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Organizational Communication in Managing Online Customer Reviews in Building Hospital Reputation: A Case Study at Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta), Indonesia

Agus Susanto¹, Ismi Dwi Astuti Nurhaeni², Prahastiwi Utari³, Andre Noevi Rahmanto⁴

¹ Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia, Social and Political Sciences Department.
Email: agus.susanto@student.uns.ac.id

² Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia, Social and Political Sciences Department.
Email: ismidwiastuti@staff.uns.ac.id

³ Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia, Social and Political Sciences Department.
Email: prahastiwi@staff.uns.ac.id

⁴ Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia, Social and Political Sciences Department.
Email: andre@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract

Advances in communication technology, particularly digital media, have transformed the interaction patterns between public service organizations and the public. Hospitals, as healthcare institutions, are not only required to provide quality medical services but also to be able to manage communication with patients and families in a digital context. One concrete manifestation of this dynamic is the presence of online reviews on digital platforms, such as Google Reviews, which now play a role in shaping a hospital's image and reputation. This study examines how hospitals manage online customer reviews (OCRs) as part of organizational communication, using the Four Flows Model (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). Focusing on the case of Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta), Indonesia, the research investigates four dimensions: membership negotiation, activity coordination, organizational self-structuring, and institutional positioning. A qualitative case study approach was employed, combining document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and triangulation to explore hospital practices in responding to negative Google Reviews. Findings reveal that membership negotiation is shaped by the internalization of service values, periodic training, and reward and punishment mechanisms, positioning patient reviews as tools for strengthening staff commitment. Activity coordination highlights the central role of Legal and Customer Services (HKPP) in facilitating cross-unit collaboration, supported by digital media such as WhatsApp, Hospital Management Information System, and medical records, with practices like case chronology enabling collective learning. Organizational self-structuring is maintained through formalized complaint management systems coordinated by the Subdivision of Legal and Customer Services (HKPP), ensuring accountability and learning. Institutional positioning is constructed through proactive public communication, transparency in information disclosure, and digital reputation management, reinforcing legitimacy and public trust. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of the Four Flows Model to the healthcare sector, demonstrating its relevance in understanding digital-era hospital communication. Practically, it provides insights for hospital managers on how OCRs can function not merely as feedback but as strategic instruments to enhance organizational reputation and service quality.

Keywords: Four Flows Model, Online Customer Reviews, Organizational Communication, Organizational Reputation, Digital Health

1. Introduction

Hospitals play a strategic role as providers of comprehensive healthcare services, encompassing medical, support, nursing, rehabilitation, and promotive and preventive measures. This is in accordance with UU No.44 2009 in the Republic of Indonesia, concerning Hospitals that hospitals are required to provide outpatient, inpatient, and emergency services. Therefore, hospitals are not only places of healing, but also institutions for education, research, and scientific development.

Over the past two decades, Indonesia's healthcare sector has shown a significant upward trend, both in terms of the number of hospitals, service classes, and bed availability ratios. However, improvements in physical facilities do not necessarily meet public expectations for service quality. Patients, as service users, have the same right to receive safe, high-quality, and affordable services, as stipulated in UU No.44 2009 in the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, patient satisfaction and safety are two key indicators that determine a hospital's reputation.

Despite the establishment of various regulations, the reality on the ground still shows a gap between ideal standards and service practices. Research (Pratikno et al., 2020) and (Imran et al., 2021) reveal numerous patient complaints, ranging from doctor delays, complicated administrative processes, to inadequate facilities. These complaints directly impact a hospital's image and reputation, especially when they are published through digital platforms accessible to the public.

Digital transformation has brought about fundamental changes in communication patterns between patients and hospitals. While previously patient feedback was delivered through conventional methods such as guest books, comment cards, paper surveys, or telephone hotlines, people now prefer digital channels, which are considered faster, more practical, and more transparent. One such platform is Google Reviews, where patients can leave open reviews in the form of text or star ratings. These reviews are public, easily accessible, and influence the perceptions of hospital quality by both potential patients and the wider community.

Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2023 showed that internet penetration in Indonesia had reached 78.19%, equivalent to 215 million users. This figure confirms that people are increasingly relying on the internet, including for seeking health information and assessing hospital reputations. Online reviews not only record individual experiences but also form collective opinions that influence potential patient decisions. Furthermore, digital reviews have the characteristics of big data. (Chatterjee et al., 2021). This means that the collection of patient reviews available on Google Reviews can be analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and strategic issues related to service delivery. Reviews, ranging from descriptive, narrative, and evaluative texts, provide a direct overview of patient experiences. Star ratings serve as a simple yet powerful indicator that quickly shapes public perception. (Lackermair et al., 2013) emphasize that ratings are a crucial measure of service quality in the decision-making process.

In the context of hospitals, positive reviews have the potential to build reputation and increase public trust, while negative reviews can quickly damage an image. Case of Jombang (East Java, Indonesia) Regional General Hospital in 2022 demonstrates how a single viral incident on social media can trigger a flood of negative reviews on Google Reviews, plummeting the hospital's rating and impacting the healthcare institution's reputation in the public eye.

This phenomenon demonstrates that managing online reviews is not merely an additional activity, but rather an integral part of a hospital's communication strategy. Digital reviews should be viewed as a dialogue space between patients and the hospital, where patient voices are interpreted, acted upon, and used as a basis for improvement. Based on this background, this study attempts to analyze how hospitals in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, specifically General Hospital of Yogyakarta City, manage online customer reviews. The analysis focuses on membership negotiation, coordination activities, self-structuring, and institutional positioning regarding negative reviews. Using the Four Flows Model approach, this article provides an analysis of the management of online customer reviews in hospitals, thus providing theoretical contributions to the study of organizational communication as well as practical recommendations for managing hospital reputation in the digital era.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of patient reviews as an evaluation instrument for hospital service quality. (Gopi et al., 2019) and (Upadhyai et al., 2022) confirmed that organizational culture and internal surveys significantly influence service quality. Other studies have used various theoretical frameworks, such as the PCP (Pivotal-Core-Peripheral) model (Izzudin et al., 2021) and Servqual (Service Quality) (Pramanik, 2016); (Singh & Dixit, 2020), which emphasize the role of staff attitudes, the hospital environment, and differences in service quality between urban and rural areas. Online reviews also serve as real-time feedback (Izzudin et al., 2021); (Shemirani & Castrillon, 2017), which showed that one-star comments often reveal critical issues such as doctor dishonesty or staff unfriendliness. Thus, online reviews serve a dual role : as a reflection of service quality and as an alert system for hospital management.

Research on patient perceptions through online reviews also found interesting findings. (Skrypczak et al., 2020) showed that half of private orthodontic practices received negative reviews on Google and Yelp, highlighting the importance of patient perception management. (Bardach et al., 2017) added that there were significant differences between patient and family perceptions regarding patient safety issues. This confirms that patient reviews are not just about medical services, but also encompass emotional, relational, and safety dimensions during treatment.

Studies on online ratings are also relevant to understanding hospital reputation. Berns et al. (2022) found that positive staff interactions with patients influenced online ratings of surgeons, while Allen et al. (2020) showed variations in ratings based on institution type. These findings demonstrate that online ratings are more than just numbers; they represent interpersonal relationships, professionalism, and public trust in healthcare institutions.

Zwier (2019) developed the Triple A Response concept (Acknowledgement, Apology, Action) in responding to patient reviews. This strategy has been shown to be influenced by the number of reviews received and the average star rating. In other words, an organization's response not only influences the individual reviewer's satisfaction but also shapes the broader public's perception of the institution's professionalism and empathy.

Other studies highlight the role of reviews in influencing patients' healthcare decisions. (McGrath et al., 2018) and (Raza & Dehury, 2021) emphasize that negative reviews related to unprofessional staff, poor infrastructure, or high treatment costs can lead to low ratings and decreased patient engagement. Conversely, positive reviews act as a driving factor in patients' decisions to choose a particular hospital.

Studies by Seltzer et al., 2022 and Tong et al., 2022 show that positive reviews generally reflect a satisfactory care experience, while negative reviews can reveal issues of service discrimination that are not detected through formal metrics. Muhammad et al., 2019 even found the role of the *Alodokter app* as a means of accessing information and connecting patients with hospitals in Indonesia, confirming that digital reviews are also related to ease of access to health information.

On the other hand, research using the Four Flows Model framework is still relatively limited. (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015) examined participatory digital culture, Bruscella & Bisel in (Stephen W. Littlejohn, 2021) expanded the model by emphasizing the role of material resources in organizational formation, while (Jahn & Johansson, 2018) used this model to understand crisis communication management during forest fires in Sweden. Other studies (Nordbäck et al., 2017) ; (Yudhapramesti et al., 2021) ; (Hülscher, 2019) ; (Levonius & Sivunen, 2024) highlighted policy flexibility, public organization adaptation, work efficiency, and the use of social media by healthcare workers. However, no research has specifically examined the management of online customer reviews in hospitals using the Four Flows Model.

Several studies also confirm that online reviews play a crucial role in shaping a hospital's reputation. (Johnson, 2014) and (Horn et al., 2015) emphasize the importance of open dialogue and patient experience as strategic reputation factors. (Vafeiadis, 2023) shows that negative reviews have a detrimental impact on patient decisions, but can be minimized with a positive response. Meanwhile, (Benlahbib & Nfaoui, 2020) found that review attributes such as sentiment, relevance, and user credibility contribute to online reputation.

This study provides an analysis of online patient reviews as an integral part of hospital organizational communication, which not only impacts service improvement, but also institutional positioning and reputation strengthening in the digital era.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is rooted in a theoretical framework that combines the basic concepts of communication, organizational communication, online customer reviews (OCRs), the Four Flows Model, digital public relations, digital media, and organizational reputation. This integration of frameworks is necessary to understand how online customer reviews in the healthcare context serve not only as information but also as a structure for organizational communication and influence the hospital's legitimacy and reputation.

Communication is understood as a relational process of creating and interpreting messages that generate responses (Griffin et al., 2022). Within this framework, communication encompasses three main components: (1) message creation, (2) message characteristics, and (3) interpretation and response. This is reinforced by Silvio Waisbord's concept in Theories of Human Communication (Littlejohn et al., 2021), which emphasizes the function of communication in connection, dialogue, persuasion, and symbolic interaction. The interpretive approach further highlights the meaning of communication as a result of social interaction, where language and symbols shape social reality.

In the realm of organizational communication, the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) approach (Miller, 2012) and (Griffin et al., 2022) emphasize that organizations are not simply comprised of communication, but rather "created" by it. Organizational structures, rules, and norms are constructed through communicative practices. Therefore, responding to online reviews is not merely understood as a service activity but as a practice that actively shapes the identity and legitimacy of the hospital organization.

OCRs are seen as a form of electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) that has a strong influence on consumer perceptions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004); (Filieri, 2015). Online reviews provide a symbolic interaction space, where patient experiences are publicized and influence other potential patients. In addition to being a means of information, OCRs also serve as an instrument of social control over the quality of hospital services. In other words, online reviews serve a dual function: as a form of public evaluation and as a means of constructing an organization's reputation in the digital space.

(McPhee & Zaug, 2009) through the Four Flows Model offers a framework that explains how organizations are formed through four communication flows: membership negotiation, activity coordination, organizational self-structuring, and institutional positioning. In the context of hospitals, online patient reviews are part of a communication flow that demands organizational responses in all four dimensions: 1) Membership Negotiation: how the hospital negotiates its professional membership identity with patients and the public through responses to reviews. 2) Activity Coordination: how cross-divisional units coordinate in responding to reviews to maintain service quality. 3) Organizational Self-Structuring: how SOPs, policies, and procedures are reorganized in response to patient complaints. 4) Institutional Positioning: how the hospital's response to online reviews shapes its image, reputation, and position among other healthcare institutions.

In the digital era, public relations no longer relies solely on traditional media, but utilizes digital media to build conversations, strengthen image, and respond to the public in real-time (Seitel, 2017). The presence of social media, Google Reviews, and other digital platforms makes OCRs a strategic arena in hospital digital Public Relations.

Organizational reputation is seen as a valuable asset formed through symbolic interactions between the organization and stakeholders (Fombrun, 2018); (Carroll, 2013). Online reviews are one of the determining factors of reputation, because they openly show public perception and influence public trust.

4. Research methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a single case study (Yin, 2018). The case study was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of organizational communication practices in managing online customer reviews in hospitals. The research focuses on exploring the management of online customer reviews, including elements of membership negotiation, coordination activities, self-structuring, and institutional positioning.

The research location was determined in the Yogyakarta Special Region, Indonesia, with the following considerations: 1) Yogyakarta Special Region ranks first in the national digital literacy index with a score of 3.64 (Santika, 2023), 2) The ratio of hospital beds to the population ranks 5th nationally, with a figure of 1.9 per 1,000 residents, the highest ratio in Java (databoks, 2022), 3) Accessibility to health services is better than surrounding areas (for example Solo Raya), with a sufficient number of hospitals for its population, 4) There is a type A national referral hospital, namely dr. Sardjito General Hospital, which is located in the Yogyakarta Special Region as an important health service center in Indonesia.

The research focused on Yogyakarta City Regional General Hospital. The selection was carried out by purposive sampling with the following considerations: Both have a Bed Occupancy Ratio (BOR) below 60%, lower than the ideal average, have a Google Review rating below 4.0 with more than 1,000 reviews, some of which are negative, the pattern of complaints that emerged showed problems related to the speed of service, staff friendliness, and the availability of facilities.

Informants were selected using the principle of purposive sampling with the criteria of relevance of experience, diversity of perspectives, accessibility, and direct involvement in the research phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The informants included: The customer review management team, especially the Head of Sub Legal and Customer Service (HKPP), Direct service officers, including the Head of the Emergency Room, Head of the Medical Services Division, Head of the Nursing Division.

