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). In other words, the probability of sanctions being

applied against corrupt actors, in combination with the seriousness of the sanctions applied, may determine the level of success of anticorruption measures (Mugellini et al. 2021: 4).

In Uganda, under the current policy framework of decentralised service provision, the statutory responsibility to provide public primary education has been handed over to the districts (Kjær and Muwanga 2019: 158-159; Namara 2020: 4; Alumu and Hassan 2019: 2). As of June 2026, Uganda has as many as 146 districts (Uganda Bureau of Statistics n.d.), yet the capability of each respective district administration to actually manage their public primary schools varies significantly (Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2024). The “bureaucratic fragmentation” of public primary education in Uganda has overall resulted in insufficient inspection, supervision and monitoring of many schools, which in turn may contribute to a social climate of leniency in respect of corrupt practices (see Lugemoui 2019; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 18-19; Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2024). Furthermore, many police officers and judges are themselves widely regarded as being involved in corruption (Kakumba 2021: 6). Symptomatically, over three-quarters (76%) of Ugandans who had been in contact with the police during the twelve months prior to the survey at hand, said that they were obliged to pay bribes to obtain police assistance (Kakumba 2025: 2-3). Hence, in the case of Uganda it has even been suggested that person-to-person corruption *per se* is a social norm, in the sense that it constitutes a point of reference that may shape and reproduce expectations regarding the interactions between seekers and providers of public services (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 2). In turn, the deep-seated mistrust in law enforcement agencies may also prevent many people in Uganda from reporting corruption (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 30-31).

In the absence of effective law enforcement, together with the overall lack of institutional capacity to proactively monitor primary school activities in general, and teacher-parent transactions in particular, the potential “costs” of engaging in bribery in Uganda may become insignificant. From a cost-benefit perspective, and with regards to the institution level of the ecology, Ugandan teachers and headteachers do simply not get deterred from extorting bribes from pupils and their families (Lugemoui 2019: 173, 197; Adeleke and McSharry 2022: 3). Instead, for Ugandan parents to report solicitation of bribes to the authorities can involve significant costs (Hyll-Larsen 2013). In the latest Afrobarometer survey, more than four out of five (83%) Ugandans stated that ordinary people risk retaliation if they report corrupt practices such as bribery within public administration (Kakumba

2025: 2-3). Subsequently, even if bribes for teachers and headteachers in public primary education constitute heavy financial burdens for many Ugandan households, they may be regarded a “lesser evil” than, for instance, expensive private schools, or seeking redress within a judicial system permeated with corruption (Hyll-Larsen 2013: 57; Inspectorate of Government 2021).

The Problem-Solving Functionality of Corruption in Ugandan Primary Education

Rather than viewing corruption as merely extractive and inherently exploitive, it has been suggested that bribery relationships should be examined based on the purposes they serve in society and for those involved (Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 18). At least in theory, bribery can perhaps boost economic activity by “greasing the wheels” in response to slow and mismanaged bureaucracies (Mukobi, Pillay and Mantzaris 2023: 207). To engage in corrupt practices may also potentially reinforce social bonds and notions of mutual obligations between people, or work as a form of “civil disobedience” through which public services on occasion can be made available for those who otherwise would have been excluded (Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 18; Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017). Although hardly ideal, corruption may persist because it sometimes provides an interim “solution” to problems people face in their daily lives. Particularly in environments characterised by a scarcity of resources, ordinary citizens may engage in bribery to manage challenges associated with weaknesses in public service systems, which can be rooted in political and organisational failures (Marquette and Peiffer 2015). Hence, the functionality perspective may interconnect the interaction level of the social ecology with the broader political economy. In the case of Uganda, it essentially draws attention to the claims that the public primary education sector in general is under-resourced (United Nations Children’s Fund 2023; Nabiddo, Yawe and Wasswa 2022: 111).

The introduction of universal primary education in Uganda in 1997 and the official banning of fees for public schooling, led to a massive influx of new pupils, and thus to significant overcrowding in many schools (Kjær and Muwanga, 2019: 153; Tromp and Datzberger 2019). The high annual population growth rate of 3% also makes it difficult for the Ugandan Government to keep up with the steady increase in demand for primary education (Uganda Bureau of Statistics n.d.; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 2). Reportedly, the financing inadequacies have led to chronic scarcities

throughout Uganda of, for example, trained teachers and proper scholastic materials (Namara 2020; Tromp and Datzberger 2019). In fact, Ugandan class sizes in the lower grades of primary school typically exceed one hundred pupils, and in worst cases, reach up towards two hundred learners per teacher (see Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2023; Lugemoi 2019: 290-291). Subsequently, rather than to succumb to the substandard education quality that would disallow most learning, Ugandan parents may choose to, for example, illicitly pay for admissions to better public schools, or to pay for grades and exams so that their children still can continue towards secondary school (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 11-12; cf. Milovanovitch 2013). In other words, bribery may for parents appear as a sensible pathway to cope with the symptoms of an economically mismanaged, or even “broken,” primary education sector. Although corruption in primary education clearly creates far more problems than it solves, the perspective of a problem-solving functionality may basically highlight how structural deficiencies can be manifested in school-level transactions (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 6, 30).

Particularly in rural Uganda, primary school teachers are often faced with inadequate facilities, meagre incomes, difficult work conditions, the absence of programs where teachers and pupils share meals, a lack of staff quarters or otherwise expensive housing and transport, etc. (Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2023). Salaries for primary school teachers within the public sector in Uganda are low even in comparison with other civil servants (Kabay 2021: 96; Namara 2020: 19), and are not always paid on time (Tromp and Datzberger 2019: 363). Hence, rather than for example absenting themselves to pursue alternative incomes outside school, underpaid teachers may enter a grey area of asking for gifts, favours or money from parents, which occasionally may amount to solicitation for bribes (Wilke, Green and Tan 2022: 916; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 5; Heyneman 2004: 639). Accordingly, from a functionality standpoint, person-to-person corruption in Ugandan primary schools can be seen as stemming from a systemic mismatch between, on the one hand, the requests and expectations of pupils, parents, and school professionals, and the actual deliverables of the public education sector, on the other (Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235). To tackle the problem is not just a matter of transparency and accountability in relation to education providers. Instead, from this perspective a reduction of school-level bribery in Uganda would require a focus shift towards the resource scarcity that the corrupt practices may be attempts to compensate for. Interaction-level incentives and social norms aside, a public primary

education sector that better meets the material requirements of teachers and learners could be expected to be less corrupt (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 6; cf. Marquette and Peiffer 2015).

Collaborative-Network Corruption in Ugandan Primary Education

Based on the empirical reality in Uganda, cost-benefit decisions of individuals should not be understood as existing in a cultural vacuum. Instead, it may be important to take yet another step beyond the narrowest economic modelling that tends to see corrupt practices virtually in isolation from the broader cultural context (Mugellini et al. 2021: 4). On a fundamental conceptual level, the problem-solving functionality of corrupt practices requires a social network. In principle, for individuals or groups outside of such networks, corruption cannot provide any “solutions” in terms of coping with systemic and material mismatches (Inspectorate of Government 2021: 6). In the case of Uganda, when analysing the reasons behind school-level corruption it may be important to recognise the dozens of different ethno-regional and linguistic communities within its borders (Kyazike, Kanyamurwa and Babalanda 2022: 220), out of which several can be described as long-standing nations, subnational kingdoms, or coalesced factions, led by cultural chiefs or lineage heads. In fact, the plethora of communities in Uganda can be understood as a patchwork of semi-official, authority structures and alliances between people based on, for example, kinship, ethnicity, religion, geographical location, or political affiliation. In many instances, the local communities may be much more salient in terms of loyalty and identity formation than the Ugandan nation state (see Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2024). The informal social networks in Uganda relevant to corruption start with the extended family but can involve any kind of acquaintances or “unholy alliances” within and between communities. Networks are also often built instrumentally to include important stakeholders or “useful connections” that are seen as potential facilitators in times of need (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 19; Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2).