The number of informants is not determined with certainty, following the saturation principle, namely that the interview is stopped if the information obtained is repeated and does not produce new findings (Cresswel, 2009). Data Collection Techniques. This study uses two main techniques: First, documentation: in the form of administrative documents, organizational structures, meeting reports, chronology of events, internal evaluations, and digital archives (e.g., Google Review reviews, hospital responses, and social media), Semi-structured interviews to explore informants' experiences and views on online review management practices. Second: Interview questions were structured following the Four Flows Model framework (McPhee & Zaug, 2009), including: Membership Negotiation: negotiation mechanisms between divisions in responding to reviews, Activity Coordination: cross-unit coordination in managing complaints and online reviews, Organizational Self-Structuring: structures, procedures, and policies that frame hospital responses, Institutional Positioning: hospital strategies in building image, reputation, and relationships with the public through online reviews.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative content analysis approach (Yin, 2018) through the following stages: Transcription and data organization: interviews were transcribed and documents were classified, Open coding: identification of themes, patterns, and categories based on field data, Categorization: grouping codes into dimensions according to the Four Flows Model framework: Thematic interpretation: interpreting the relationships between categories, with a focus on organizational communication practices in managing of customer reviews, Source triangulation: comparing data from interviews, documentation, and observations to increase the validity of findings, Reporting results: compiled in narrative form

5. Results

5.1. Membership Negotiation

Research findings indicate that the membership negotiation process in hospitals occurs through the internalization of service values and the division of roles between divisions. This negotiation relates not only to formal

membership as part of the organization but also to how staff understand their responsibilities in responding to negative customer reviews. Negative customer reviews are categorized as customer complaints. Through regular training and coaching, employees are guided to align their attitudes, behaviors, and communication styles with organizational standards. Role clarity and involvement in handling customer complaints demonstrate that membership negotiations are dynamic, emphasizing the importance of commitment to the hospital's service quality. The results of the study can be described as follows: First: Internalization of service culture: The motto of Smile, Greeting, Polite, Courteous becomes a collective identity, instilled through morning roll call, training, and work contracts, Second: Excellent service training: Conducted periodically (every 2-3 years) for all employees, including third party partners, as an effort to instill excellent service values, Third: Appreciation for positive reviews: Delivered in morning roll call as a form of collective appreciation and motivation, Fourth: Leadership by example: Leaders, especially Human Resources become role models through simple practices (smiles, greetings, greetings) that are imitated by staff, Fifth: Reward & punishment: Exemplary employees are selected based on indicators of being free of patient complaints and positive reviews.

5.2. Activity Coordination

The Legal and Customer Service plays a crucial role in coordinating online review management at the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta). This unit occupies a central position as the primary coordinating actor, tasked with connecting the hospital with customers and bridging communication across internal units. The Legal and Customer Service's role is not only administrative but also strategic in managing the complaint follow-up process, enabling the hospital to respond quickly and measurably.

Coordination is conducted across units, involving relevant units mentioned in customer reviews, such as the Emergency Department, Nursing Department, Medical Services Department, and the Human Resources Sub-Division. Each unit contributes according to its function and authority: the Emergency Room handles clarification of emergency service cases, Nursing Department tracks aspects of nursing services, Medical Services Department ensures that medical service standards are maintained, while the Human Resources Sub-Division plays a role in fostering discipline and enforcing organizational rules. This mechanism demonstrates that coordination emphasizes not only case resolution but also ensures ongoing organizational learning.

In terms of communication media, WhatsApp has become the primary channel for quickly distributing customer reviews to relevant structural officials and service units. This channel complements the Hospital Management Information System and medical records electronics, which allow for more detailed patient chronology tracking. This integration between media allows for a more effective and accurate clarification process.

One key practice in coordination is the development of a chronology of each patient complaint. The chronology is compiled by the relevant service unit to verify and track the patient's experience. This document is then discussed in a hospital-wide forum to identify the root cause and formulate solutions. As a result, each complaint is not simply addressed through administrative responses but also contributes to collective learning to improve service quality.

In general, coordination activities have three main characteristics. First, they are responsive, characterized by prompt follow-up, especially on complaints rated red, which could potentially tarnish the hospital's reputation. Second, they are integrated, as online review management is linked to quality reports, incident forums, and internal reporting systems. Third, they are evaluative, as each complaint serves as the basis for improving policies and service practices.

Coordination activities in managing online reviews at the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) not only serve to calm customers or resolve complaints, but also play a vital role in building a responsive, collaborative, and evaluation-based organizational communication mechanism.

5.3. Self-Structuring

The research results show that online customer review management operates within a strong organizational self-structuring framework. This structure is supported by official documents, work guidelines, and formal communication channels that regulate complaint handling mechanisms. A central role is played by the Legal and Customer Service Unit (HKPP), which acts as the primary coordinator in monitoring, summarizing, and distributing all customer reviews, both positive and negative, to relevant units.

Hierarchically, the complaint management structure is layered, starting with the Deputy Director of General Affairs and Finance as the highest-ranking person, through the Legal and Customer Service (HKPP) as the strategic liaison, maintaining legality and public communication, and extending down to the technical complaint management level. Thus, every customer complaint is not merely received but processed through a cross-sectoral forum for clarification, evaluation, and follow-up.

Customer complaint management in the Emergency Room is carried out with a structured division of tasks, the Legal and Customer Service (HKPP) unit acts as the main coordinator, the Emergency Room plays a role in providing clarification regarding reported cases.

In the Nursing Division, she is responsible for handling complaints, particularly those related to direct interactions between patients and nursing staff. Complaints arising in the nursing service area are followed up through the hierarchy, starting with the staff member, then the ward head, and then forwarded to the nursing division for resolution. Human resources are involved in a coordination forum after receiving negative reviews shared by the Legal and Customer Service (HKPP). Information from Google Reviews or other media is channeled through a structural group, then discussed together to determine clarification and follow-up steps. In this forum, each complaint is investigated to identify the root cause and determine the responsibilities of the relevant units, including nursing, medical, and general. In the Medical Services Division, a hierarchical structure involving the Head of Medical Services, the outpatient and inpatient teams, and policy analysis staff demonstrates a systematic coordination pattern in responding to customer reviews. Reviews received through Google Reviews are submitted by the Legal and Customer Service through a structural WhatsApp group, then analyzed and followed up by the relevant units, particularly regarding negative reviews.

These findings confirm that self-structuring at the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) is not merely an administrative tool but also an organizational learning mechanism. the Legal and Customer Service Unit (HKPP) serves as a communication gateway, while service areas implement follow-up actions. Thus, the organizational structure plays a dual role: ensuring a sustainable response to customer complaints while strengthening the hospital's service quality evaluation system.

5.4. Institutional Positioning

The findings on the institutional positioning element confirm that the hospital builds its image and reputation through an integrated public communication strategy. Responses to customer reviews, both positive and negative, are carried out in a measured manner to demonstrate concern and increase public trust. Furthermore, the hospital actively uses social media, customer forums, and public hearings to strengthen the institution's position in the community. Positioning efforts go beyond facility promotion, but also include service transparency, performance evaluation, and ongoing interaction with customers and external networks. With this strategy, the hospital strives to maintain a positive reputation while minimizing potential losses from negative reviews. Institutional positioning is carried out as follows:

First, the Legal and Customer Service Unit (HKPP) plays a role not only in resolving technical complaints but also in strengthening the hospital's image through service promotion, facility awareness, and ongoing communication with the public. This strategy is reinforced by direct follow-up with customers, both through personal contact (phone/WhatsApp) and through responses on Google Reviews, although official channels are considered more effective in maintaining ongoing communication.

Second, affirms its position as an accountable and informative public institution through annual monitoring and evaluation of information transparency. For three consecutive years, has maintained its informative category with a high score (90/100), demonstrating organizational commitment, infrastructure readiness, and the role of human resources in supporting transparency.

Third, in terms of digital image, the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) actively responds to both positive and negative reviews on Google Reviews and other social media platforms. Prompt responses to customer appreciation and engagement with public comments demonstrate an effort to build interactive, two-way communication. This strategy also leverages social media algorithms to amplify the hospital's positive image. Overall, the institutional positioning is built on three main pillars : First: Proactive public information (service promotion, education, customer meetings), Second: Transparency and accountability (public openness monitoring and evaluation with informative categories), Third: Digital image management (active response to reviews, both positive and negative).

With this strategy, the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) asserts itself not only as a healthcare provider, but also as a modern, responsive, and trusted public institution that maintains its reputation in both the digital and social spaces.

6. Discussion

6.1. Membership Negotiation

Findings regarding *membership negotiation* indicate that the membership process at Yogyakarta City General Hospital is not only based on structural formalities but also on the internalization of service values as a collective identity. The motto "Smile, Greet, Polite, Courteous" and the service excellence training program are important instruments in shaping employee behavior. This aligns with (Mcphee & Zaug, 2009), who emphasize that membership negotiation is an arena for the formation of organizational identity through members' commitment to organizational norms and culture.

The presence of rewards and punishments, appreciation for positive reviews, and leadership that demonstrates role models emphasize that negotiations are dynamic, emphasizing loyalty and discipline. Thus, customer reviews are not only an external instrument but also part of the organization's internal mechanism for affirming the identity and role of staff members.

6.2. Activity Coordination

Research findings on activity coordination demonstrate the strategic coordinating role of the Legal and Customer Service. As the primary coordinator, the Legal and Customer Service ensures that customer complaints are promptly distributed to relevant units via communication channels (WhatsApp, Hospital Management Information System, and medical records electronics for looking for information relate to the condition of patient). The practice of compiling case chronologies serves as a concrete example of how coordination extends beyond administrative responses and fosters collective learning.

The responsive, integrated, and evaluative characteristics of coordination align with McPhee's definition of activity coordination as a communication flow that enables work between organizational members to proceed despite differences in interests, expertise, and structural positions. In other words, coordination not only unifies cross-divisional work but also maintains the continuity of service quality amidst digital reputation pressures.

6.3. Self-Structuring

In terms of self-structuring, it demonstrates an organized complaint management system through official documents, formal workflows, and multi-layered coordination. The central role of the Legal and Customer Service (HKPP) as a communication gateway demonstrates a structure that maintains consistent responses and accountability.

The hierarchical structure involving the Deputy Director, the Legal and Customer Service Unit (HKPP), and technical service units illustrates that the organization has established a formal, standardized mechanism for responding to customer feedback. Consistent with McPhee's concept, self-structuring serves as a mechanism for maintaining organizational form through rules, policies.

Interestingly, the findings reveal a dual function of this structure: in addition to its administrative role, it also serves as a learning tool for the organization. This means that customer complaints are not simply resolved but processed into evaluation material for improving service quality.

6.4. Institutional Positioning

In terms of institutional positioning, the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) affirms its institutional reputation through an integrated public communications strategy. HKPP is at the forefront of presenting the hospital as an informative, accountable, and responsive institution to the dynamics of the digital space.

This strategy is realized through three main pillars: (1) proactive in public information, service promotion, customer meetings, public education; (2) transparency and accountability, demonstrated by achieving the "informative" category in public openness monitoring and evaluation for three consecutive years; (3) digital image management, active response to Google Review reviews and interaction with public comments on social media. Consistent with the literature on organizational reputation (Johnson, 2014; Horn et al., 2015), positioning based on transparency and digital interaction has been shown to strengthen an organization's legitimacy in the eyes of the public. the Yogyakarta City General Hospital (RSUD Kota Yogyakarta) does not simply respond to complaints but manages online reviews as a strategic tool for building a positive image while maintaining public trust.

7. Conclusion

This study confirms that the management of online customer reviews at Yogyakarta City General Hospital can be explained through McPhee's Four Flows Model. In membership negotiation, the hospital emphasizes internalizing service values through mottos, training, and reward-punishment systems, making reviews an instrument for staff loyalty and service commitment. In activity coordination, cross-unit collaboration supported by digital tools and case chronologies creates responsive, integrated, and evaluative follow-up. In self-structuring, a layered structure led by Legal and Customer Service (HKPP) ensures consistent responses while functioning as a learning mechanism. In institutional positioning, the hospital builds an informative, transparent, and responsive image through service promotion, public information disclosure, and digital engagement. Overall, online reviews are not merely complaint responses but part of a broader communication strategy to strengthen identity, structure, coordination, and reputation as a modern, accountable, and customer-oriented healthcare organization.

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Immigration and Resilience: A Review of Paradigms, Policies, and Emerging Challenges

Agung Sulistyo Purnomo¹, Mochamad Ryanindityo², Intan Nurkumalawati³, Sri Kuncoro Bawono⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Department of Immigration, Politeknik Pengayoman Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia.

Correspondence: Mochamad Ryanindityo, Department of Immigration, Politeknik Pengayoman Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia. E-mail: ryanindityo@gmail.com

Abstract

This literature review aims to explore the complex relationship between immigration paradigms, global mobility, and national resilience with Indonesia as a comparative case. To deepen understanding of the various elements of immigration policies and their impact on resilience, key theoretical frameworks such as push-pull theory, securitization theory, and global migration governance are analyzed. To this end, breakthroughs in migration tracking, such as big data and AI, are explored for possible contribution. From the review, there are substantial gaps in the literature, including under-researched locations and the need for cross-disciplinary studies that combine sociopolitical, economic, and environmental perspectives. Informed by developing challenges such as climate-induced migration and the significance of developing technology, future studies are suggested. The findings suggest that integrating immigrants can enhance the national resilience of host countries; however, the process is nuanced and depends on political, economic, and social factors. The importance of this paper is in recommending a more holistic approach to the study of immigration that would incorporate the interplay of various elements and uphold ethical research practices. By highlighting Indonesia, this review helps to increase the understanding of how immigration paradigms influence national resilience in different locations

Keywords: Immigration Paradigms, National Resilience, Global Mobility, Migration Governance, Indonesian Immigration

1. Introduction

Immigration has recently become one of the most pressing issues in the global debate, with far-reaching implications for national economies, social structures, and security dynamics (Kwiliński et al., 2024; Peters et al., 2024). Immigration paradigms refer to the various structures and regulations that control people's cross-border movements (Achermann, 2021). These paradigms affect not only the lives of immigrants, but also the social, economic, and political stability of the host countries (Haas et al., 2015; Massey, 2013). In an increasingly interconnected world, immigration laws are inextricably linked to global mobility, which refers to the ease with which individuals travel borders for purposes such as work, education, asylum, or family reunification. Hence, global mobility has influenced labour markets, cultural interactions, and international relations (Bauder, 2015; Ridgway & Kirk, 2021).

Nowadays, the impact of immigration on national resilience, perceived as a nation's ability to resist and adapt to internal and external threats, has been in the spotlight. This is to say that immigration has its value in serving national interests. It can boost national resilience by increasing economic productivity, cultural diversity, and population growth (Dustmann & Görlach, 2016). The newly re-elected Trump, for instance, under his administration has shown a controversial executive order to ban refugees and conduct mass deportation of unwanted migrants (*What Trump Has Done since Taking Power*, 2025). In contrast, poorly managed immigration can cause social instability, cultural conflict, and economic pressure (Castles, 2004; Doust Mohammadi et al., 2024). The way of perceiving immigration mainly consists of two contrary perceptions of economic and security (Hollifield et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Indonesia is trapped in between these two paradigms, which do not recognize refugee status but are unable to avoid humanitarian responsibility in the eyes of the world. For this reason, understanding how different immigration paradigms affect national resilience is especially important for countries that are both sources and recipients of migration like Indonesia.

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to investigate how immigration paradigms impact national resilience and global mobility. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the theoretical basis of immigration paradigms and how they relate to national resilience. Secondly, examines the influence of immigration policy in the main global regions, including North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia. Thirdly, examine Indonesia as a comparative case study, focusing on how its immigration paradigm affects national resilience and fits within the larger regional context of Southeast Asia. Fourthly, analyze the approaches used in the literature to study immigration and national resilience. Lastly, discusses the policy implications for Indonesia, considering its strategic position as both a source and destination of migrants.

2. Method

The research method for this literature study was formulated to ensure extensive coverage of crucial academic material regarding immigration paradigms and national resilience, specifically within the Indonesian context. The procedure begins with database selection from Scopus, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar as the principal databases for the literature search. These databases were selected to guarantee access to high-quality, peer-reviewed academic articles, and encompassing a wide selection of subjects and viewpoints. The utilization of these databases combined assured that the literature review included a varied and thorough array of high-quality academic sources, addressing both foundational theories and contemporary developments.

This review explores the impact of immigration paradigms on national resilience. It examines the theoretical foundations of immigration paradigms, including push-pull factors, migratory systems theory, and transnationalism. The study also analyzes key themes such as security implications, social and cultural assimilation, and economic consequences, comparing Indonesia's immigration paradigm with other regions. It also examines how immigration policies can strengthen or weaken national resilience, highlighting the potential benefits and drawbacks of Indonesia's immigration policy. Additionally, innovations and advancements in migration research are briefly discussed. The review concludes by proposing reforms to improve Indonesia's immigration system and emphasizes the need for data-driven investigations.

3. Key Concepts

Articulating various key concepts used in this research helps to clarify and contextualize the situation at hand. Firstly, the immigration paradigm is the theoretical framework that underpins national immigration policies, including both legal and social considerations (Haas et al., 2020). A nation's immigration framework is influenced by its historical migration patterns, economic necessities, cultural perspectives, and political climate (Massey, 2013). For instance, the "open-door" policy of Southeast Asia countries contrasts with Australia's "restrictive immigration" approach, demonstrating opposing viewpoints that influence national labour markets and demographics. Meanwhile, global mobility refers to people's capacity to travel across boundaries for reasons such as family reunions, education, and jobs. Globalization is inextricably linked to today's development, which is

known for its interconnection. Global migration is both voluntary and involuntary, with a significant impact on labour markets, economic development, and intercultural engagement (Harney, 2024; Pucik et al., 2023).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Immigration is a complex process influenced by various elements, requiring a comprehensive theoretical framework. Push-pull, securitization, and global migration governance theories are commonly discussed, and their strategies are compared to understand immigration control.

Considered the most basic theory in the subject of migration studies, the push-pull theory was first expressed by Lee (1966), which asserts that individuals are driven from their own country by "push" causes including unemployment, poverty, and political unrest; they are attracted to migrate to a new nation by "pull" factors including better job possibilities, political stability, and better living conditions. The thesis holds that both kinds of elements affect migration. This concept is especially crucial for comprehending economic migration, especially concerning the movement of people to economically developed countries in the quest for better opportunities.

Zimmerman (1994) and Datta (2015) claim that a better approach to comprehending the financial reasons behind migration is the push-pull theory. This is so because migratory patterns are driven by the differences in national economic possibilities. Within Indonesia, the push-pull theory clarifies the dynamics of the labour movement to and from the country. It especially emphasizes the impact on migration patterns of economic disparities between Indonesia and her surrounding countries.

Conversely, Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) say that securitization theory highlights how issues are seen as threats to national security. According to this point of view, migration can be "securitized" when political actors characterize it as a security concern, therefore justifying harsh policies to control it. Particularly in North America and Europe, this approach has been widely used to understand the increasing securitization of migration policies in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy (Huysmans, 2006). The way immigrants are portrayed as dangerous threats has produced restrictive immigration laws, especially border control policies and detention practices.

Securitization theory can thus help to define Indonesia's response to immigrants and asylum seekers. Concerns about human trafficking and terrorism have driven Indonesia to restrict borders and be reluctant to let refugees into neighbouring cities (Missbach, 2015; Nethery, 2017). Clearly how the securitization of migration is done in Indonesia is shown by the way asylum seekers are often portrayed in media and political debate as prospective security concerns (Missbach et al., 2025).

From another angle, global migration governance stresses the part international institutions, multilateral agreements, and regional cooperation play in regulating migrant flows (Lavenex & Piper, 2022). Unlike push-pull and securitization theories, which mainly focus on national-level dynamics, this concept highlights the importance of international frameworks including the Global Compact for Migration and the 1951 Refugee Convention. This helps one to understand how countries like Indonesia interact with international agencies like the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to restrict migration.

Given Indonesia's role as a transit country for asylum seekers, global migration regulation is particularly crucial for that country. Indonesia's participation in international organizations and regional projects like the Bali Process illustrates its attempts to fit its immigration policy with broader worldwide principles even if it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Kneebone, 2014). This framework clarifies Indonesia's challenges in balancing national sovereignty with obligations for international humanitarianism.

Simply said, securitization theory addresses the political framing of migration as a security concern whereas the push-pull theory provides an understanding of the social and economic causes of migration. On the other hand, global migration governance stresses the importance of world collaboration in migration control. From personal

motives to state-level security concerns and global governance structures, these concepts taken together offer complete awareness of the several aspects of immigration.

Simultaneously, national resilience has grown in significance in migration studies as scholars and policymakers work to determine if nations can meet migration expectations. National resilience is a country's ability to bounce back from shocks, maintain stability, and heal from upheavals. Resilience models underscore the framework of immigration and propose the need to include immigrants in ways that enhance economic, social, and cultural stability (Preston et al., 2022).

More precisely, economic resilience is a nation's capacity to maximize immigration to raise its GDP. Immigration can help to create economic resilience by addressing labour shortages, boosting innovation, and increasing manufacturing (Dustmann & Görlach, 2016). As a matter of fact, for sectors like technology and healthcare, which are essential for Indonesia's development, trained immigrants benefit (Purnomo et al., 2023). Social resilience thus is the ability of a society to maintain coherence and adapt to demographic change. Good integration of immigrants can assist in reducing conflicts, boost social cohesiveness, and foster understanding among civilizations (Kende et al., 2022). This implies that integrating immigrants to solve social resilience in Indonesia depends much on the local communities' cultural diversity as well as on Indonesia itself. Security resilience is the ability of a country to manage the various security risks associated with immigration. This element of resilience is closely connected to securitization theory, which regards migration as a possible threat to national security (Buzan et al., 1998). For Indonesia, security resilience includes problems with border control, terrorism, and human trafficking (McKenzie, 2019).

Understanding of immigration and its connection with national resilience has evolved drastically over the past decades. Early in the 20th century, migration was largely seen via an economic prism; the labour movement was seen as a method to overcome industrializing nations employment shortages (Haas et al., 2020). During this period, immigration rules largely aimed to let workers help to promote economic growth. Particularly regarding post-colonial migration to Europe, the focus of the latter half of the 20th century shifted toward the social and cultural consequences of immigration. Scholars such as Stephen Castles stressed the challenges of bringing immigrants into host nations and the likelihood of societal conflict. Growing knowledge of the need to manage the cultural features of migration to increase national resilience motivated the policy reaction of multiculturalism in countries like Australia and Canada (Triandafyllidou, 2024).

Given increasing attention to security, the events of September 11th marked a significant shift in the immigration discussion. Particularly in North America and Europe, where fears about terrorism led to stricter border policies and more restricted immigration rules, the securitization of migration became a major topic (Huysmans, 2006). Frameworks like the Global Compact for Migration were supposed to encourage regular, safe, orderly migration. International migration management showed further cooperation during this period as well (Kraly & Hovy, 2020) (Kraly & Hovy, 2020). Considering immigration, the concept of national resilience has been more important recently. Scholars have stressed the need for policies that not only control migrant flows but also enhance the resilience of host countries by employing economic, social, and cultural integration (van Riemsdijk & Panizzon, 2022). This shift reveals a greater awareness of immigration as a challenge as well as a possibility for national development.

Still, numerous academics have made major contributions to our knowledge of immigration and its interaction with national resilience. Leading authority in migration studies, Stephen Castles is well-known for his work on the worldwide aspects of migration and integration issues. His studies have underlined the need to realize migration as a dynamic process impacted by political, social, and economic elements. The work of Castles is especially pertinent to Indonesia since it offers a framework for comprehending the complexity of migration in a world fast changing (Haas et al., 2020).

Later on, Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" has been very important in helping to explain how different countries view immigrants and the part national identity plays in forming immigration laws. His studies on borders and sovereignty provide light on how nations create and preserve symbolic as well as physical borders

in reaction to migration (Anderson, 2006). Moreover, Sassen's studies on global cities and migration underline how closely migration is linked with world economic activities (Sassen, 2014). Her work emphasizes how centres of migration cities and the difficulties in controlling different urban populations (Ribas-Mateos & Sassen, 2022). This viewpoint is pertinent to Indonesia because cities like Jakarta significantly help to absorb migrant populations and define the immigration policy of the nation.

Another well-known person is Hollifield, who contends that knowledge of how various immigration policies affect national resilience depends mostly on the arguments about open borders against restricted immigration policies (Hollifield et al., 2022). Proponents of open borders contend that letting people migrate freely will boost social cohesiveness, encourage cultural interaction, and help accelerate economic development. For example, by drawing qualified workers and supporting diversity, Canada's open immigration policy has been applauded for helping to explain its economic resiliency. Advocates of restricted immigration laws, on the other hand, stress the need to preserve national security, social order, and local worker interests. Reflecting worries about terrorism and societal stability, the securitizing of migration following 9/11 resulted in tougher border restrictions in the United States and Europe. Restricted policies are sometimes defended in Indonesia on security and illegal immigration prevention.

From an ethical perspective, the case mostly revolves around personal rights to pursue better possibilities against state power to border control. Although governments might justify such limitations as necessary for national security, humanitarian organizations argue that these laws violate the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers (Ismail, 2023). From an economic perspective, on the other hand, open borders can help to alleviate labour shortages and promote development; however, restricted rules could so lessen the benefits of migration. Regarding security, the debate on immigration laws largely centres on security measures. Proponents of restricted policies argue that halting crime and terrorism depends on immigration being under control; conversely, some argue that securitization leads to immigrant marginalization and raises societal tensions (Saunders, 2025).

All things considered, the ideas covered in this section provide a structure for analyzing how immigration paradigms affect national resilience. Especially about labour migration, the push-pull theory will clarify the financial motivations behind travel to and from Indonesia. Securitization theory will help us to understand how migration is portrayed as a security threat in Indonesia, therefore influencing policy responses to asylum seekers and refugees. Global migration governance will help to place Indonesia's involvement in international migration systems and efforts to combine national sovereignty with international obligations. Using these theories in the Indonesian context aids this literature review in providing a sophisticated grasp of how immigration paradigms influence national resilience, therefore underlining both the potential and challenges encountered by Indonesia in managing migration.

4.2. Review of Key Themes

4.2.1. Theme 1: Major Findings and Contribution

Reflecting the particular economic, social, and political settings of every geographical area, immigration studies have produced a spectrum of results. Key results from North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, and other countries are compared in this part together with the impact of open versus restricted immigration policies on preserving national resilience.

Inspired by economic requirements and security issues, immigration policies in North America, especially in the United States and Canada, have typically wavered between openness and restriction (Portes & Rumbaut, 2024). Emphasizing multiculturalism and integration, Canada's partially liberal immigration policy has been demonstrated to strengthen national resilience by driving economic growth and social cohesion (Zhang et al., 2023). On the other hand, the U.S. has struggled with issues of illegal immigration and divisive public opinion that have compromised social resilience and stability (Massey, 2013).

Especially given the Syrian refugee crisis, European nations have seen notable migrant flows. Relatively liberal policies used by nations like Germany gave many refugees sanctuary, therefore promoting demographic renewal

but also creating social and political unrest (Secen, 2024). Driven by nationalist feelings, restrictive measures in Eastern European countries have, on the other hand, hampered their capacity to gain from the possible economic contributions of immigrants (Estevens, 2018).

In comparison, immigration policies range greatly throughout Southeast Asia. Selective immigration laws implemented by Malaysia and Singapore give talented immigrants top priority, hence promoting economic resilience. With an eye on controlling labour migration and handling the issues presented by asylum seekers, immigration policies in Indonesia have been moulded by both economic requirements and security concerns (Saputra et al., 2024). In the meantime, Australia's points-based immigration system has been effective in drawing talented immigrants, therefore supporting national resilience and economic growth. Emphasizing integration and multiculturalism, the nation has helped to lower social tensions and create an immigrant sense of belonging (Fong, 2023). Understanding national resilience depends mostly on the argument between restricted and open immigration policies. As shown in Germany and Canada, open immigration laws have been successful in alleviating labour shortages, advancing cultural variety, and strengthening economic resilience (Cerna, 2009). These measures can, however, also cause difficulties for social integration, especially in cases of significant immigration influx within a short span. On the other hand, restrictive immigration laws are sometimes defended on the grounds of preserving social order and safeguarding national security. By excluding skilled workers and building administrative obstacles to integration, these policies can restrict the financial advantages of immigration. As a result of security and social stability concerns, Indonesia has instituted stringent measures to control the influx of asylum seekers (Heriyanto et al., 2023). Although these policies have been useful in controlling migratory flows, they have also prevented the nation from reaping the benefits that could have come from welcoming refugees and those seeking asylum.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Ongoing Debates and Emerging Areas

Changes in worldwide migration patterns and technological improvements are reflected in the ever-evolving field of immigration studies, which is characterized by new debates and developing areas of inquiry. This part addresses the rising topic of climate refugees and emphasizes how technology might help to restrict immigration.

With nations depending more on artificial intelligence (AI) and biometric technologies to control migration flows and improve border security, technology in immigration control has grown to be a major topic of debate (Molnar, 2023; Nalbandian, 2022). Systems driven by artificial intelligence are finding ways to evaluate visa applications, forecast migration patterns, and spot possible security risks. For instance, migrants' identity is being confirmed using biometrics like fingerprinting and facial recognition, therefore preventing fraud (Bigo, 2014). These technologies create ethical questions about privacy, data security, and the possibility of discrimination even while they provide great efficiency and security advantages (Molnar, 2023).