The illicit practices in Uganda that either stem from social network arrangements, or are enabled by social network dynamics, have been labelled collaborative corruption (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 19). In essence, collaborative corruption implies the blurring, or elimination, of the line between public officials’ private interests and their public roles (Mugellini et al. 2021: 4). From this perspective, public officials are equally subject as

anybody else in Uganda to the widely recognised social norms that prescribe individuals to share resources with their respective social network. In this regard, Ugandan teachers and headteachers may be obliged to reciprocate the favours and gifts that they were given in their respective communities throughout their lifetimes, even when it conflicts with their official duties (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2). The general culture in Uganda has been characterised as oriented towards the collective rather than the individual, which also has been pointed out as underpinning some of the corrupt practices within Ugandan public administration (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 22). In this regard, teachers and headteachers may come under significant pressure from relatives, friends, or acquaintances, to misuse the authority that comes with their positions and, regardless of merit, fulfil expectations of favourable treatment of certain pupils. In other words, the motivation behind corrupt practices may be less about direct individual gain and more about satisfying the interests of specific networks (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017; cf. Heyneman 2007: 314; Heyneman 2025: 365).

According to the collaborative-network perspective, there are at least two basic conditions for the development of illicit collaborative arrangements between civil servants and ordinary citizens. First, there needs to be a common belief that the exchanges can be mutually beneficial; second, there must be a shared understanding that corruption can be a viable option to “get things done.” It has also been pointed out that bribery within public administration is something that is regularly discussed in Uganda. In other words, people typically know how, and in which situations, they can engage in illicit payments and gift giving (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 20-22). Moreover, collaborative corruption in Uganda can take the form of long-standing, *quid pro quo* relationships within well-established networks. Yet, parents of children in primary school may also strategically approach specific teachers or headteachers with gifts as means to proactively co-opt them into their own informal social networks. Indeed, to “come prepared” for a meeting with a public official usually means that money has been collected beforehand, or that one’s network has been mobilised in order to find an acquaintance that can act as facilitator. Teachers and other officials in Uganda who are “successful providers” in the sense that they favour and benefit their respective social network, may be respected and admired irrespective of the sources of the redistributed resources. Conversely, law-abiding officials who do not deliver services in the form and quantity that are demanded by their respective group, often get shamed or ostracised (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2; Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 22). In our

experience, reprisals against Ugandan teachers in these situations can be odd punishments such as transfers to poor rural schools, early retirements, or terminations of employment by district authorities, based on cooked-up crimes of mismanagement of government funds.

Particularity in settings where provisions are unequal and resources are insufficient, social networks may facilitate and reproduce the collective strategy of corrupt practices. Under such circumstances, acts of school-level corruption may range from one-off transactions, to perpetual exchanges within a local economy of network collaboration. Although corruption for the sole purpose of self-enrichment is widely condemned in Uganda, the provision of in-group benefits may generally be regarded as adhering to the socially prescribed duties of solidarity *vis-à-vis* the group. Hence, a Ugandan teacher who, for example, solicits bribes from parents to pay for a relative's wedding or funeral may act well within social boundaries (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2). Arguably, the role of culturally entrenched networks at the community level of the social ecology may largely explain why person-to-person corruption in primary education is so difficult to mitigate in a country like Uganda. From the collaborative-network perspective, preventative measures against school-level bribery should primarily focus on professional integrity. To reduce corruption in Ugandan primary schools it would be necessary to promote integrity by forming a new cultural consensus that all civil servants exclusively should serve the public according to their formal professional responsibilities. In other words, there would need to be a complete separation in Uganda of the working lives of school staff, and the interests of the informal networks they may belong to (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 22, 19; see Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2).

Institutional Theory of Corruption in Education

Complex social behaviour such as corrupt practices in primary education may be approached theoretically also from the viewpoint of their institutional underpinnings. The institutional level of the social ecology is arguably vital for the understanding of how both public service delivery and policy implementation are impacted by the particularities of public administration. Basically, public institutions can be understood as structures of governance that embody authority, routines, standards-generating, and guidelines for collective action. Since people tend to adapt to institutional conditions, they may constitute valid components of the social ecology. In other words, institutions comprise dynamic mechanisms that both constrain

and channel new arrangements of social conduct (Scott 2004: 408, 412). In the case of Uganda, it has been put forward that the functioning of public administrations generally is based on “deals” rather than “rules” in the sense that informal bargaining between stakeholders often take precedence over formalised bureaucratic processes (Hickey and Hossain 2019: 26). From this viewpoint, public institutions also have cultural-cognitive components such as shared beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes, which undergird, as well as give meaning to, people’s behaviour (Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 23; Scott 2004: 408-409). How education systems are organised may directly reflect a society’s underlying social structures and sociocultural fabric. Hence, a comprehensive conceptual framework of school-level corruption should perhaps focus less on individual “bad apples” and more on the institutional “bad barrels” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).

The cultural-cognitive features of public institutions in Uganda basically mean that school-level corruption can be attributed to corrupt practices “higher up the ladder,” which may have set the tone for the rest of the sector (Transparency International 2013: xix-xxi, 4). In this regard, it has been widely noted that some of the financial resources allocated to public primary education in Uganda disappear at the top levels of the organisational hierarchy (Tromp and Datzberger 2019: 364; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 3). It has even been argued that the Ugandan primary education sector can be conceptualised as more or less regulated informally by connections seeking, in-group favouritism, and different kinds of bribery (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 1-2). Symptomatically it has also been found that generally when public institutions in Africa become afflicted by illicit mismanagement of funds, not only is the effectiveness of public spending compromised, but teachers also tend to become more involved in corrupt practices (Fomba, Talla and Ningaye 2023: 108). In addition, Ugandan primary school teachers themselves recurrently get extorted for bribes by public officials at the district level when, for instance, applying for new jobs, asking for promotions, or requesting for transfers to more attractive schools (Abu-Baker 2016: 241; Inspectorate of Government 2021: 22-23). Not surprisingly, school-level corruption may increase when teachers perceive that the mismanagement of funds at ministerial, district, and school-management levels have become endemic, and thus leaves them devalued, underpaid, and demoralised (Transparency International 2013: xix-xxi, 4).

From an institution theoretical standpoint, service delivery-level bribery may be the outcome of a vicious cycle of cause and effect. Since corruption negatively impacts the overall efficiency of public spending on education

in Uganda, it subsequently undermines school resourcing, learning outcomes, and teacher remuneration (Inspectorate of Government 2021; Fomba, Talla and Ningaye 2023: 89, 108). Hence, corruption exacerbates the material deficiencies that Ugandan teachers and parents may try to manage by bending, bypassing, or breaking the law (cf. Hyll-Larsen 2013: 57; Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235). From this perspective, the Ugandan education sector also embodies an ongoing cultural normalisation process in relation to corruption, which both reproduces and cements practices such as bribery (Scott 2004; Kaluya and Elliott 2018). Accordingly, person-to-person corruption in primary schools can be understood as the outcome of an institutionalisation of sentiments that cast bribery as a privilege of certain professional positions, or as a default strategy for ordinary people to receive public services, and thus as a routine “part of life” (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017: 2). As far as people in general may base their decisions about whether or not to engage in bribery on their perceptions of the general level of corruption within the public sector in question, bribery in Ugandan primary education may actually risk becoming a self-playing piano (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 27; Lugemoi 2019: 173; Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 23). To break this corruption-driving cycle in Uganda, it would be necessary to design a public education sector that legitimises its existence via a sound management and distribution of resources, as well as by exclusively serving its originally designated purpose of providing adequate primary education to all Ugandan children. Finally, the actors with the most power and influence over public administrations in Uganda must lead by example in the establishing of an organisational culture in public education based on the rule of law, objectivity, and neutrality (cf. Hyll-Larsen 2013: 57; Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235).

Conclusion

For the purpose of analysing school-level corruption within the public primary education sector in a country like Uganda, we advance the proposition that the five perspectives discussed in this study are complementary. Arguably, each of the theoretical approaches outlined above adds important pieces to the complex puzzle of understanding the reasons behind school-level bribery. Rather than representing mutually exclusive or opposing views, they may constitute lenses that highlight the different sets of factors that fill out the others’ contributions (cf. Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 19). Secondly, the reviewed perspectives are compatible in the sense

that they share the fundamental economic stipulations that individuals respond rationally to the information and incentives they are faced with, which in our opinion makes them possible to combine into a single model. In this regard, our suggested adaptation of the ecological framework allows for a multilayered, yet interconnected and coherent, view of these particular actions of individuals within their cultural and social context. From an ecological standpoint, the cost-benefit decisions of individual actors may depend on, for instance, perceptual dynamics as well as on situational, relational, and societal influences. In other words, they are highly susceptible to change (Kaluya and Elliott 2018; Mugellini et al. 2021). Accordingly, the key to anticorruption victory in Ugandan public education is not to choose one single-component intervention over another, but rather to seek synergy effects from interventions that simultaneously deal with transparency, accountability, resourcing, professional integrity, and the organisational culture of the pertinent institutions. A recognition of corruption-driving factors on various analytical levels may ideally aid designs of measures that address both corrupt individuals and the wider social and economic conditions that incentivise bribery in Ugandan primary schools.

Any school-level transaction in Uganda between teachers and pupils should be considered against the backdrop of the national policy of universal primary education. In principle, the policy entails that public primary schools are disallowed to request school fees. However, the high enrolment and overcrowding of many schools that followed in its tracks may in many instances have come at the expense of education quality. In turn, the quality issues including disparities in learning outcomes between different districts, as well as between different public schools within the same areas, may have been exacerbated by the current decentralisation of the Ugandan primary school sector (Söderberg, Berggren and Kumakech 2024; Namara 2000; Heyneman and Stern 2014). Hence, school-level corruption may basically be the manifestation of a societal failure in Uganda to reach equilibrium in a just and meritocratic fashion between demand and supply of adequate-standard primary education (Transparency International 2013: 4; Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 14). Ugandan parents who feel the pinch of deficient education quality may bribe their way to grades and admissions, thinking that their children otherwise neither would receive the schooling, nor the educational future, they believe they have been promised (Zimmermann and Riegner 2023: 12; Söderberg 2023; see Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017). Ironically, the solicitation of bribes from pupils and their families is in outright contradiction to the idea of universal primary education. From

a social ecological standpoint, a policy implementation in Uganda that was more in touch with the realities on the ground, with a resourcing that better accommodates the needs of its stakeholders, would possibly entail a less corrupt education sector (cf. Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235).

As discussed above, rather than fair play disenfranchised Ugandan parents may meet public primary school settings that present entry points for systemic corruption, and may be negatively influenced by the wheeling and dealing of the upper echelons of the education sector. Instead of effectively counteracting service delivery-level corruption, the institutional workings of Ugandan primary school can practically even be seen as establishing bribery relationships as a norm (cf. Kaluya and Elliott 2018: 20-22). In turn, bribery may appear as a viable option for parents, who may already perceive the public sector to be more or less permeated with corruption, when they for the sake of their children's learning seek interim "solutions" to work around the inadequate quality of many Ugandan primary schools. In these situations, the local informal networks in Uganda may reportedly step in to assist in finding the right connections, or the right "gatekeepers" with the right discretionary power over educational opportunities, to approach with the right kinds of gifts, favours, or illicit payments. Hence, in an overall atmosphere of leniency in Uganda, with an information asymmetry to the advantage of education providers, and with authorities neither capable of nor willing to impose effective sanctions, the scarcity of adequate primary education may rig the cost-benefit calculus for pupils and their families so that person-to-person corruption seems rational, necessary, and worth the risk (Hyll-Larsen 2013: 57; Milovanovitch 2013: 233).

On the other side of the transaction, teachers and headteachers in Ugandan public primary school, who formally are civil servants, may feel the pressure to engage in corrupt practices when persuasive or strong actors within their informal social networks start to call in favours (cf. Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017). As noted in the discussion above, a fertile breeding ground for opportunistic acceptances of bribes would be where an unorthodox management of funds is already socially normalised, and there is a general institutional climate of mistrust and impunity in relation to corruption. Likewise, a high-risk situation may emerge when there is a significant difference between, on the one hand, the actual market value of the teachers' roles, and their formal remuneration on the other. In other words, where the stakes for completing primary school are high, yet teacher salaries are not paid on time, or teachers are paid less than what is required to make a decent living, the likelihood of school-level bribery goes up (Heyneman, Anderson

and Nuraliyeva 2008: 7-8). Moreover, when the reporting of corruption gets associated with risks of reprisals, the incentives to partake in corruption may simply be stronger than to oppose it (Inspectorate of Government 2021; Marquette and Peiffer 2015: 20; Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013: 456-457).

If a primary education sector is corrupt, future citizens can unfortunately also be expected to be corrupt (Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva 2008: 3). In turn, those who bribe themselves to education success without merit may later swell the ranks of incompetent leaders in society, including within the public education sector (Transparency International 2013: 5-6; Heyneman 2007: 313). Hence, the corruption-related undermining of meritocracy in Uganda *per se* may, through this self-reinforcing feedback loop, pave the way for even more corruption in Ugandan primary education (Milovanovitch 2013: 234-235; Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva 2008). Conversely, a strengthening of meritocracy, via adequate and well-informed measures against corruption in education, may potentially help give the younger generation in Uganda the future of social and economic prosperity it deserves.

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No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

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EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE AND POWER: APPRAISAL THEORY IN SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL RHETORIC

Sixeko Pakade^a and Zameka Sijadu^b

Abstract: This study examines the re-appropriation of state memorial space into an arena of political resistance through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics' Appraisal Theory. Focusing strictly on the Attitude subsystem, it analyses the 2016 funeral address delivered by Dr Siphon Pityana for Reverend Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile (1944-2016). Through a linguistic examination of 142 evaluative clause units across English and isiXhosa in this address, the article demonstrates how evaluative meanings are strategically deployed. The findings reveal that while positive Affect expresses collective grief and veneration for the deceased, negative Judgement morally condemns corruption and state capture among incumbent leaders. Furthermore, Appreciation constructs institutional decline. By isolating Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation, the article illustrates how emotional expression and moral evaluation intersect to challenge political authority in post-apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: *Attitude subsystem, Siphon Pityana, isiXhosa, Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile, post-apartheid South Africa*

Introduction and Contextual Background

The powerful isiXhosa phrase, “Zemk’inkomo magwalandini,” meaning “There go the cattle, you cowards!” was repeatedly used at the funeral of anti-apartheid activist Reverend Makhenkesi Stofile on 25 August 2016. This saying, which carries deep historical weight, was the title of an influential book by Dr Walter Benson Rubusana (Rubusana 1911: 1), a founding member of the Native Education Association who contributed to the formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, later renamed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923. The use of this

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phrase at the funeral was a clear and forceful political statement, departing from the typical formal decorum of state funerals and highlighting a strong sense of dissatisfaction.

Before examining the linguistic mechanics of the address, it is essential to contextualise the two central actors in this political drama. Reverend Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile (1944–2016) was a prominent anti-apartheid activist, rugby administrator, and liberation stalwart who played a vital role in the United Democratic Front (UDF) during the 1980s. Following South Africa's transition to democracy, Stofile served as the second Premier of the Eastern Cape (1997–2004), Minister of Sport and Recreation (2004–2010), ambassador to Germany, and a long-standing member of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) (News24 2016: 2; Mail and Guardian 2016: 1). His passing triggered an official state funeral, drawing the nation's political elite to the University of Fort Hare in Alice, Eastern Cape.

The speaker, Dr Siphso Pityana, is an influential South African business leader, civil society activist, and former anti-apartheid student leader. Pityana held high-level executive positions in post-apartheid governance, serving as Director-General of the Department of Labour under President Nelson Mandela and Director-General of Foreign Affairs under President Thabo Mbeki. His deep historical roots within the liberation movement provided him with the internal legitimacy and institutional weight required to deliver an uncompromising audit of the ruling executive in front of incumbent party leaders.

During the service, Pityana delivered a stinging critique of the ANC and its leadership under President Jacob Zuma. Pityana's speech addressed numerous controversies, including the disrespect for democratic institutions, the Marikana massacre, the Nkandla scandal, and rampant corruption. By invoking the historical call to action, "Zemk'inkomo magwalandini," Pityana aimed to criticise the government's perceived failure to uphold the values of the liberation movement, suggesting that the "cows" of integrity, democracy, and public trust were being lost or stolen (News24 2016: 3).