Critics of artificial intelligence applications in immigration control contend that it might perpetuate prejudices and result in unfair treatment of immigrants, especially those from underprivileged groups (Saunders, 2025). Although data security issues still exist, the use of biometric technology for immigration control in Indonesia shows the government's attempts to modernize its border management (Lindquist, 2018; Putra & Arifin, 2020).

On the other hand, climate change has become a major factor causing migration and resulted in the emergence of climate refugees, or people compelled to flee their homes because of environmental changes including rising sea levels, severe events, and desertification (Black et al., 2011). This phenomenon has important consequences for national resilience since nations must adjust to the difficulties presented by environmental-driven migration.

As a result of climate-induced migration, many people have already been compelled to leave their homes in countries like Bangladesh and those in the Pacific Island nations, as the sea levels continue to rise (Gilmore et al., 2024). Particularly in coastal regions susceptible to sea-level rise, Indonesia boasts a significant risk of climate-induced migration (Hugo, 2011). The government's resilience plan shows a weakness since it has not yet created a thorough policy framework to handle the issues presented by climate refugees. For Indonesia and other surrounding nations, the emergence of climate refugees poses a major political obstacle. Improving national resilience requires

developing adaptive policies that both solve the underlying causes of climate change and the demands of impacted communities.

4.3. Critical Analysis and Identification of Gaps

Despite the fact that immigration studies have come a long way in examining how immigration policies affect national resilience, there are still important gaps and missing pieces to the puzzle. Focusing on areas like theoretical foundations and data restrictions, as well as addressing biases that impact the results, this part offers a critical evaluation of the robustness of previous studies.

Drawing on push-pull theory, securitization theory, global migration governance, and resilience models, immigration studies have a varied theoretical basis. Explaining economic migration is ideal for the push-pull theory since it emphasizes the elements motivating people to migrate as well as the possibilities drawing them to target nations (Lee, 1966). It has been criticized, then, for oversimplifying the migration process by neglecting the intricate social, cultural, and political elements influencing migration choices (de Haas, 2021).

Particularly in the post-9/11 setting, securitization theory has been crucial in helping someone comprehend how migration is presented as a security issue. However, this emphasis on security sometimes results in a one-sided perspective on migration, stressing the possible dangers presented by immigrants and so excluding their contributions to host countries (Abramson, 2024; Bibeau et al., 2025; Kinacioglu, 2023). Securitization theory has been applied in Indonesia to support restrictive immigration laws, although this strategy has been criticized for ignoring the social and economic gains of including refugees and asylum seekers (Missbach, 2017). In addition, global migration governance offers a useful perspective on how international organizations and agreements might help to control migration. The literature sometimes does, however, lack a critical analysis of the shortcomings of these systems, notably the difficulties nations like Indonesia have in juggling national sovereignty with international humanitarian commitments.

In particular, research on immigration faces substantial obstacles related to data availability and quality. Much research depends on secondary data sources such as government statistics and international databases, which might not always be reliable or current (Pötzschke & Rinken, 2022; Rampazzo et al., 2023). Data on irregular migration and illegal immigration in Indonesia are sometimes insufficient, which makes it challenging to evaluate the whole extent of migration and how it affects national resilience. Another typical restriction in immigration research is outdated databases. Given the fluid structure of migration, depending too much on data that is several years behind could result in obsolete conclusions that do not reflect current migration trends or policy environments (Haas et al., 2015). Studies on the economic effects of migration in Southeast Asia, for instance, sometimes rely on early 2000s statistics that might not adequately depict the contemporary economic contributions made by migrants in the area (Hugo, 2011).

Additionally, many of the current publications clearly show geopolitical prejudices, especially in research on migration in North America and Europe that ignore migration patterns in the Global South (Schmiz et al., 2022). Particularly, considering the Syrian refugee crisis and migration flows to Europe and the United States, this prejudice has caused an over-focus on the security concerns related to migration. Consequently, the particular difficulties and possibilities experienced by nations such as Indonesia are sometimes disregarded in the more general migration debate.

Furthermore, what most affecting the results of immigration studies are cultural biases. Focusing on individual rights and multiculturalism, research done in Western settings sometimes presupposes a universal approach to integration (Ward et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in nations with distinct cultural norms and values, like Indonesia, where religious and community organizations are pivotal to the integration process, these assumptions might not prevail (Hutabarat, 2023; Sadjad, 2022).

How to best facilitate social integration is another contentious issue. Some academics support multicultural

policies that honour and celebrate ethnic variety, contending that these initiatives strengthen national resilience and foster social cohesiveness (Lundberg, 2020). Australia and Canada have embraced this strategy, where successful immigrant integration is attributed in great part to multiculturalism. Other academics counter that assimilationist programs, which stress the acceptance of the values and culture of the host nation, are more successful in fostering social stability. Although assimilationist strategies have been used in nations such as France to foster a shared national identity, they have also been condemned for not allowing for cultural diversity (King et al., 2017).

Even while there is a lot of discourse on immigration and national resilience, there are still some major gaps that must be filled. These gaps consist of understudied areas, non-traditional security concerns, and shared methodological constraints. The majority of the research on immigration concentrates on larger countries like the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia, ignoring the experiences of smaller nations. Some Southeast Asian countries, like Laos and Timor-Leste, have less research on the effects of immigration than others. This is, even though, migration dynamics in these smaller nations may vary greatly from those in bigger nations, like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Although immigration in Indonesia has been the subject of some studies, it is usually handled more as a secondary case study than as a main topic of investigation. Being a source and transit country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia's immigration policies necessitate more thorough research. While non-traditional security issues, such as climate change and environmental displacement, receive less emphasis in the literature on immigration and national resilience, traditional threats to security like terrorism and criminality usually take the stage (Black et al., 2011).

In its multifaceted nature, immigration affects fields as diverse as politics, sociology, economics, and environmental studies. Still, a lot of the current research is discipline-specific, and few studies combine ideas from other domains using a cross-disciplinary approach. This is to state that multidisciplinary research could help to better grasp the several aspects of immigration and how it affects national resilience. This can be seen, for instance, in the work of Reed (Reed, 2010) and Khaled (Kraly & Hovy, 2020) who see immigration issues through a theological lens.

4.4. Innovations and Advancements in Migration Research

Owing to the introduction of new technologies and analytical techniques, migration research methodology has seen significant changes recently. This part addresses some of the most important developments in migration research. Big data's application in migration research has opened fresh chances to examine migration trends broadly (Nurkumalawati et al., 2024). Real-time information on migration flows provided by big data sources including cell phone records, social media data, and satellite images enables researchers to track movements and examine trends with unprecedented accuracy (Soehl et al., 2024; Zagheni et al., 2017). For instance, Syrian refugees in Turkey have been tracked using cell phone data, therefore exposing migratory paths and settlement patterns (Luca et al., 2022; Sterly & Wirkus, 2022). Big data's key benefit, they contend, is its ability to provide large-scale, real-time insights not possible from more conventional data sources. Big data utilization, however, asks questions about representativeness, privacy, and data quality. Data gathered from cell phones might not be typical of all migrants, particularly those without mobile connectivity.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are then quickly being applied to examine migration data, project migration trends, and assess the success of immigration programs (Molnar, 2019). To find trends and project future migrant flows, AI-powered algorithms may examine enormous datasets like visa applications and border crossing records. For instance, artificial intelligence has been applied to predict the movements of asylum seekers depending on factors such as conflict level and economic conditions back home (Freund et al., 2023; Hoffmann Pham & Luengo-Oroz, 2023; Nair et al., 2020). Although artificial intelligence could significantly raise migration research's accuracy and efficiency, it raises ethical issues as well. Since AI models may reflect prejudices in the data used to train them, their application in migration monitoring can result in bias and discrimination. Moreover, the use of artificial intelligence in decision-making procedures like visa approvals raises questions regarding responsibility and openness (de Fine Licht & de Fine Licht, 2020; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2023; Loi & Spielkamp, 2021).

Researching migration from a rights-based perspective that stresses migrants' privacy and the ethical use of their data can help academics solve ethical concerns. This encompasses obtaining informed permission, ensuring data security, and being transparent about how the data will be used. Moreover, defined rules on how to apply big data and artificial intelligence in migration research to prevent discrimination and bias as well as more responsibility in their usage in these fields are needed.

5. Conclusions

5.1. *Summarization of Findings*

This literature review explores the relationship between immigration paradigms, global mobility, and national resilience, using Indonesia as a comparative case study. It is evidenced that, immigration paradigms are shaped by social, economic, and security concerns, with the push-pull theory describing financial motivations for migration. However, securitization has led to restricted immigration laws, weakening social cohesiveness and national resilience. Global migration governance emphasizes the need for international institutions and regional cooperation to control migratory flows and build resilience. Resilience frameworks, particularly the integration of immigrants into host nations, are crucial for increasing security and social resilience. Current research on immigration and its link to national resilience needs to focus on underdeveloped areas and sociopolitical processes, as well as combining environmental and financial issues.

5.2. *Future Research Directions*

To progress the subject of immigration studies, it is critical to pursue new research avenues that fill gaps in the existing literature and address growing difficulties. One of the many relevant avenues for future research is immigrants' sociopolitical integration. While the majority of the literature focuses on economic integration, there is little research on how immigrants integrate politically and socially in their host countries. Future research should look at the elements that encourage or discourage political participation and civic engagement among immigrants, as well as the role of host communities in promoting social cohesiveness.

Given the complexities of migration, future research should also take a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating findings from economics, political science, sociology, and environmental studies. This method would provide a more comprehensive knowledge of immigration's complex impacts and the elements that contribute to national resilience. Cross-disciplinary research could also aid in the identification of novel solutions to migration-related difficulties, such as the development of new policies that balance economic needs with social and environmental concerns or security concerns with religious practices.

Several global socioeconomic trends are expected to have an impact on immigration research over the next few decades. The changing demographics of both sending and receiving countries will have a substantial impact on immigration studies. Many nations in the Global North are experiencing ageing populations and declining birth rates, increasing their reliance on immigration to preserve labour force growth and economic stability. Future research should look at how demographic shifts influence immigration policies, as well as how immigrants might help alleviate labour shortages and sustain ageing populations.

Environmental influences, such as climate change and resource shortages, are predicted to have a significant impact on future migratory trends. As the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events grow, more people will be displaced by environmental reasons, resulting in an increase in the number of climate refugees. Future immigration research should concentrate on gaining a better understanding of the mechanisms that drive climate-induced migration and their consequences for national and international policy frameworks. Furthermore, host countries must investigate how to strengthen their resilience to absorb climate refugees while guaranteeing the long-term viability of their own natural and social systems.

Technological improvements will continue to shape immigration research, both in terms of how migration is studied and controlled. Big data and artificial intelligence (AI) are already transforming migration management

by giving new tools for tracking migratory patterns, assessing dangers, and managing refugee identities. Future studies should investigate the ethical implications of these technologies, such as privacy, bias, and discrimination, and create standards for their appropriate usage in migration management.

Political movements and changes in the global order are also likely to influence immigration studies. The growth of nationalist and populist groups in many nations has resulted in growing opposition to immigration and the implementation of stricter immigration regulations. Future studies should look at how these political upheavals affect migration flows, immigrants' integration, and national resilience. Furthermore, as globalization continues to alter economic and social dynamics, it is critical to understand how global interconnection influences migration decisions and states' ability to manage migration successfully.

To sum up, immigration is a complicated and varied issue with far-reaching consequences for national resilience. This literature evaluation has identified important trends in immigration perspectives, approaches for studying migration, and areas where additional research is required. Future study that takes a more integrated and cross-disciplinary approach can provide a better understanding of how immigration contributes to or threatens national resilience. Emerging technology, climate-induced migration, and evolving societal dynamics will continue to shape the subject of immigration studies, providing academics and policymakers with both opportunities and difficulties. Addressing these issues necessitates a dedication to ethical research procedures, new solutions, and a thorough understanding of the various elements influencing migration and resilience.

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Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid at the United Nations as a Tool of Soft Power in Achieving National Interests

Salman Faris Salem Al-Ahbabi¹

¹ Lusail University. Email: alahbabi.salman@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9937-8562>

Abstract

This study examines how Qatar uses developmental and humanitarian aid through the UN as a soft power tool to serve its national interests. Drawing on Joseph Nye's soft power theory, it analyzes the link between Qatari aid, soft power, and national interests. Despite its small size, Qatar leverages financial and diplomatic resources to boost its global standing in a volatile region. Using a qualitative analytical approach, the study explores three dimensions: economic (exports, investments, food and energy security), political (mediation, alliances, global influence), and security (addressing non-traditional threats). Findings confirm a strong relationship between Qatari aid and enhanced soft power in all three areas, and between soft power and advancing national interests. The research underscores Qatar's strategic use of aid, showing varying impacts across sectors, and highlights the importance of UN partnerships in legitimizing its efforts.

Keywords: Development Aid, Humanitarian Aid, Soft Power, National Interests, Qatari Foreign Policy

1. Introduction

Qatar has emerged as a distinctive model in using development and humanitarian aid as a core component of its foreign policy and soft power strategy. The state's strategic investment in humanitarian initiatives has significantly enhanced its international image and political influence. In recent decades, global power dynamics have shifted from reliance on hard power to soft power—defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. Within this framework, development and humanitarian aid have become essential tools for states seeking to advance their national interests, enhance their global image, and build strategic partnerships (Muawad 2019, 173).

Qatar's foreign policy is grounded in the principles outlined in its 2003 Constitution, which emphasizes peaceful resolution of disputes and international cooperation (Government Communications Office, 2024). Article 7 further enshrines mediation as a central principle (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Qatar, 2024; Barakat, 2019). This constitutional foundation aligns with Qatar's long-standing commitment to humanitarianism and diplomacy. Since 1995, when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani assumed power, Qatar has pursued an “open-door policy” that

maintains relations across political divides, enabling it to adopt an independent foreign policy distinct from Saudi Arabia's regional dominance (Kabalan, 2023).

Qatar's soft power strategy includes expanding its energy exports, hosting major global events, investing in international media and sports, and enhancing its international aid profile (Stiftung Wissenschaft, 2023). Its foreign aid efforts have evolved from traditional Gulf-based models to a more structured and institutionalized approach. Following the Arab Spring and the Gulf blockade crisis in 2017, Qatar initiated significant transformations in its foreign aid mechanisms, establishing key institutions such as the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, the Qatar Fund for Development, and the International Cooperation Department (Aras et al., 2024). These institutional developments linked humanitarian assistance more closely with the country's foreign policy objectives.