The Appraisal framework, developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Martin and White (2005: 33), provides the analytical tools required to unpack how evaluative language negotiates social relationships and moral positioning. The present article investigates how Pityana strategically deploys attitudinal resources specifically Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation in order to transform a formal funeral oration into a catalyst for political resistance.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Metaphor, Emotive Language, and Political Persuasion

Political discourse relies fundamentally on symbolic, evaluative, and persuasive language to construct social reality, shape public perception, and legitimise or challenge authority (Segal 2008: 341; Yule 2006: 112). Within persuasive communication, emotive language serves as a key rhetorical device that frames political events, invokes normative values, and guides audience interpretation (Macagno and Walton 2014: 45). Emotive words do not merely convey propositional content; they carry affective orientations that invite listeners to adopt specific moral and ideological alignments regarding public figures and state institutions (Macagno and Walton 2014: 48).

Metaphor plays an indispensable cognitive and persuasive role in political rhetoric by rendering complex, abstract institutional dynamics intelligible through concrete, socio-culturally grounded domain mappings (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 14; Dillard and Sopory 2002: 385). In political addresses, the strategic deployment of metaphor alters audience attitudes by saliently highlighting specific characteristics of political actors while suppressing or obscuring others (Ottati and Renstrom 2010: 785). When embedded in public addresses, metaphorical expressions act as high-potency evaluative tokens that bridge conceptual understanding with immediate emotional response, thereby driving political persuasion and collective stance-taking (Dillard and Sopory 2002: 388; Ottati and Renstrom 2010: 789).

Cognitive Appraisals and Emotion in Public Discourse

The relation between evaluative language and emotional reaction is extensively conceptualised in cognitive appraisal theories of emotion (Frijda 1986: 88; Lazarus 1991: 122; Roseman 1991: 163). Cognitive appraisal theorists demonstrate that human emotions are not arbitrary visceral reactions, but structured responses triggered by an individual's cognitive evaluation of events, actions, and social agents in relation to personal and collective moral standards, goals, and social norms (Lazarus 1991: 125; Roseman 1991: 165).

In public and political discourse, when a speaker evaluates an event or institutional action as a violation of established ethical norms or socio-

political expectations, this cognitive appraisal triggers discrete emotional responses such as grief, indignation, or righteous anger across the audience (Frijda 1986: 92; Roseman 1991: 170). In memorial and eulogistic settings, speakers often manipulate these cognitive-evaluative triggers to transform personal mourning into shared moral auditing and political resistance (Lazarus 1991: 130).

The Attitude Subsystem in Systemic Functional Linguistics

To systematically map how evaluative meanings are constructed in a text, this study grounds its analysis in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 54) and, specifically, the Appraisal framework formulated by Martin and White (2005: 42) (see also Hunston and Thompson 2000: 142; Martin 2000: 145; White 2015: 2). Appraisal Theory provides a comprehensive taxonomy for analysing how language users register feelings, judge human character, evaluate entities, and negotiate intersubjective positions with their audiences (Martin and White 2005: 45; White 2015: 4).

While the overall Appraisal system includes Engagement (positioning speaker stance relative to alternative voices) and Graduation (scaling intensity and focus), this study focuses strictly on the Attitude subsystem to perform an exhaustive linguistic audit of evaluative stance (Martin and Rose 2007: 28; Coffin and O'Halloran 2010: 165).

The Attitude subsystem categorises evaluative language into three distinct semantic domains (Martin and White 2005: 49–53):

1. Affect: The semantic domain concerned with registering positive or negative emotional feelings, psychological states, and visceral reactions (e.g. grief, fear, pride, or moral indignation) (Martin and White 2005: 49).
2. Judgement: The semantic domain concerned with assessing human character, motives, and behaviour against socio-cultural, legal, or ethical norms (Martin and White 2005: 52). Judgement is subdivided into:
 3. 2.1. *Social Esteem*: Normative assessments of normality, capacity, and tenacity (Martin and White 2005: 53).
 4. 2.2. *Social Sanction*: Moral and legal assessments of veracity and propriety (Martin and White 2005: 53).

5. Appreciation: The semantic domain concerned with evaluating non-human entities, processes, institutional systems, and creative performances in terms of aesthetic reaction, structural composition, and social value or significance (Martin and White 2005: 56).

Attitudinal choices are expressed either directly through *inscribed Attitude* (explicit evaluative lexical items) or indirectly through *invoked Attitude* (metaphorical, figurative, or culturally loaded expressions that prompt the audience to formulate an evaluative stance) (Martin and White 2005: 61; Fuoli 2018: 108).

Empirical Applications of Appraisal Theory in Political Discourse

In contemporary discourse analytics, the Attitude subsystem has proven to be an exceptionally versatile framework for uncovering implicit power dynamics, institutional critiques, and covert ideological stances across political and media genres (Coffin and O'Halloran 2010: 168; McKinley 2018: 29). Scholarly applications demonstrate that political addresses rely heavily on strategic configurations of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation to establish moral authority, construct political in-groups and out-groups, and align public sentiments (Liu 2025: 46; Simanjuntak 2024: 240). For instance, Simanjuntak (2024: 241) and Liu (2025: 48) illustrate how political addresses deploy negative Judgement tokens of Social Sanction (veracity and propriety) to audit state executives and undermine political legitimacy.

Cross-linguistic and translation studies further demonstrate how attitudinal meanings shift or are re-accentuated when moving across different cultural and linguistic paradigms (Jing and Chen 2018: 142; Kholifah and Prasetyoningsih 2024: 50). Applying this framework within qualitative discourse methodologies enables researchers to interpret how localised cultural metaphors and code-switching perform evaluative work in contested socio-political spaces (Guba and Lincoln 1985: 78; Patton 2015: 102; Smith and Sparkes 2020: 1005).

Contested Memory and Eulogistic Subversion in Post-Liberation Africa

In post-colonial African states, state-assisted memorial services and funeral addresses are rarely neutral spaces of grief; rather, they serve as critical sites where official state memory and dominant political narratives are

produced, reinforced, or contested (Zuern 2012: 494; Mbembe 2017: 112). Ruling political elites often utilise eulogies to project institutional solidarity, reassert liberation credentials, and consolidate power (Zuern 2012: 496; Hodgkin and Radstone 2014: 82).

However, when state funerals are subverted by dissident insiders or civil leaders, the traditional genre of eulogy is transformed into a platform for political accountability and moral confrontation (Hodgkin and Radstone 2014: 85; Rubusana 1911: 4). By re-appropriating traditional oral panegyric forms, indigenous rhetorical idioms, and bilingual code-switching, speakers can audit state leaders directly in front of the public (News24 2016: 4; Rubusana 1911: 5). Systemic Functional Linguistics and specifically the Attitude subsystem provides the necessary analytical precision to demonstrate exactly how such rhetorical subversions are constructed word by word.

Methodology and Corpus Description

Data Corpus and Corpus Attributes

This study adopts a qualitative, corpus-assisted discourse analytic design grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Guba and Lincoln 1985: 82; Patton 2015: 105; Smith and Sparkes 2020: 1008). The primary corpus consists of the verbatim audio-visual recording and transcript of Dr Sipho Pityana's funeral address delivered during the state funeral of Reverend Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile on 25 August 2016 at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, Eastern Cape (BusinessTech 2016: 1; News24 2016: 1; Pityana 2016: 1).¹

The raw audio-visual recording (32 minutes) was transcribed and cross-verified against published text records (Daily Maverick 2016: 2; News24 2016: 1). The speech is naturally bilingual, featuring fluid code-switching between English and isiXhosa. To ensure analytical integrity, isiXhosa segments were transcribed and translated into English, with cultural idioms preserved in their original form alongside literal and contextual glosses (Rubusana 1911: 12).

A defining attribute of the data is its fluid bilingualism. The text features extensive code-switching between English (the primary language of formal state discourse) and isiXhosa (the native language of both the speaker

1 Here is the link of the video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19qgDVsa2Q4>.

and the deceased, rich in cultural and historical resonances). Key corpus tokens include historical battle calls, biblical metaphors, and direct political accusations, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Linguistic Feature	Language	Socio-Political/Rhetorical Context
“Zemk’inkomo magwalandini”	isiXhosa	Invocation of Walter Rubusana’s first addition published in 1906 battle cry (“There go the cattle, you cowards!”), functioning as a call to defend the movement against internal decline.
“iingcuka ezambethe iimfele zegusha”	isiXhosa	Biblical and cultural metaphor (“wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing”), referring to corrupt cadres within party ranks.
“full-time thieves and looters” / “amasela nabarhwaphilizi”	English / isiXhosa	Direct attitudinal label targeting state capture and systemic corruption among incumbent leaders.
“cadres with questioning loyalty”	English	Reference to Oliver Tambo’s historic directive, legitimising internal dissent and critical accountability.

Table 1. Cultural and Linguistic Tokens in Pityana’s Address

Data Processing, Translation, and Glossing

Given the bilingual nature of the speech, data processing required rigorous translation and glossing procedures:

- **Literal and Contextual Glossing:** All isiXhosa tone units and clauses were translated into English, placed in square brackets [] immediately following the original expression. For example, “ukufa kusembini maqabane” [the disease is within the body, comrades] and “Mkhuluwa wam, Msholoz, Nxamalala nikezela intambo kunyembelekile” [My elder brother, Msholoz, Nxamalala, hand over the reins, things have broken down].
- **Attitudinal Potential of Cultural Tokens:** Idiomatic and historical tokens such as “Zemk’inkomo magwalandini” were annotated not merely for

literal meaning, but for their invoked attitudinal capacity to express negative Judgement (cowardice/negligence) and elicit collective Affect (indignation) within Xhosa socio-cultural memory.

- Criteria for Inscribed versus Invoked Attitude: Explicit lexical items carrying inherently positive or negative core meanings (e.g. “thieves”, “courageous”) were coded as inscribed Attitude. Figurative expressions ideologically charged metaphors, and cultural proverbs that prompt an evaluative response without explicit attitudinal lexis were coded as invoked Attitude.

Analytical Procedures and Coding Strategy

The attitudinal analysis followed a rigorous four-stage pipeline adapted from Fuoli (2018: 112) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 68):

1. Clause Unit Segmentation: The 1,624-word speech was broken down into 142 distinct evaluative clause units.
2. Attitudinal Categorisation: Each clause unit containing evaluative meaning was coded into one of the three Attitude domains: Affect, Judgement, or Appreciation (Martin and White 2005).
3. Polarity and Target Mapping: Evaluative units were assigned polarity (positive [+] or negative [-]) and mapped to specific targets of evaluation principally contrasting the deceased (Rev. Stofile and historical stalwarts) against the incumbent ANC leadership and state executive.
4. Quantification and Synthesis: The raw frequencies and proportional distributions of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation tokens were calculated to determine the dominant evaluative mechanism driving the political critique.

Linguistic Analysis

The linguistic analysis of Pityana’s funeral address reveals a total of 142 evaluative clause units containing explicit and invoked attitudinal tokens. Across the corpus, the deployment of Attitude exhibits a pronounced rhetorical polarisation: 67.6% (n = 96) negative attitudinal tokens versus 32.4% (n = 46) positive attitudinal tokens.

Rather than functioning as a conventional eulogy focused on mourning and biographical praise, the address uses positive evaluations selectively to exalt

the deceased, while unleashing a predominant wave of negative evaluations aimed at delegitimising the incumbent African National Congress (ANC) executive and state leadership.

Table 2 details the metaphorical mappings deployed in the text.

Metaphorical Phrase	Literal Meaning / Referent	Function in the Discourse
"Zemk'inkomo magwalandini"	"There go the cattle, you cowards!"	Pityana uses this historical battle cry from Rubusana to frame the current crisis as a loss of the nation's most precious assets (democracy, integrity, public trust), directly blaming the leadership as cowards.
"Died with his boots on"	Rev. Stofile remained a committed and active revolutionary until his death.	Contrasts Stofile, a "true cadre," with "peacetime revolutionaries," implying that the latter are only committed when the struggle is easy or rewarding.
"lingcuka ezambethe iimfele zegusha" (wolves in sheep's clothing)	Wolves in sheep's clothing.	Direct, harsh metaphor for hypocrisy and betrayal, accusing current leaders of hiding corrupt motives behind revolutionary rhetoric.
"Eating through"	Livestock feeding on state resources.	Dehumanises corrupt leaders, reinforcing the idea that they view public office as an opportunity for selfish "looting."
"Plunge parliament into chaos"	Deliberate disruption of democratic institutions.	Vividly describes the destructive force exerted by leaders who disrespect democratic processes to avoid accountability.
"Ceded our moral high ground"	Surrendered ethical authority.	Describes the party's spiritual defeat, implying they willingly gave up their greatest weapon their reputation for integrity.
"Fall on their sword"	Take responsibility and resign from office.	Dramatic demand that the leadership, having accepted "collective responsibility," must follow through with political sacrifice.
"Nikezela intambo"	Surrender the rope/ power.	Localised metaphorical command delivered in isiXhosa for maximum emotional effect, signifying the need to relinquish control.

Table 2. Metaphorical Mapping and Rhetorical Functions in the Eulogy

Affect Analysis

Dr Sipho Pityana began and ended his tribute by creating a profound sense of grief and reverence for Rev. Stofile, a technique central to the Attitude dimension of Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005: 33). This strategy was designed to disarm critics and establish the speaker's moral sincerity. By using intimate terms like "a great friend" and "umkhuluwa wam" (my older brother), he personalised the loss, transforming the funeral into a heartfelt testimonial. Pityana deepened this by invoking Stofile's final, painful feelings, referencing his dying anguish through *ingqumbo*, *isingqala*, and *inyembezi* (wrath, deep sorrow, and tears). This shared, deep-seated negative affect of sorrow and disappointment united the audience in communal grief, emotionally preparing them for the critique that followed.

The reverence Pityana holds for Stofile is simultaneously a political act of idealisation. The metaphor, "Stofile is a revolutionary who died with his boots on," elevates the deceased into an untarnished archetype of the selfless, principled ANC cadre, a standard of conduct defined by Judgement values of humility, scrupulousness, and personal sacrifice. This is a crucial rhetorical step because the speaker frames his grief as not just sorrow for a man, but as mourning the loss of the purity and integrity he represented. By dedicating the emotional heart of the tribute to this idealised figure, Pityana establishes an unquestionable moral benchmark. The profound and highly public grief thus serves as a powerful catalyst: it ensures that the audience, having united in mourning the exemplary past (Stofile), is emotionally and morally obligated to respond to the fierce Judgement Pityana then delivers against the living leadership who have betrayed that very past.

The affective stance of disappointment and betrayal serves as the primary engine for Pityana's critique, transforming the eulogy into an urgent political denunciation. This sentiment stems from the chasm Pityana perceives between the historic, self-sacrificing ideals of the ANC and the self-serving reality of its contemporary leadership. The speaker expresses a visceral sense of betrayal that the movement, for which stalwarts like Stofile risked their lives, has allowed its core values to be corrupted. This anguish is most powerfully encapsulated in the repeated use of the isiXhosa battle cry, "*Zemk'inkomo magwalandini*" ("There go the cattle, you cowards!"). By invoking this historic lament, where the "cattle" metaphorically represent the revolutionary gains, moral high ground, and principles won through struggle (Rubusana 1911:1), Pityana channels a collective disappointment and projects it as an existential crisis facing the party. He lays the blame for this betrayal squarely at the feet

of leaders who, instead of upholding the democratic project, ironically “show nothing but disdain and contempt for our Constitution” and are recast as “full-time thieves and looters” (News24 2016:3).

Judgement Analysis

Pityana’s eulogy for Rev. Makhenkesi Stofile was a relentless exercise in negative Judgement, systematically evaluating the character and actions of the ANC leadership under Jacob Zuma and finding them severely wanting. This critique extended beyond personal disapproval to encompass the leadership’s specific consequential actions (News24 2016: 3). Pityana passed harsh negative Judgement (propriety and veracity) on systemic failures, condemning the attacks on Chapter 9 institutions state bodies established under the South African Constitution to protect democracy and hold government accountable. He further highlighted the collective failure during the Nkandla saga and the “great shame” of the Marikana Massacre (BusinessTech 2016: 1). By targeting these high-profile political actions, Pityana elevated his discourse from a personal lament to a structural condemnation, arguing that the leadership was actively destroying the democratic foundations fought for by Stofile and his peers.

This political radicalism was licensed and fuelled by the rhetorical use of Affect, which strategically transitioned from profound grief to militant indignation. Pityana established Stofile as an idealised moral benchmark of “humility and simplicity” (News24 2016: 3), leveraging initial reverence to amplify his subsequent fury over the leadership’s “absolute impunity” and culture of “denial”. The indignation peaked with the historical battle cry, “Zemk’inkomo magwalandini” (“There go the cattle, you cowards!”), which transformed the political crisis into a moral, existential threat (Rubusana 1911: 1). Crucially, Pityana channelled this collective outrage into determined optimism, concluding with a non-negotiable demand for structural change and urgent redemption of the ANC’s principled legacy by urging younger leaders to step up (News24 2016: 3).