Against this background, the current study investigates a critical research problem: to what extent has the State of Qatar successfully utilized its development and humanitarian aid—particularly that provided through United Nations channels—as a tool of soft power to enhance its international standing and achieve its national interests? This question is particularly important in light of Qatar's geographic size and the volatility of the regional environment. The research explores the causal relationship between Qatari development and humanitarian aid (independent variable), soft power (intervening variable), and national interests (dependent variable), with an emphasis on how financial and diplomatic resources are leveraged to serve the state's economic, political, and security goals.

Qatar's aid is characterized by neutrality, impartiality, and responsiveness to crises—ranging from conflicts to natural disasters (Government Communications Office, 2024). A notable feature of its aid policy is its reliance on partnerships with international organizations, particularly UN agencies, which provide institutional legitimacy and operational reach. Studies such as Barakat (2019) and AlObaidan (2022, 5) highlight how these partnerships have enhanced Qatar's reputation as a credible international mediator and actor in global humanitarian efforts.

Qatar's current ranking—22nd globally and 3rd in the Arab world—in the 2025 Global Soft Power Index, with a score of 54.5 out of 100, reflects the effectiveness of its soft power instruments, including foreign aid, media, education, and diplomacy (Brand Finance, 2025). In this context, the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of Qatar's aid policy in strengthening its soft power and achieving national interests. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine the extent to which Qatar's aid policy contributes to achieving its economic interests internationally through soft power diplomacy.
2. Evaluate the role of Qatar's aid in supporting its political interests at the global level.
3. Analyze how Qatar's aid policy contributes to safeguarding the country's security interests via its soft power strategies.

2. Research Theory and Hypotheses

The appropriate theory to answer the problem is soft power theory. Soft power theory is one of the most prominent contemporary theories in international relations. It was introduced by Joseph Nye in his book "Bound to Lead" in 1990 and further developed in his book "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" in 2004. The theory is based on the fundamental idea that power in international politics is not limited to military and economic coercion, but extends to the ability to influence through attraction and persuasion.

Researchers distinguish between several levels of soft power. Nye sees two basic levels: the first relates to the resources and assets a state possesses (such as culture, values, and institutions), and the second relates to behavior and practices (such as public diplomacy and development aid). Barakat adds a third level related to the outcomes and effects a state achieves through its soft power. Many researchers have developed analytical models to measure and evaluate soft power. Watanabe & Soft (2024) presented a model based on three dimensions: political, economic, and cultural. Many researchers, such as Cooper & Momani (2011), have applied this theory to various cases, including studies of how small and medium-sized states use soft power to enhance their international standing.

The following conceptual map (fig1) illustrates the interactive relationship between the three main variables of the study. It shows how Qatari aid (as an independent variable) influences the strengthening of the state's soft power (as a mediating variable), which in turn contributes to achieving Qatari national interests (as a dependent variable) across all three dimensions. This map represents the analytical framework upon which the study relied to test its hypotheses and analyze its results.

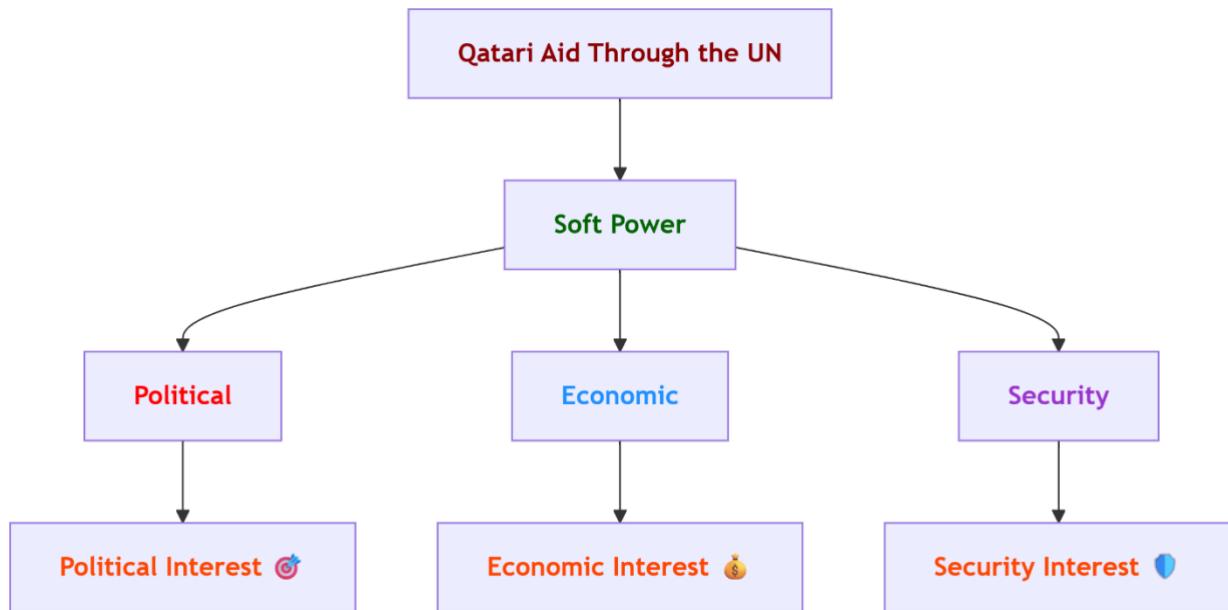


Figure 1: Concept map of research (by the author)

The above conceptual map represents the analytical framework upon which this study relied to understand the causal relationships between three primary variables: Qatari aid as the independent variable, soft power in its three dimensions as the mediating variable, and Qatari national interests as the dependent variable. This model demonstrates how aid, through the enhancement of soft power, is employed to serve national interests. Based on this framework, the research hypotheses were developed, which the study seeks to test and analyze in subsequent chapters.

The research problem is based on the main assumption that Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations system constitute an effective tool of soft power, and that this soft power, in turn, contributes to achieving the country's national interests. Testing this assumption requires an in-depth analysis of the interrelationships between the three variables and a comprehensive assessment of Qatar's success in utilizing its development and humanitarian aid to achieve its strategic objectives. This problem gains additional importance in light of the growing regional and international challenges and the need for a deeper understanding of how soft power is used to achieve the national interests of small and medium-sized states in the contemporary international system. Based on soft power theory, three main hypotheses were formulated for the study:

Hypothesis 1: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations enhances Qatari soft power in the economic sphere, contributing to the realization of the country's economic interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "soft economic power" developed by Nye, whereby aid enhances the positive image of the donor country and increases its economic attractiveness. The theory assumes that development aid contributes to creating an economic environment conducive to investment and trade, opens new markets for exports, and strengthens economic relations with recipient countries. It also contributes to building Qatar's reputation as a reliable economic partner and rising economic power, enhancing its ability to attract investment and diversify its economy.

Hypothesis 2: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations contribute to strengthening Qatar's political soft power, contributing to the realization of its political interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "public diplomacy" in soft power theory, whereby aid constitutes an effective tool for influencing public opinion and political elites in recipient countries. The theory assumes that humanitarian and development aid contributes to enhancing the donor country's international standing and improving its global image. In the Qatari context, aid strengthens Qatar's role as a trusted regional and international mediator, grants it political influence in international organizations, and helps build strategic political alliances. It also contributes to strengthening the legitimacy of Qatari foreign policy and its ability to influence international decisions.

Hypothesis 3: Qatari development and humanitarian aid provided through the United Nations enhances Qatar's soft security power, helping to achieve its security interests.

This hypothesis is based on the concept of "soft security" in Nye's theory, whereby aid contributes to building relationships of trust and cooperation that enhance mutual security. The theory assumes that humanitarian and development aid play a pivotal role in achieving regional stability and combating non-traditional security threats. In the Qatari case, aid contributes to strengthening national security by building a network of security relationships with recipient countries, contributing to conflict prevention and resolution, and enhancing cooperation in combating common threats such as terrorism and extremism. It also helps create a stable regional environment that supports Qatari security interests.

Based on soft power theory, the model assumes a positive, sequential relationship between these variables. Aid leads to the strengthening of soft power, which in turn contributes to the achievement of national interests. These relationships are based on the basic concepts in Nye's theory on the mechanisms of soft power and its impact on achieving foreign policy objectives.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and critical methodology to understand the relationship between development and humanitarian aid provided by the State of Qatar and its use as a tool of soft power in the service of national interests. This approach was chosen due to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the subject, while utilizing both descriptive and comparative approaches to support the analysis. The analytical, critical approach provides an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the three main variables in the study. It also allows for an analysis of the historical, political, and social contexts surrounding this relationship and its transformations over time. The descriptive approach provides a comprehensive overview of the nature, mechanisms, and evolution of Qatari aid, while the comparative approach enables evaluation of its effectiveness by analyzing and comparing different experiences over multiple time periods. The study relies on interconnected hypotheses and sub-questions, which are tested based on the adopted theoretical framework.

The study relies on an in-depth analysis of official documents and records to collect its data, given the accurate and reliable information they provide about Qatari aid and its impact. These documents include annual reports issued by relevant Qatari entities, such as the Qatar Fund for Development, in addition to documents from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between Qatar and international organizations. The study also covers official Qatari discourse related to aid and its accompanying media coverage, in addition to relevant academic studies, through an analysis of government data, media reports, and documented content.

The study relies on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official documents issued by Qatari entities such as the Qatar Fund for Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in addition to aid statistics and documents from the United Nations and its various agencies, such as development reports and bilateral agreements. Secondary sources include previous academic studies, specialized books, reports issued by research

centers, and peer-reviewed scientific articles that address the topic of Qatari aid and soft power, which provide analytical and interpretive dimensions that enrich the study's content.

The study follows a multi-stage analytical methodology, beginning with classifying and organizing data according to topics and time periods to facilitate systematic analysis. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the relationships between variables within a clear theoretical framework. Content analysis is the primary tool for understanding texts and documents, used to extract recurring themes and patterns that address the relationship between aid, soft power, and national interests. Comparative analysis is also used to track the evolution of Qatari aid over time and measure its impact on achieving desired goals. The study relies on strict standards to ensure the quality of the analysis and the reliability of the results. Methodological triangulation techniques are applied by comparing data from multiple sources to ensure accuracy, while maintaining objectivity and avoiding bias in interpreting the results.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Qatari Aid and Economic Interests: A Soft Power Analysis

This part of the paper discusses how Qatari aid has transformed from mere humanitarian and development support into an effective tool for promoting national economic interests through its use as soft power. This approach is based on the concept of soft power, which refers to indirect influence through attractiveness and good reputation. It reviews the Qatari experience in this context as a model that combines humanitarian commitment with economic benefit.

4.1.1 Transforming Qatari Aid into Economic Attractiveness

Qatar has relied on well-thought-out strategies to transform its aid into economically attractive tools that enhance its international standing. Projects such as the \$200 million Siraj solar energy project in Somalia demonstrate Qatar's ability to combine humanitarian goals with economic interests. Projects in Sudan and Somalia have also contributed to enhancing Qatar's food security through agricultural investments that serve both parties (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). According to Kharas (2015), this approach is more balanced than the traditional aid model.

In promoting its image as a responsible economic power, Qatar has focused on financing innovative development projects that reflect its financial and technical capabilities (Cooper & Momani, 2011). This "aid diplomacy" has enabled it to establish a foothold in international financial institutions (Aghzadeh, 2023). This policy also aims to market a Qatari economic model based on innovation and sustainability, as confirmed by the Siraj project as an example that embodies the state's commitment to the green economy (Al Sharq newspaper, 2019; Yavuzaslan & Cetin, 2016).

The Impact of Aid on Qatar's Image as a Trusted Economic Partner

Qatari aid has enhanced its image as a reliable economic actor, especially during crises like the Gulf blockade (2017–2021) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite challenges, Qatar continued aid efforts in over 80 countries (Kinninmont, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2021), strengthening its credit rating and investment appeal. This approach also enabled economic diversification and expanded Qatar's reach into regions like Africa, forming partnerships in infrastructure, agriculture, and energy (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023).

Qatar's efficiency is reflected in projects such as Gaza's Hamad Hospital (Bashir & Abdelsalam, 2021), while the involvement of Qatari firms in international infrastructure has boosted their global competitiveness (Moawad, 2019). Qatar's financial interventions, like the \$3 billion deposit to Egypt in 2012, further underscore its strategic economic role (Barakat, 2019).

Strategic Economic Partnerships with UN Agencies

Qatar has deepened its global footprint through major partnerships with UN agencies. A 2023 UNDP agreement worth \$500 million supported initiatives such as the "Youth Economic Empowerment" program in North Africa, which opened new markets for Qatari firms (United Nations, 2023; Lestra, 2017). Cooperation with the FAO on

strategic crops included the Somalia "Green Belt" project, which created agricultural investment opportunities (Qatar Charity, 2025; Milton et al., 2022).

Partnerships with UNOPS facilitated Qatari infrastructure involvement in complex zones like Gaza (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021; Barakat, 2019), while collaboration with UNCTAD promoted Qatar as a regional trade hub, particularly through African infrastructure and trade facilitation programs (Pericoli, 2021; Zaid, 2021).

Effectiveness of Economic Partnerships with UN Agencies

Studies confirm that UN partnerships have strengthened Qatar's image as a credible economic partner and diversified its economy (ElKahlout & Milton, 2022). Post-blockade, these partnerships reinforced the legitimacy and transparency of aid flows (Elkahlout & Hedaya, 2024). Nonetheless, challenges remain, including weak institutional coordination, limited impact assessment mechanisms, and insufficient private sector engagement (Barakat, 2019).

4.1.2 Economic Impacts of Qatari Aid

Qatari Aid and Economic Diversification

Qatari aid has supported the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 by promoting economic diversification. It has helped develop sectors such as agriculture, real estate, and services, creating opportunities beyond oil and gas (Lestra, 2017). Domestically, aid stimulated growth in transport, logistics, and food industries, while enhancing human capital in planning and international relations (Cooper & Momani, 2011; Barakat, 2019).

Aid's Impact on Qatari Investment Abroad

Aid has fostered favorable investment climates in recipient countries. In Somalia, aid preceded Qatari investment in ports and infrastructure (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). It also improved the business environment and provided political cover for investments, as seen in Sudan and Turkey (Bashir & Abdelsalam, 2021; Antwi-Boateng, 2013). Qatar's investments in Turkey, totaling over \$22 billion, supported its economy during currency and natural disasters.