Pityana’s critique of the ANC leadership escalated into a severe Judgement of collective responsibility, challenging the sincerity and effectiveness of the party’s internal accountability mechanisms. He dismissed the National Executive Committee’s (NEC) claim of “collective responsibility” as insufficient, arguing that genuine responsibility requires definitive consequences specifically, that leaders must “fall on their sword” through

resignation or political sacrifice. He judged this institutional response as “not good enough” (News24 2016: 2). This negative judgement primarily operates within the domain of Social Sanction (Propriety), contesting the ethical integrity of their actions. He deemed the collective leadership morally lacking for refusing to make concrete sacrifices following the movement’s crisis. Ultimately, he passed a decisive negative judgement on their future capacity, stating that a leadership that failed to sacrifice itself is “not capable of launching us in the new battles” (News24 2016: 2), effectively declaring the current collective unfit for future challenges.

In sharp contrast to his condemnation of current leaders, Pityana employed positive Judgement to strategically elevate past leaders, particularly Rev. Stofile, as the moral and political benchmark the ANC should uphold. This idealisation reinforced the values Pityana argued were betrayed by the incumbents. He utilised high-value positive Judgement across Social Esteem and Social Sanction, praising Stofile’s exceptional fortitude and character with words like “courageous,” “fearless,” “principled,” and “scrupulous” (News24 2016: 3). Crucially, Pityana lauded Stofile for being a leader who “start[ed] with the people and not with himself,” affirming his selfless adherence to the ANC’s core anti-elitist ethos.

Pityana strategically used the positive Judgement of Rev. Stofile’s actions as the essential moral counterpoint to his critique of the incumbent ANC leadership. He employed strong positive Social Sanction, highlighting Stofile’s integrity by noting that he “submitted himself to public scrutiny” and “didn’t play avoidance games” (News24 2016: 3). Pityana praised Stofile for his humility in clearing his name and showing “respect for the law and for the people,” framing this as the definitive right way to act when accused (News24 2016: 3). This detailed positive appraisal functioned as a rhetorical strategy of contrast, using Stofile’s flawless accountability as a mirror to implicitly condemn current leadership for evading scrutiny and lacking propriety and commitment to the rule of law.

Furthermore, Pityana anchored his overall critique in a powerful positive Judgement of past ANC values, establishing a baseline of principled conduct that sharply contrasted with present decay. He praised the historical ANC for its commitment to constitutionalism, specifically for upholding “the independence of the judiciary and separation of powers” (News24 2016: 3), implicitly delivering a crushing negative Judgement against incumbents undermining these safeguards. By invoking leaders like O. R. Tambo as models for “questioning loyalty,” Pityana used positive Judgement to sanction and encourage principled

dissent among current ANC members, asserting that true loyalty requires challenging corrupt leadership (News24 2016: 3). This sustained strategy of moral contrast elevating cadres of Stofile's ilk against corrupt leaders who treat public office as a vehicle for "eating through" state resources compelled the audience to accept the subsequent negative Judgement that the incumbents are fundamentally unfit to lead (BusinessTech 2016: 1; News24 2016: 3).

Appreciation Analysis

Pityana's praise of Rev. Stofile is a foundational rhetorical strategy that establishes Stofile as the idealised moral benchmark against which the current ANC leadership is measured and condemned. Pityana uses highly positive Affect (e.g., "a great friend," "a man of love") and positive Judgement to detail virtues like Stofile's "great humility and simplicity" and his respect for the poor (News24 2016: 2). These specific qualities are strategically chosen because they embody the ANC's core, historic values of selfless service and anti-elitism. By transforming Stofile into a living standard of a true ANC cadre, this sustained evaluation of character serves as a necessary precursor to the critique, allowing Pityana to accuse the incumbent leadership of failing to uphold the movement's highest moral and political ideals.

Pityana uses the positive Judgement of Rev. Stofile's integrity as a crucial rhetorical manoeuvre, establishing Stofile as the ideal model of accountability that the current ANC leadership conspicuously fails to meet. Pityana dedicates a significant portion of his address to commending Stofile's response to corruption allegations, using positive Judgement to highlight that Stofile "didn't play avoidance games" and "submitted himself to public scrutiny" (News24 2016: 2). This emphasis on Stofile's willingness to face scrutiny and his respect for the rule of law is directly juxtaposed with the incumbent leadership's perceived attempts to evade accountability. By praising Stofile's flawless accountability, including how he "humbled himself" and "cleared his name," Pityana creates a moral standard, turning Stofile's past actions into a present, implicit accusation against those who currently refuse to subject themselves to the same scrutiny.

Pityana solidifies Stofile's heroic status and establishes him as the ideal standard of a political leader by praising his revolutionary commitment and practical contributions. Pityana employs high-value positive Judgement, describing Stofile with potent phrases like a "revolutionary who died with his boots on" and a "man of principle" who "never sought to please," which highlights his

moral courage and lifelong, uncompromising dedication (News24 2016: 2). Beyond his revolutionary identity, Pityana also lauded Stofile’s tangible work as a “development activist” who championed education, sports, and culture.

Pityana’s meticulous observance of protocols at the beginning of his speech, specifically acknowledging and naming every dignitary (including Cyril Ramaphosa, Kgalema Motlanthe, Gwede Mantashe, and the Stofile family), is a highly deliberate act of strategic protocol adherence and structural deference (News24 2016: 3). This formal, deferential beginning is rhetorically crucial because it establishes Pityana’s position within the established political and institutional order of the ANC and the state. By following every convention, Pityana signals that he is operating within the system. This formality provides an essential shield of propriety, lending constitutional and institutional weight to his words before he delivers his subsequent, uncompromising Judgement and Warning against the very leaders he has just formally greeted.

Empirical Findings

The linguistic analysis of Pityana’s funeral address reveals a total of 142 evaluative clause units containing explicit and invoked attitudinal tokens. Across the corpus, the deployment of Attitude exhibits a pronounced rhetorical polarisation: 67.6% (n = 96) negative attitudinal tokens versus 32.4% (n = 46) positive attitudinal tokens.

Rather than functioning as a conventional eulogy focused on mourning and biographical praise, the address uses positive evaluations selectively to exalt the deceased, while unleashing a predominant wave of negative evaluations aimed at delegitimising the incumbent African National Congress (ANC) executive and state leadership.

Table 3 provides the quantitative breakdown of the 142 coded clause units across the three domains of the Attitude subsystem.

Attitude Subsystem	Positive (+)	Negative (-)	Total Units	Percentage (%)
Judgement	22	64	86	60.6%
Affect	14	16	30	21.1%
Appreciation	10	16	26	18.3%
Total	46 (32.4%)	96 (67.6%)	142	100.0%

Table 3. Distribution of Attitudinal Tokens in the Speech Corpus

Judgement: Moral Polarity and Ethical Condemnation

Judgement constitutes the dominant attitudinal resource in the address, accounting for 60.6% (n=86) of all coded evaluative units. Pityana constructs a sharp moral binary by deploying positive Judgement to establish an ethical benchmark through Rev. Stofile and historical stalwarts, while using negative Judgement to condemn the contemporary leadership.

Positive Judgement (+propriety, +tenacity, +capacity)

Positive Judgement tokens (n=22) are exclusively assigned to Rev. Stofile, Oliver Tambo, and historical struggle stalwarts. Stofile is evaluated through positive Judgement of propriety (moral integrity), tenacity (unyielding resolve), and capacity (leadership competence):

- Moral Integrity and Tenacity: “He lived his Christian belief in his everyday life... He was courageous, he was fearless, he was daring. He was principled, he was scrupulous”.
- Principled Dissent: “O. R. Tambo encouraged us to be cadres with unquestioned loyalty... [and] questioning loyalty”.

By framing Stofile’s compliance with judicial commissions of inquiry as exemplary respect for public office, Pityana establishes an unquestionable moral standard anchored in the ANC’s historical values.