Benchmarking Qatar's Aid Model in the UN System

Qatar's aid model combines generosity with strategic ambition. From 2012 to 2019, it provided an average of \$6.75 billion annually (Government Communications Office, 2024). Like the UAE, Qatar channels aid through institutions such as Qatar Fund for Development and Qatar Charity (Aras et al., 2024). While Sweden emphasizes human rights and Turkey "humanitarian diplomacy," Qatar integrates humanitarian and political goals aligned with UN principles (Government Communications Office, 2024). Since joining the Development Assistance Committee in 2016, Qatar has boosted its global role by submitting official aid statements and hosting UN offices (United Nations, 2023).

Aid as a Tool for Export Growth

Qatar uses "tied aid" to support national exports. Between 2015 and 2020, non-oil exports to aid-receiving countries rose over 30% (Sheikh Mohammed bin Thamer Al Thani Report, 2024; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2025, 1149). Aid to North Africa increased exports of Qatari chemicals and construction materials. Development projects also promoted Qatari products abroad. In Sudan, health aid improved perceptions of Qatari medical services, boosting demand. Aid also helped build distribution networks that facilitated product access (Yavuzaslan & Cetin, 2016; Kinninmont, 2017).

Aid's Role in Food and Energy Security

Aid supports Qatar's food security by funding agriculture in countries like Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, targeting key crops such as wheat and rice. Around 30% of grain needs were met via Sudan and Ethiopia projects, including the \$300 million "Al-Qout" initiative (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). Aid aligned with sovereign wealth investments, enhancing Qatar's control over food value chains (Al Sharq, 2023). In Ethiopia, the "Sustainable Food" project linked aid and investment to supply meat and grains.

In energy, aid expanded Qatar's global role beyond gas exports. Renewable energy projects in developing countries, such as Somalia's Siraj solar initiative, diversified expertise and opened new markets (Naier, 2021, 48). Infrastructure financing in Africa and Asia also supported LNG market expansion.

4.1.3 Testing the First Hypothesis on Economic Soft Power

Qatari aid—especially through the United Nations system—has become a strategic pillar in building the state's economic soft power. The findings support the study's first hypothesis: Qatar has effectively used aid to advance national interests and promote its image as a resilient, innovative, and sustainable economy. This transformation is reflected in its ability to tie aid to mutual economic interests, boost international confidence, and showcase technical and institutional capabilities. Aid has also supported economic diversification and expanded Qatar's global market presence. However, success varies, as the link between aid and diversification remains indirect and challenged by structural reliance on the energy sector. Qatar's partnerships with international institutions further highlight its flexible approach to beneficiary needs and global market trends, adding legitimacy to its development policy and strengthening economic ties within a strategic, humanitarian framework. Table 1 shows key joint projects between Qatar and UNx agencies regarding humanitarian aid.

Table 1: Key Joint Projects Between Qatar and UN Agencies Regarding Humanitarian Aid

Project Name	Partner Agency	Value/Scope	Objectives and Achievements
Gaza Emergency Project (2023–2024)	World Food Programme (WFP) + UNRWA + UNDP	\$150 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shelter for 50,000 displaced individuals - Establishment of 3 field hospitals - Clean water for 500,000 people
Education Above All	UNICEF	Support for 1 million children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction and equipping of schools - Teacher training - Provision of educational supplies
Sustainable Food Security	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	10 countries in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of sustainable agriculture - Support for small-scale farmers - Improvement of food supply chains
"Amal" Initiative	UNHCR	100,000 refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for education in refugee camps
Gaza Relief Operations Support 2023	World Food Programme (WFP)	\$100 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of urgent food aid to over 1 million people
Support for UNRWA Operations in Gaza (prior to recent closure)	UNRWA	\$25 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of shelter for displaced individuals - Healthcare services - <u>Urgent humanitarian aid</u>

(Sources: *Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2024; *UNRWA*, 2024; *Education Above All*, 2024; *Al-Sharq Newspaper*, 2023)

It is also noted that Qatar's strategy of utilizing aid to achieve economic interests faces multiple challenges and risks. Focusing on specific geographic regions, particularly Africa and the Middle East, makes this strategy vulnerable to political and security fluctuations in these regions. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on UN organizations to implement aid, despite its benefits in terms of legitimacy and transparency, may limit flexibility and speed in responding to available economic opportunities.

The following chart illustrates the dynamic relationship between Qatari aid and economic soft power and its impact on achieving national interests. Qatari aid, whether provided directly or through UN agencies, contributes to

strengthening Qatar's economic soft power by increasing its attractiveness and influence internationally. This soft power translates into tangible economic gains, including diversifying the national economy, promoting foreign investment, opening new export markets, ensuring food and energy security, and expanding the network of international economic cooperation. The dashed path in the following chart (fig 2) represents the cumulative effect of this process, as the economic gains achieved contribute to strengthening Qatar's ability to provide more aid, creating a positive cycle of sustainable impact that strengthens Qatar's economic position globally.

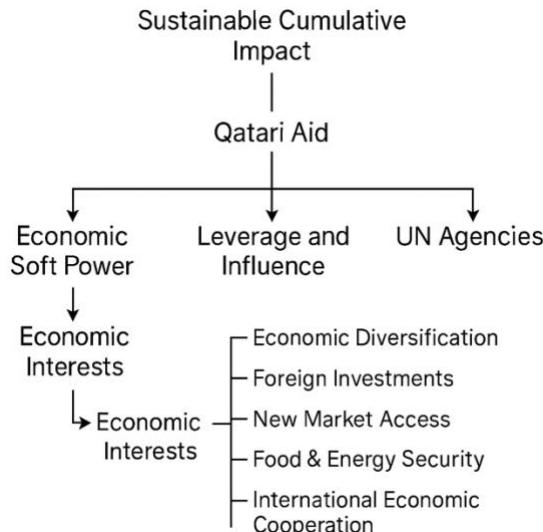


Figure 2: An Illustrative Model of the Impact of Qatari Aid on Economic Soft Power

Despite these challenges, Qatar's model of employing aid as a tool for economic soft power offers valuable lessons for small and medium-sized countries seeking to enhance their global economic influence. Despite its limited size and population, Qatar has been able to transform its financial resources into effective soft power, contributing to its economic interests and enhancing its international standing.

Looking ahead, it appears that achieving greater success in employing aid to enhance economic soft power requires developing more integrated mechanisms among the various Qatari institutions involved, adopting a more strategic approach to selecting projects and beneficiary countries, and enhancing the participation of the Qatari private sector in the design and implementation of aid programs. It also requires developing more accurate tools to measure and evaluate the economic impact of aid, allowing it to be more effectively directed toward achieving national economic interests.

4.2 Qatari Aid and Political Interests: A Soft Power Approach

This chapter explores the political dimension of Qatari development and humanitarian aid by analyzing how it is employed as a tool of soft power to serve national interests. Despite the official discourse's emphasis on the humanitarian and developmental nature of aid, the analysis reveals its profound political role, particularly in enhancing Qatar's international image, expanding its influence within international organizations, and achieving diplomatic gains through its various partnerships, particularly with the United Nations system. This chapter draws on a soft power approach to understand how aid is transformed into diplomatic tools that contribute to maximizing Qatar's political influence, particularly in the context of regional crises and changing international balances.

4.2.1 Dimensions of the Political Influence of Qatari Aid

Mechanisms for Transforming Aid into Political Influence

Qatar has built an integrated system of "donor diplomacy" to convert aid into political influence. Barakat (2019) notes that Qatar strategically directed aid to areas like Syria, Gaza, and Afghanistan, allowing it to exceed its geographic and demographic limitations. Timing played a key role, as seen in Sudan post-2019, when Qatar

leveraged political shifts to expand its influence. Through "targeted aid," Qatar combined bilateral support to elites with UN-channelled aid for international legitimacy. Cooper & Momani (2011) termed this "small-state ingenuity," exemplified by the \$200 million direct aid to Sudan and simultaneous UN humanitarian support (Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2019).

Qatar also employs "humanitarian diplomacy" by linking aid to political mediation. Elkahlout & Hedaya (2024) highlight this in Afghanistan, where Qatar aided the evacuation of over 70,000 people (Lusail News, 2021). Similar strategies were applied in Gaza. The study identifies four mechanisms as illustrated in fig 3: donor diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, UN partnership, and targeted aid—each reinforcing Qatar's political presence regionally and internationally.

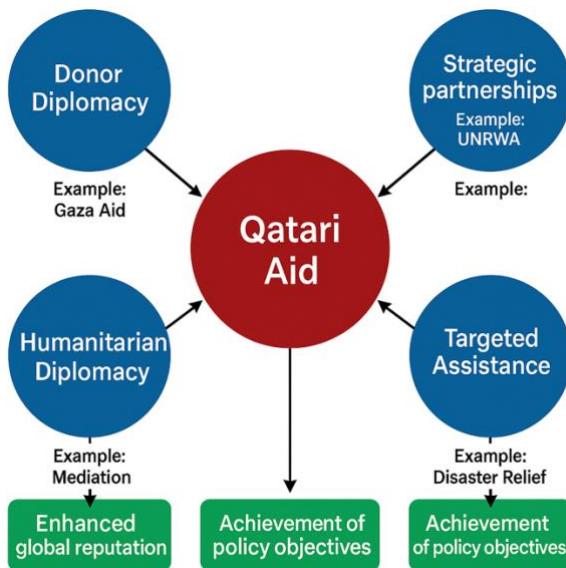


Figure 3: Mechanisms for transforming Qatari aid into political influence

The Impact of Aid on Qatar's Political Reputation in the International Community

Enhancing Qatar's International Image through Aid

Qatari aid has improved the country's global image, particularly after the 2017 blockade. Naier (2021) notes that aid countered terrorism allegations and positioned Qatar as a humanitarian state. During COVID-19, it sent aid to 80 countries, reinforcing its credibility (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Support for just causes—especially Palestine—has also elevated Qatar's status. Pericoli (2021) highlights over \$1.6 billion in Gaza aid, with a key mediation role during the 2023–2024 conflict. Qatar's rapid aid response to Syria and Turkey post-2023 earthquake further reinforced its humanitarian reputation (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

UN partnerships have increased transparency. Milton et al. (2022) observed a transformation in Qatari aid delivery post-2017, acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General (United Nations, 2023), which boosted Qatar's international standing.

Aid and Qatar's Role in International Organizations

Qatar's generous contributions expanded its influence in global institutions. Barakat (2019) links this to its election to bodies like ECOSOC (2021–2023), the Human Rights Council (2018–2020), and the UNESCO Executive Board. Qatar has also strengthened its position within the IMF and World Bank.

Initiatives like Education Above All have educated over 10 million children (Education Above All, 2024), boosting ties with UNESCO and UNICEF. Collaboration with FAO supports food security (Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2023). Hosting UN offices like OCHA and OHCHR (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021) has further enhanced Qatar's institutional presence.

UN Partnership and Political Gains

Post-2017, Qatar prioritized its UN partnership. Elkahlout & Hedaya (2024) emphasize that this boosted legitimacy, eased regional pressures, and enhanced international acceptance. In Gaza, UN frameworks allowed Qatar to provide aid under blockade conditions (United Nations, 2022). Qatar leveraged UN cooperation to act in sensitive contexts, such as in Syria through UNHCR (Pericoli, 2021) and in Afghanistan as a mediator (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The UN has also served as a multilateral platform for broader alliances. Milton et al. (2022) note Qatar's active role in initiatives like the Dialogue of Civilizations and climate change, enhancing its diplomatic independence amid regional polarization.

4.2.2 The Geopolitical Distribution of Aid

The geographic distribution of Qatari aid (fig 4) reflects a strategic pattern that combines a focus on the Arab region and the Middle East, as a geographic priority, with maintaining an active presence in other regions. This approach reflects Qatar's vision of employing development and humanitarian aid as a means of soft power to serve its national interests (RACA, 2022).

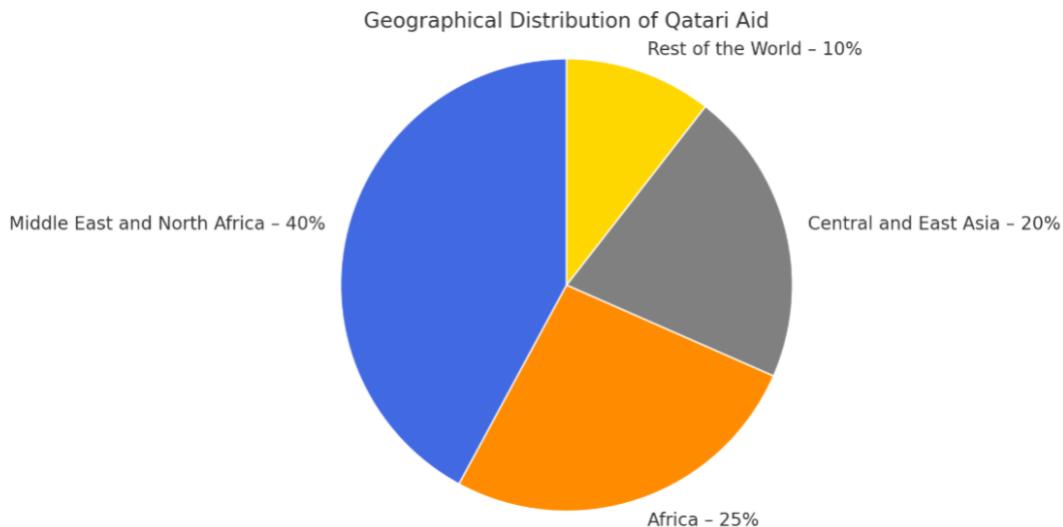


Figure 4: Estimated Calculation of the Geographical Distribution of Qatari Aid

The Middle East and North Africa receive about 45% of Qatari aid, reflecting strategic, cultural, and historical priorities. Qatar views the region as vital to its foreign policy. Notably, aid to Palestine has exceeded \$1.6 billion over the past decade, supporting reconstruction in Gaza, building hospitals and schools, salary support, and humanitarian relief. Following the October 2023 events, Qatar pledged \$500 million in emergency aid (RACA, 2024).

In Syria, Qatar has provided over \$2 billion since the crisis began, focusing on refugees, education, and healthcare. A key initiative was establishing the "City of Hope" in northern Syria after the opposition, led by new President Ahmad al-Sharaa, took control.

Aid Beyond MENA

While focused on MENA, Qatar also directs 55% of its aid to Africa and Asia. Africa receives 25%, including sustainable development and crisis response projects. These include the \$200 million Siraj renewable energy project in Somalia, and initiatives in Sudan involving dam construction, agriculture, and education. Asia receives

20%, with over \$50 million to Afghanistan post-2021 and aid to Pakistan in education, healthcare, and infrastructure (RACA, 2024; Qatar Charity, 2025; MOFA, 2023).

Criteria for Aid Allocation

Though no official criteria are published, analysis of RACA's reports reveals several guiding principles. Priority is given to countries facing severe humanitarian or development crises. Strategic relevance, regional role, and institutional capacity also influence aid distribution. The potential for long-term impact and strength of bilateral ties are considered. These criteria are periodically reviewed with international partners to ensure aid effectiveness (RACA, 2024).

4.2.3 Qatari Aid and Strategic Political Objectives

Studying the Impact of Aid on Qatar's Capacity in Mediation and International Negotiations

Qatari aid has significantly enhanced the country's role as a regional and international mediator, enabling effective engagement in complex negotiations. Milton et al. (2022) describe this as "diplomatic capital," allowing Qatar to build balanced relationships with conflicting parties and serve as an acceptable mediator. A clear example is its role in the Afghan crisis, where aid helped facilitate the 2020 Doha Agreement and the evacuation of over 70,000 people (Lusail News, 2021; Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Qatar has adopted "humanitarian diplomacy," integrating humanitarian and political dimensions to navigate sensitive conflicts. This is evident in Gaza, where Qatar maintained ties with both Hamas and Israel, allowing it to broker ceasefires and prisoner exchanges, including during the October 2013 War (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). A similar approach was used in Sudan, leading to the 2011 Doha Document for Peace.

Aid has also contributed to Qatar's diplomatic strengths. According to Elkahlout & Hedaya (2014), it has enabled disciplined neutrality, credibility, and access to hard-to-reach actors. These qualities were key in mediating complex cases like Lebanon's 2008 Doha Agreement and peace efforts in Yemen.

The study's model shows that Qatari aid builds trust and credibility essential for mediation. Case studies of six major conflicts (fig 5) illustrate how Qatar transformed humanitarian aid into political influence, achieving strategic goals: building alliances, enhancing its global standing, and addressing regional challenges. Despite its small size, Qatar has effectively used aid to establish powerful soft influence.



Figure 5: Mutual Influence Model between Qatari Aid and International Mediation Efforts

The Impact of Aid on Building Strategic Alliances

Qatar has used its aid as a key instrument to build strategic alliances beyond its immediate geography, reinforcing its political independence. As Cooper and Momani (2011) point out, Qatar pursued a pragmatic aid policy,

balancing relations with key powers such as Lebanon and Turkey. During Turkey's economic crisis and the 2023 earthquake, Qatari aid deepened bilateral ties, reflected in Turkey's support during the Gulf blockade (Naier, 2021). In Africa, Qatar expanded its influence in the Horn of Africa through stronger ties with Ethiopia and Somalia.

Qatari aid also strengthened relations with major powers and international bodies. Kinninmont (2017) emphasized the role of aid delivered via international organizations in deepening ties with the U.S. and EU, culminating in Qatar's 2022 designation as a major non-NATO ally. Pericoli and Donelli (2023) note Qatar's flexible aid strategy, especially after the 2017 crisis, during which it intensified cooperation with international organizations to counter isolation and later restored Gulf ties without compromising autonomy. This flexibility reflects a strategic use of aid to enhance political influence despite limited resources.

Aid Effectiveness in Confronting Regional Political Challenges

Qatar effectively used aid to counter regional pressures, particularly during the 2017–2021 blockade. Barakat (2019) highlights how partnerships with Tunisia, Morocco, and Somalia helped break isolation. Humanitarian ties with Turkey and Iran ensured supply continuity during the crisis (Naier, 2021).

Qatar also reinforced its role as a neutral mediator. Milton et al. (2022) describe its "positive neutrality," offering aid to both sides of conflicts like in Yemen and Syria, especially after the 2023 earthquake (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Qatar's independent policy also targeted regional hegemony. Elkahlout and Hedaya (2024) show how aid to Sudan and Somalia bolstered its Horn of Africa influence, while Pericoli (2021) highlights its strengthened roles in the Arab League and OIC. Yet, regional polarization and complex crises such as Syria and Libya have limited aid effectiveness in some contexts.

Testing the Second Hypothesis on Political Soft Power

The analysis supports the second hypothesis: Qatari aid—particularly through UN cooperation—enhances political soft power and supports strategic goals. Tools like "donor diplomacy" and "humanitarian diplomacy" have helped Qatar build broad international ties and a responsible global image.

Aid flexibility, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, has enabled Qatar to navigate complex political landscapes. UN cooperation has provided international legitimacy and influence in global forums. This enabled mediation roles in conflicts such as Afghanistan, Gaza, Darfur, and Lebanon, and strengthened alliances with major powers like the U.S. and Turkey.

This strategy proved particularly effective during the blockade, allowing Qatar to preserve independence. Still, the model is subject to regional shifts and global polarization. It also raises concerns about the politicization of aid. Nonetheless, Qatar's approach represents a unique model of how a small state can leverage financial and diplomatic tools to amplify its international role. Its continued success depends on adaptability and the evolution of its soft power instruments.

4.3 Qatari Aid and Security Interests: The Soft Security Dimension

This chapter explores the security dimension of Qatari aid, highlighting its role in promoting "soft security"—a strategy that addresses the root causes of threats through development and stability rather than military means. Qatar uniquely integrates aid into its foreign policy to foster a stable environment that reduces risks and strengthens

regional influence. This approach relies on international partnerships, especially with the UN, to enhance the legitimacy of aid and support national security (Fatic, 2002, 93).

4.3.1 Section 1: Aid as a Tool of Soft Security in Qatari Policy

Qatari aid, while humanitarian and developmental in nature, also serves as a preventive tool for promoting stability in fragile regions. Following the Arab Spring and the blockade crisis, Qatar increasingly used aid to expand regional influence and protect its domestic environment (Blyth, 2018; Stoddard & Harmer, 2010).

The Concept of Soft Security and Its Connection to Aid

Soft security involves using non-military tools—such as economic and social aid—to tackle non-traditional threats like extremism, migration, and conflict. It focuses on addressing root causes like poverty and marginalization to achieve lasting stability (Fatic, 2002, 93). Qatar applies soft security model (fig 6) in areas like Gaza, Syria, and Somalia to contain crisis spillover. However, critics warn that linking aid to security goals may compromise neutrality and international credibility.

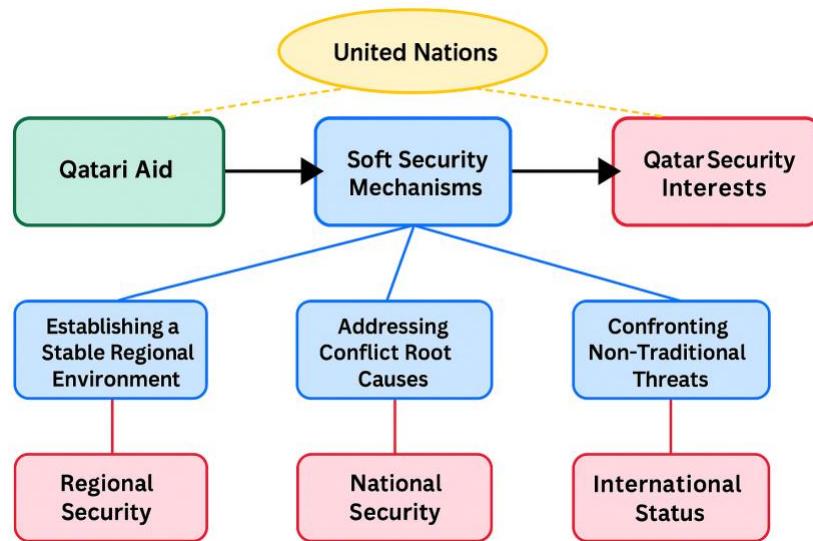


Figure 6: Conceptualization of Qatari soft security model

The study outlines how Qatar transforms its aid into tools of soft security through three mechanisms: promoting regional stability, addressing conflict roots, and tackling non-traditional threats. The United Nations plays a key role by lending legitimacy to Qatar's aid, reinforcing its position as a reliable security actor.

Aid and Regional Stability

Qatar has helped stabilize fragile states like Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen by funding development, infrastructure, education, and health services. These efforts have mitigated crises and reduced conflict risks, shielding Qatar from regional fallout (Pericoli & Donelli, 2023). Aid has also bolstered stability in Gaza and northern Syria (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Yet, the fragility of recipient states threatens sustainability, highlighting the need for broader international cooperation, as seen during the Gulf blockade (Kinninmont, 2017).

Qatar's Role in Regional Security

Qatari aid has enhanced its influence in conflict zones. Its swift crisis responses and mediation roles, notably in Afghanistan, support its image as a key regional mediator (Elkahlout & Hedaya, 2024). Aid efforts in Palestine and Syria have extended Qatar's influence beyond its size (Milton et al., 2022). However, politicizing aid could erode trust and reduce Qatar's long-term effectiveness (Pericoli, 2021).

Confronting Non-Traditional Threats

Qatar uses aid to counter complex threats like extremism and displacement (AlHakmani, 2023, 10). A large share supports education and social services in conflict zones to tackle poverty and marginalization. Initiatives such as

“Education Above All,” in partnership with UNICEF, exemplify this strategy (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Qatar also assists migration-affected states like Sudan and Yemen, aiming to reduce displacement and tensions. Collaborations with UNHCR and others help implement these efforts (AlHakmani, 2023, 9).

Still, addressing such threats requires integrated strategies as illustrated in fig 6, and ongoing program evaluations to ensure sustainable regional security outcomes (Barakat, 2019).

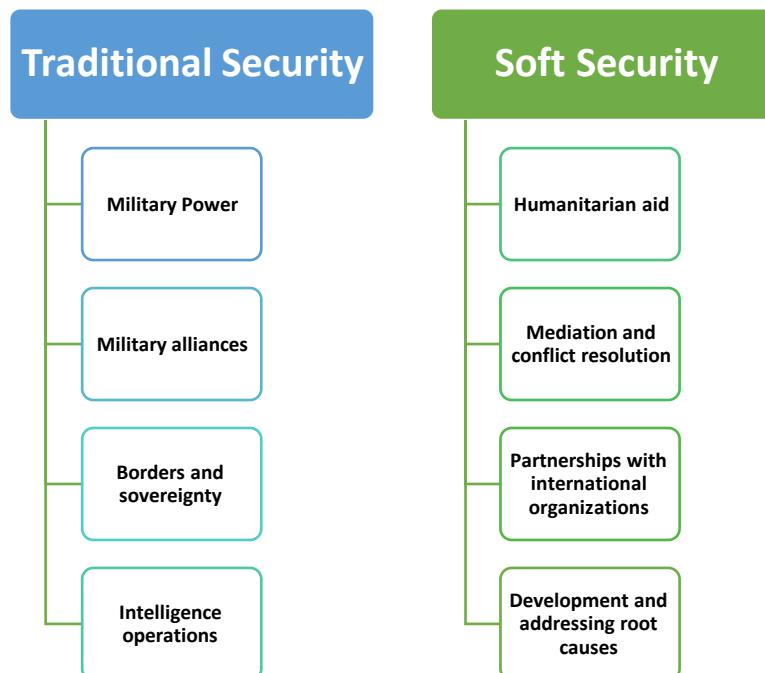


Figure 6: Conceptualization of Qatari soft security model

The model proposed in the study demonstrates how Qatar transforms its aid into tools for achieving soft security. It highlights three main mechanisms: first, building a stable regional environment; second, addressing the root causes of conflicts; and third, confronting non-traditional threats. The United Nations is a pivotal partner in this model, as it confers international legitimacy on Qatari aid, enhancing its role in regional and international security, and cementing Qatar's position as a responsible and trusted actor in security affairs.

4.3.2 Enhancing Qatari Security through International Aid Partnerships

This section explores how international partnerships enhance Qatar's national security through development and humanitarian aid. These collaborations help address non-traditional threats like terrorism and extremism and support Qatar's evolving security strategies.

Aid and National Security

Qatar leverages partnerships with international organizations as part of a broader national security strategy that extends beyond military tools to include economic, social, and political dimensions. Collaborations with UN agencies such as UNDP and FAO have enabled the implementation of development projects in conflict-prone areas, reducing security risks (Barakat, 2019). These efforts have supported Qatari interests, such as aiding Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan via UNHCR, which reduced tensions and reinforced Qatar's international reputation (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Such partnerships were especially valuable during the Gulf blockade, bolstering Qatar's economic and political resilience (Al-Obaidan, 2022).

Aid in Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Qatar prioritizes countering terrorism and extremism through development and humanitarian work. By collaborating with international organizations, especially the UN, Qatar implements projects in vulnerable regions to tackle the root causes of extremism, including poverty and marginalization (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

2024). These initiatives, notably in North Africa and the Sahel, have curtailed extremist recruitment by focusing on education and development (Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). However, ongoing challenges include instability in target areas, sustainable funding, and coordination with stakeholders, necessitating regular evaluations to improve adaptability (Al-Obaidan, 2022, 102).

Testing the Third Hypothesis

This part of the paper supports the third hypothesis: Qatari aid through UN partnerships enhances soft security and serves Qatar's strategic interests. Aid has been used to address root causes of terrorism, extremism, and migration, promoting regional stability. These partnerships have given Qatari aid international legitimacy and reinforced its image as a responsible global actor. Despite its success, challenges persist regarding sustainability and responsiveness to shifting conditions. Qatar's experience offers a unique soft security model that balances humanitarian goals with strategic interests, provided it undergoes continuous assessment and development.

5. Summary and Analysis of Results

The study results demonstrated Qatar's success in employing foreign aid as an effective tool of soft power, enabling it to achieve strategic gains on the economic, political, and security fronts. In the economic field, Qatar was able to integrate its aid with economic interests, contributing to enhancing its economic attractiveness and building its reputation as a global financial center based on innovation and sustainability. This was reflected in strengthening international confidence in its economy, expanding its network of trade relations, and highlighting its administrative and technical competencies internationally.

The study also demonstrated that Qatari aid contributed to diversifying sources of income, increasing foreign investment, and opening new markets for its exports, enhancing its global economic image. This aid also contributed to achieving food and energy security by expanding its investments in these two sectors, supporting the stability of the Qatari economy in the face of global market fluctuations.