Negative Judgement (-propriety, -capacity)

Negative Judgement tokens (n=64) form the main engine of Pityana’s critique, targeting the incumbent ANC executive, President Jacob Zuma, and corrupt party cadres. This evaluation is heavily weighted towards negative propriety (ethical violation and lawlessness) and negative capacity (governance incompetence):

- Direct Ethical Branding: “amasela nabarhwaphilizi” [thieves and looters] and “full-time thieves and looters”.
- Constitutional Violations: “[The President] takes every opportunity to show nothing but disdain and contempt for our Constitution”.
- Institutional Subversion: “When the constitutional court makes a finding that you broke your oath of office, what it means is that you are honourable no longer. What it means is that you are untrustworthy”.

- Incapacity to Lead: “[The leadership] is not capable of launching us in the new battles... leadership that has got us to a crisis”.

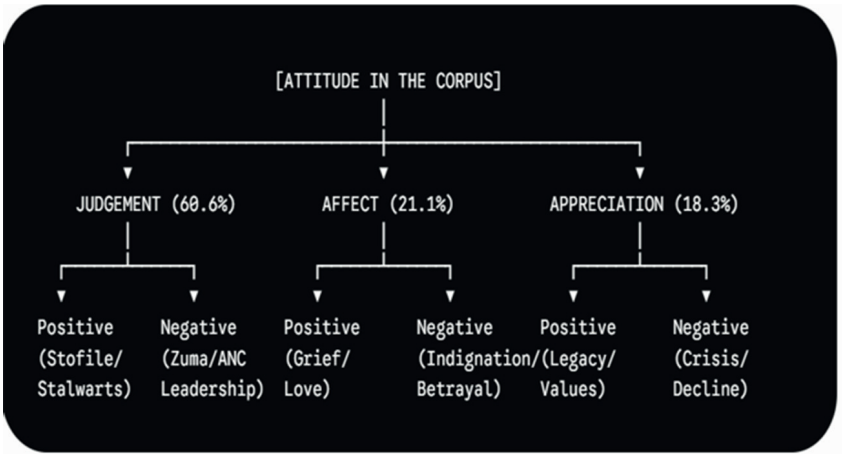


Figure 1. Attitudinal Token Distribution across the Speech Corpus

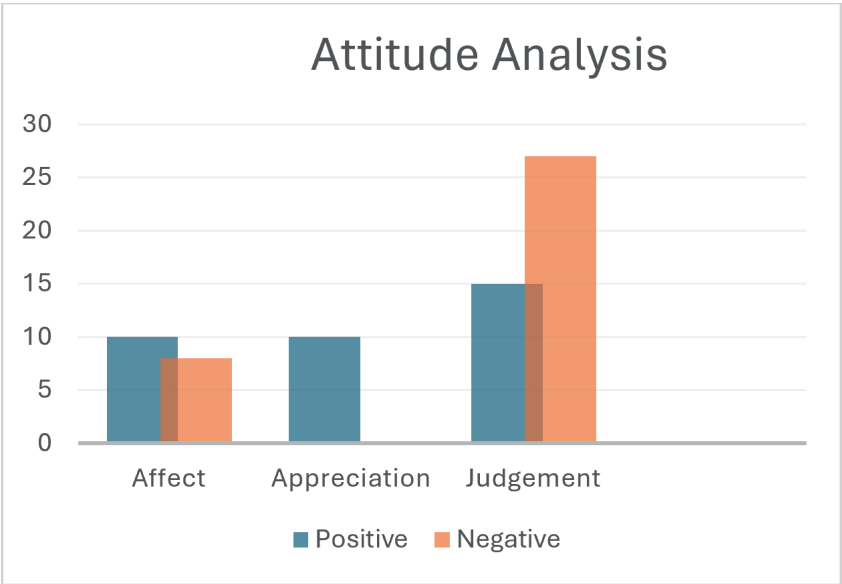


Figure 2. Bar Graph Showing the Attitude Analysis

Affect: Emotion as a Catalyst for Mobilisation

Affect accounts for 21.1% (n=30) of the attitudinal tokens in the corpus. Rather than serving solely as expressions of personal grief, affective choices function strategically to transform sorrow into collective political indignation.

Positive Affect (+security / +affection)

Positive Affect tokens (n=14) are confined to expressions of personal affection, spiritual grounding, and communal warmth surrounding Stofile's personal relationships:

- Personal Affection and Humility: "He was a man of love. He loved his family. He had great humility and simplicity".

Negative Affect (-dissatisfaction /-insecurity) and Invoked Cultural Emotion

Negative Affect tokens (n=16) express collective anxiety, sorrow, and deep political betrayal. Pityana frames Stofile's dying days not merely around physical mortality, but around emotional angst regarding state failure:

- Sorrow over State Failure: "Inyembezi zakhe in his dying days esithi 'zange silwele lento kunyembelele lungisani maqabane'" [his tears in his dying days saying 'we never fought for this, things have broken down, fix it comrades'].

The emotional core of the speech relies on the repeated, culturally charged isiXhosa invocation:

- Historic Battle Cry: "Zemk'inkomo magwalandini!" [There go the cattle, you cowards!].

In Xhosa socio-cultural memory, this battle cry originally issued by Walter Rubusana in 1906 evokes invoked negative Affect (Indignation/Betrayal) alongside invoked negative Judgement (Cowardice/Dereliction of Duty). It serves as an emotional call, urging the audience to feel the urgency of losing the liberation project.

Appreciation: Evaluating Institutional Crisis and Historical Decay

Appreciation represents 18.3% (n=26) of attitudinal tokens, evaluating the state of the organisation, public institutions, and historical developments.

Positive Appreciation (+valuation)

Positive Appreciation tokens (n=10) evaluate the historical liberation struggle as a noble, valuable endeavour:

- Historical Liberation Values: “These are the solid values that made the revolution an attractive project for him”.

Negative Appreciation (-reaction / -valuation / -composition)

Negative Appreciation tokens (n=16) depict the contemporary condition of the ruling party and state institutions as experiencing profound structural collapse:

- Systemic Decay: “That our movement is in crisis is trite, and it is beyond question”.
- Trajectory of Decline: “Under this leadership what we’ve experienced is a cataclysmic anticlimax... grotesque and unmitigated chaos that prevails”.
- State Capture: “Our movement is captured, and consequently the state is captured. Our revolutionary project is under threat.”

By characterising the state of the organisation through negative Appreciation terms such as “cataclysmic anticlimax” and “unmitigated chaos,” Pityana evaluates the contemporary political era not as a temporary setback, but as a systemic crisis requiring immediate structural intervention.

Rhetorical Implications, Political Reception, and Discussion

The empirical findings demonstrate how Siphso Pityana’s address at the state funeral of Reverend Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile in August 2016 re-appropriated a solemn memorial space into an arena of political contestation. By examining the 142 evaluative clause units exclusively through the Attitude subsystem, this discussion interprets how the strategic deployment of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation destabilises the ruling elite’s narrative of legitimacy in post-apartheid South Africa.

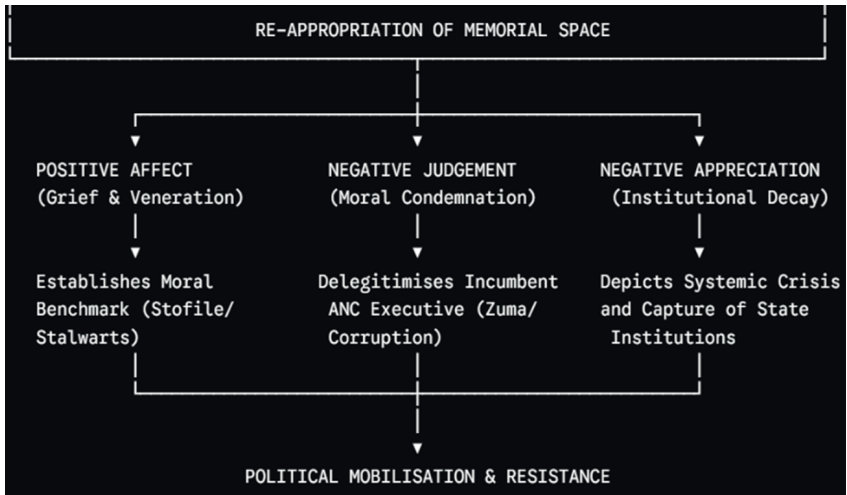


Figure 3. Strategic Re-Appropriation of Memorial Space Through the Attitude Subsystem

Re-Appropriating Eulogistic Space: Memorial Politics as Resistance

Traditional African eulogistic practices and state funerals are conventionally designed to reinforce national unity, perform collective mourning, and consolidate the political legitimacy of the ruling party (Zuern 2012: 495). However, Pityana's address fundamentally subverts this genre by using attitudinal resources to convert a state funeral into a platform for dissent.

The total attitudinal distribution is predominantly negative (67.6%) and reflects a deliberate departure from customary panegyric rhetoric. Rather than sustaining an uncritical eulogy, Pityana partitions the memorial space: positive evaluations are restricted to establishing an ethical benchmark through the deceased, while negative evaluations target the political leadership seated directly before him. In doing so, the speech demonstrates how memorial events in post-liberation African polities can be weaponised to challenge dominant party hegemony from within.

The Interplay of Affect and Judgement: Moral Authority versus Political Corruption

A critical finding of this study is the functional alignment between positive Affect and negative Judgement. While Affect represents 21.1% of attitudinal

choices and Judgement accounts for 60.6%, their interaction generates the speech's rhetorical leverage.

Pityana constructs a stark moral dichotomy:

1. Veneration through Positive Judgement and Affect: Expressions of personal love and veneration (+affect) for Rev. Stofile are coupled with evaluations of moral integrity (+judgement of propriety and tenacity). Stofile is framed as the embodiment of liberation values: scrupulous, principled, and selfless.
2. Condemnation through Negative Judgement: By grounding Stofile's legacy in unassailable moral authority, Pityana creates a normative foundation from which to launch negative evaluations of the incumbent leadership. The executive is evaluated through negative Judgement of Propriety ("amasela nabarhwaphilizi" / [thieves and looters]) and Capacity ("not capable of launching us in the new battles").

This contrast transforms grief from a passive state of sorrow into active moral indignation. By framing the current leadership as having violated constitutional oaths and ethical standards, negative Judgement strips the ruling elite of their claim to the liberation movement's moral heritage.

Institutional Decay and Cultural Resonances: Appreciation and isiXhosa Idioms

Appreciation choices (18.3%) extend the critique from individual politicians to the broader institutional state. By evaluating the condition of the African National Congress and the post-apartheid state as being in "crisis," suffering a "cataclysmic anticlimax," and subject to "state capture," Pityana depicts governance failure not as isolated misconduct, but as systemic institutional decay.

This institutional critique is reinforced through bilingual switching into isiXhosa tropes. The invocation of the historical battle cry "Zemk'inkomo magwalandini!" [There go the cattle, you cowards!] functions as a potent socio-cultural token. Culturally, cattle symbolise wealth, heritage, and collective survival. By equating state capture and corruption with the loss of the collective herd, Pityana triggers invoked negative Affect (collective loss and alarm) and negative Judgement (cowardice and betrayal of the struggle). The deployment of isiXhosa thus bridges formal political discourse with indigenous memory, galvanising the audience toward political action.

Theoretical Implications for Political Rhetoric in Post-Apartheid South Africa

By isolating the Attitude subsystem within Systemic Functional Linguistics' Appraisal framework, this study underscores how emotional expression (Affect), moral sanction (Judgement), and institutional evaluation (Appreciation) operate interdependently in African political rhetoric.

Focusing on Attitude demonstrates that political resistance in post-liberation societies does not rely solely on policy critique or ideological debate; it is deeply rooted in moral evaluation and emotional alignment. In post-apartheid South Africa, where liberation movements derive authority from historic struggle narratives, attitudinal discourse serves as a primary mechanism to audit political legitimacy, condemn corruption, and demand democratic accountability.

Political Reception, Consequences, and Transformative Impact

The transformative impact of Pityana's address extended far beyond the immediate eulogistic context, serving as a watershed moment in post-apartheid political discourse. By breaking the unwritten rule of party deference at state funerals, Pityana's speech triggered immediate national political reverberations:

- **Civil Society Mobilisation:** The speech directly catalysed the formation of the "Save South Africa" (Save SA) campaign, a broad coalition of business leaders, trade unionists, civil society organisations, and anti-apartheid veterans. Led by Pityana, Save SA organised nationwide protests and legal interventions demanding executive accountability and the resignation of President Jacob Zuma.
- **Family and Veteran Endorsement:** Rather than distancing themselves from the political subversion of the funeral, the Stofile family publicly endorsed Pityana's address. They affirmed that remaining silent about state capture would have betrayed Reverend Stofile's lifelong commitment to truth and justice.
- **Internal Party Fractures:** The eulogy empowered the ANC Council of Stalwarts and Veterans to formalise their resistance against party leadership, intensifying internal policy debates and judicial audits that ultimately contributed to executive leadership changes at the 54th ANC National Conference in December 2017.

Conclusion

This study has examined the rhetorical and political mechanics of Dr Siphon Pityana's funeral address for Reverend Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile by applying the Attitude subsystem within the Appraisal framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. By isolating evaluative choices across Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation, the analysis demonstrates how a state memorial service was re-appropriated into a high-stakes arena of political dissent and ethical auditing within post-apartheid South Africa.

The empirical findings reveal a highly polarised attitudinal distribution, with 67.6% negative evaluative tokens overriding 32.4% positive tokens across 142 coded clause units. Rather than adhering to conventional eulogistic panegyric, Pityana deploys positive judgement (+propriety, +tenacity) and positive affect strategically to venerate the deceased and historic struggle stalwarts. This selective veneration establishes an unassailable moral benchmark rooted in the liberation movement's foundational ideals.

Against this moral baseline, the speech unleashes a dominant wave of negative Judgement (60.6% of all tokens), targeting President Jacob Zuma and the incumbent African National Congress executive for ethical dereliction (-propriety) and governance failure (-capacity). This moral sanction is reinforced by negative Appreciation (18.3%), which constructs contemporary state capture and organisational decay as a systemic crisis. Furthermore, the strategic code-switching into isiXhosa idioms, most notably the historic battle cry "Zemk'inkomo magwalandini!" [There go the cattle, you cowards!], bridges individual grief with collective cultural memory, converting sorrow into political indignation and a call for democratic renewal.

Ultimately, the present article contributes to African political discourse studies by showing that political authority in post-liberation societies is not permanently guaranteed by historical legacy. When formal parliamentary and institutional channels are perceived as compromised, memorial spaces become vital sites of democratic accountability. Through the deliberate deployment of attitudinal resources, political actors can challenge ruling elites, reclaim the moral lineage of the liberation struggle, and demand institutional reform from within.

Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable qualitative insights into the strategic deployment of Appraisal resources in South African political eulogies,

several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on a single, albeit highly consequential, speech. Concentrating exclusively on Dr Siphon Pityana's eulogy provides rich qualitative depth, but it inherently limits the direct generalisability of the findings to all political funeral oratory across South Africa or the broader African continent.

Second, qualitative attitudinal coding inherently involves an element of analyst interpretation, particularly when identifying invoked (implicit) Attitude and cultural metaphors such as *Zemk'inkomo magwalandini*. Although this subjectivity was mitigated through systematic categorisation against established Appraisal subcategories and careful contextual grounding, alternative readings of specific attitudinal tokens remain possible.

Directions for Future Research

While this study provides a focused investigation into how attitudinal resources operate within Dr Siphon Pityana's funeral address, its empirical boundaries highlight key avenues for future scholarship:

- By restricting the analytical lens to the Attitude subsystem, this article intentionally set aside Engagement and Graduation. Subsequent research could incorporate Engagement (e.g. dialogic contraction, expansion) and Graduation (e.g. force and focus) to evaluate how political speakers negotiate dialogic space and calibrate the intensity of moral critique during public funeral oratory.
- Future research could extend this attitudinal model comparatively to other post-liberation contexts in Southern Africa such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, or Mozambique where former liberation movements encounter internal factionalism, state capture, and succession disputes (Zuern 2012: 498). Such comparative analyses would assess whether the subversion of official memorial spaces represents a systemic regional trend in African political rhetoric.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Statement of Ethics

No human participants were involved or interviewed in this study. The empirical data analysed for this article is derived entirely from secondary sources available in the public domain, specifically the audio-visual recording and transcript of Dr. Sipho Pityana's eulogy broadcast on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19qgDVsa2Q4>.

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