On the other hand, partnerships with United Nations agencies played a fundamental role in the success of Qatar's soft power model, by providing an institutional framework that ensures transparency and grants international legitimacy to the aid. These partnerships have enabled Qatar to implement development projects with tangible impact in collaboration with organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization, strengthening Qatar's position as a reliable economic partner internationally.

The study also demonstrates that Qatar developed its strategy after the 2017 Gulf blockade crisis, intensifying its cooperation with international organizations, enhancing the credibility of its aid and reducing regional pressure and criticism. Qatar demonstrated flexibility in adapting to regional and international changes by diversifying its partners and expanding the scope of its aid, which strengthened its economic decision-making independence and enabled it to successfully overcome the effects of the blockade.

5.1 Discussion of the Main Research Problem and Hypothesis Testing

The study examined how Qatar uses development and humanitarian aid through the United Nations as a soft power tool to achieve its national interests. It raised a key question about how a small state can employ financial and diplomatic means to build soft power that protects its interests, along with three sub-questions related to the economic, political, and security dimensions of aid.

Economic Dimension:

Qatar effectively aligned its aid with shared economic interests, enhancing its position as a reliable trade partner, boosting foreign investment, accessing new markets, and securing food and energy needs. Partnerships with international organizations added credibility and amplified the economic impact.

Political Dimension:

Qatari aid bolstered its political influence, strengthened its role in international organizations, and enabled effective diplomatic engagement in crises like Afghanistan, Gaza, Darfur, and Lebanon. Through “donor diplomacy” and “humanitarian diplomacy,” Qatar expanded its political reach and fortified its position during the blockade while building new alliances.

Security Dimension:

Qatar’s aid policy enhanced national security through “soft security” strategies that address root causes of conflict such as extremism, terrorism, and illegal migration. Its contributions supported regional stability, counter-extremism efforts, and human security, reducing risks and strengthening national security via nontraditional approaches.

Hypothesis Testing:

The study tested three hypotheses involving the relationship between Qatari aid (independent variable), soft power (mediator), and national interests (dependent variable), all of which received support.

- **First Hypothesis – Economic Soft Power:** Aid strengthened economic soft power by building trust, attracting partners, and opening markets, though its impact on diversifying the national economy was less clear.
- **Second Hypothesis – Political Soft Power:** Aid reinforced Qatar’s international image and mediation capacity. UN cooperation added legitimacy, though regional and global tensions posed challenges.
- **Third Hypothesis – Soft Security:** The strongest support was found here, as aid helped achieve stability, address extremism, and enhance human security. International partnerships increased aid effectiveness, though sustainability remains a challenge in a volatile region.

The data in table 2 confirmed the strong relationship between the three variables, supporting the hypotheses theoretically and practically, noting that the results of the application varied by field (economic, political, security).

Table 2: Relationship between the three variables

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable	Dependent Variable	Measurement Indicators	Test Results
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Economic Soft Power	Economic Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing Qatar’s image as an economic partner - Opening new export markets - Promoting foreign investments - Diversifying Qatar’s economy - Strengthening food and energy security 	The first hypothesis was confirmed, with varying levels of impact across different areas. The impact was strong in opening markets and enhancing economic image, and moderate in economic diversification.
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Political Soft Power	Political Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing political reputation - Increasing status in international organizations - Strengthening mediation roles - Building strategic alliances - Addressing regional political challenges 	The second hypothesis was confirmed. Aid had a strong impact on enhancing political soft power, particularly in the areas of mediation and strategic alliances.

Independent Variable	Mediating Variable	Dependent Variable	Measurement Indicators	Test Results
Qatari Development and Humanitarian Aid	Security Soft Power	Security Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building a stable regional environment - Enhancing Qatar's role as a security actor - Addressing non-traditional threats - Strengthening national security 	The third hypothesis was confirmed, showing a positive impact of aid on enhancing security soft power. The impact was strong in addressing non-traditional threats and moderate in building a stable regional environment.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Qatari aid, soft power, and national interests, it can be said that Qatar has succeeded in developing a distinct model that transforms foreign aid into effective soft power that contributes to achieving its multiple national interests. The table and graph above show the positive interrelationship between the three variables, confirmed by the results of testing the study's three hypotheses. Table 3 below illustrates the factors influencing the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power.

Table 3: Factors influencing the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power

Factor	Impact	Examples
Partnership with International Organizations	Strong Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of aid - Providing an institutional framework for aid - Leveraging technical and administrative expertise
Geographical Distribution of Aid	Moderate Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on the Middle East and North Africa region (45%) - Presence in Africa (25%) and Asia (20%) - Diversifying geographic partners
Type and Sectoral Distribution of Aid	Strong Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balance between humanitarian and development aid - Focus on strategic sectors (education, health, energy) - Aligning aid with strategic objectives
Regional and International Environment	Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact of the Gulf crisis (2017–2021) - Regional and international polarization - Competition with other regional powers
Institutional Capacity for Aid Management	Moderate Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of specialized institutions (e.g., Qatar Fund for Development) - Coordination among Qatari institutions - Development of evaluation and follow-up mechanisms

One of the essential elements that contributed to the success of the Qatari model of aid delivery is the strategic partnership with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. These partnerships provided an institutional framework and international legal cover that gave Qatari aid a significant degree of effectiveness in achieving economic, political, and security objectives. The importance of these partnerships was particularly evident during the Gulf blockade crisis, as they helped open alternative channels for delivering aid in a transparent and reliable manner, enhancing the credibility of Qatar's role on the international stage.

However, this model faces a number of challenges and limitations that affect its efficiency and sustainability. These challenges include the continuity of funding, the effectiveness of coordination between various Qatari institutions, and the difficulty of measuring the long-term impact of aid, especially given the multiplicity of stakeholders and their varying expectations. Furthermore, aid outcomes do not appear at the same level across all sectors, with the impact being more pronounced in some sectors than others, raising questions about the balance in the distribution of this effectiveness. Overall, the results of the hypothesis testing confirm the validity of the theoretical model adopted in the study, which assumes a positive, sequential relationship between Qatari aid as the independent variable, soft power as the mediating variable, and national interests as the dependent variable. These results indicate the growing importance of soft power as a strategic tool for small and medium-sized countries like

Qatar, particularly in a complex and volatile international environment. This enhances these countries' ability to protect their interests and consolidate their global standing.

Practical and Theoretical Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, a set of practical and theoretical recommendations is presented to enhance the effectiveness of Qatari aid as a tool of soft power in foreign policy. On the practical level, the study calls for strengthening the institutional framework by establishing a higher body to coordinate between aid stakeholders, such as the Qatar Fund for Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Qatar Red Crescent, with the aim of achieving integration and avoiding duplication. It also recommends developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system based on clear performance indicators, as well as attracting qualified national cadres in the fields of development and humanitarian work. The recommendations also emphasize the need to direct aid according to a map of specific national interests and to diversify its delivery channels between bilateral and multilateral means, achieving integration between humanitarian and political policies within a comprehensive vision. They also call for deepening partnerships with United Nations agencies and expanding Qatari participation in international decision-making mechanisms, as well as hosting regional offices and headquarters for international organizations in Doha to strengthen Qatar's position as a regional hub for humanitarian action. In the same context, the recommendations emphasize the importance of developing an integrated media strategy that highlights Qatar's aid efforts, while strengthening the role of the private sector and civil society to ensure sustainability and community engagement.

On the theoretical level, the study focuses on the need to adapt the concept of soft power to suit the specificities of small and medium-sized countries by integrating it with hard power concepts to produce a comprehensive model of smart power appropriate to the Qatari and Gulf contexts. It also recommends developing quantitative and qualitative tools to measure the impact of soft power, taking into account the cultural and political specificities of the region. It calls for establishing the concept of "humanitarian diplomacy" as a theory that links aid and diplomatic mediation, while emphasizing the need to establish ethical standards that regulate the relationship between aid and national interests. The study proposes developing the concept of "soft security" as a theory linking humanitarian action and national security, particularly in the field of conflict prevention. It also emphasizes the importance of developing a theory of small-state diplomacy that takes into account the limitations of their tools and the challenges they face in the international system, while deepening theoretical understanding of the role of international organizations as spheres of influence, and explaining how small states adapt to international changes through soft power tools.

5.2 Future Research Prospects

The study opens up broad avenues for future research, including conducting comparative studies between the Qatari model and other Gulf models such as the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, as well as with successful small-state models such as Singapore, Switzerland, and Norway. It also proposes studying the evolution of the Qatari model over time, particularly in the period before and after the Gulf blockade.

The study calls for in-depth research on specific issues such as Qatar's role in Afghanistan and the Palestinian issue, or analyzing the impact of aid on its relations with major powers such as the United States and the European Union. It also proposes the development of quantitative indicators to measure the impact of aid, analyzing the perceptions of beneficiary communities, and studying Qatar's official discourse on aid as a tool of soft power.

In terms of future prospects, the study proposes scenarios for the development of Qatari aid in light of international economic transformations, such as changes in the energy market, and analyzes future challenges that may face Qatari soft power. It also recommends specialized studies on partnerships with international organizations, including an analysis of partnerships with United Nations agencies, a study of Qatar's role in reforming the global aid system, and an assessment of the impact of hosting regional offices on its international influence.

These recommendations and research perspectives confirm that Qatari aid, if developed within an integrated institutional and strategic framework, can remain an effective tool for achieving the state's interests and strengthening its position in a world of accelerating changes and increasing complexity of international relations.

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Disparities in the Issuance of Refugee Cards by the UNHCR in Indonesia: Vulnerability and Risk Mitigation

M. Alvi Syahrin¹, Alrin Tambunan², Devina Yuka Utami³, Tony Mirwanto⁴, Koesmoyo Ponco Aji⁵, Anindito Rizki Wiraputra⁶, M. Arief Hamdi⁷, Rita Kusuma Astuti⁸, Ajeeb Akbar Qolby⁹, Dewa Gian¹⁰

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9} Politeknik Pengayoman Indonesia, Indonesia

¹⁰ Directorate General of Immigration, Indonesia

Correspondence: M. Alvi Syahrin, Politeknik Pengayoman Indonesia, Indonesia. Email: ma.syahrin@gmail.ac.id

Abstract

As a non-signatory to the Convention, Indonesia does not conduct protection assessments, nor does it offer a pathway for refugees to achieve permanent residency there. Many asylum seekers are involved in criminal acts, such as human trafficking, due to the long wait from asylum seeker status to the process of granting refugee cards by UNHCR. The modus operandi of foreign nationals tends to exploit the ease of UNHCR document processing in Indonesia. The author's initial suspicion, that there is a significant inconsistency in the granting of refugee cards by UNHCR, is a problem that can be focused on research on how refugee status is granted to asylum seekers. Therefore, the author then builds an initial suspicion, that there are obstacles to transparency in the mechanism for granting refugee cards to asylum seekers by UNHCR. This type of research is empirical normative legal research. Data collection techniques used are observation, documentation, and interviews. The results of this study are seen that the disparity in the process of granting refugee cards by UNHCR is due to the lack of transparency and involvement of other parties in determining refugee status by UNHCR, as well as the lack of accountability and openness and clarity of data coordination between the process of determining refugee status by UNHCR and Immigration. And the mitigation steps that must be taken by UNHCR and Immigration in reducing the disparity as a form of legal certainty is by compiling and improving the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and UNHCR in 2019 in order to support the ease of rapid information exchange and a clear coordination model between UNHCR and Immigration, as well as changes to Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Abroad in order to accommodate the introduction of the determination of refugee status and accommodate more detailed coordination functions in determining refugee status and faster data exchange in the context of immigration supervision.

Keywords: Refugee Card, UNHCR, Legal Certainty

1. Introduction

Between 1948 and the 1980s and 1990s, and since the end of the Cold War (1980s and 1990s), the global situation has continuously changed. Simultaneously, new issues have emerged at the international level, relating to and impacting the definition of refugees, the meaning of the refugee issue, and how to determine the scope of the rights and obligations of states (country of origin, transit, or final destination) under international and national law

(Aleshkovski, 2016). Of particular note is the impact of modernization and globalization, which has given rise to the movement and displacement of people for various reasons, from one region or country to another (Khanna, 2020). Concretely, the drivers of population movement from one country to another are massive environmental damage (climate change, global warming, and sea level rise), the welfare gap, the ever-widening gap in civilization between developed (rich) and developing (poor) nations, and the vulnerability of poor countries to economic turmoil and crisis (Kim, 2017). Furthermore, the global impact of the end of the Cold War (Western vs. Eastern Bloc) in the late 1980s should not be overlooked, which did not immediately lead to the disappearance of armed conflicts (international and non-international). This includes asymmetric warfare between states and armed groups (terrorists, insurgency-belligerency, and others). All of these developments have triggered migration (movement/movement) on an individual-family scale or on a large scale (mass migration) from one region or country to another perceived as providing greater security and survival (Bauer & Zimmermann, 2018).

In fact, Indonesia has long faced the presence of (international) refugees. These refugees include boat people, including those fleeing the Vietnam War (1965-1975), Rohingya fleeing oppression in Myanmar-Bangladesh (2010s), the Hazara ethnic minority fleeing Afghanistan (1980-1990s), and Syrians fleeing the turmoil of war in the Middle East-Africa (2010s). Conversely, a number of Indonesians have been political refugees (Asih, 2015). They lost their citizenship and, due to fear of persecution, chose to become refugees in their home countries and/or request asylum. The Indonesian government has even requested assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to take care of those classified as internally displaced persons due to the loss of their homes due to the natural disaster in Aceh in 2004 (Al Imran, 2022).

In handling refugees and asylum seekers, the important thing to pay attention to is political handling (Fine, 2020), starting from bilateral policies between countries that become The country of origin of asylum seekers and refugees, or the country of origin and the host country or country receiving refugees (Çelik & White, 2022). Political and policy standards for handling refugees can be implemented through legal regulations for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees through:

1. Access to international legal/human rights instruments related to asylum seekers and refugees, namely the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol;
2. Human rights instruments within each country's region. The Organization of African Union (OAU) implemented this through the 1969 Convention, and through the 1985 Schengen Convention and the 1990 Dubin Convention by European countries, and through the 1984 Cartanegara Declaration by countries in the Americas, particularly Latin America;
3. National legislation programs addressing refugees. National laws must be developed through a comprehensive National Legislation Program and in accordance with universal principles of refugee protection.

Provisions regarding refugees from abroad are not expressly stipulated in all applicable regulations in Indonesia. However, in reality, the number of refugees (foreigners) originating from abroad is very large in Indonesia (Briskman & Fiske, 2016).

Indonesia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. The two most important documents in refugee law, national law does not yet have adequate legal products to protect refugees, because Indonesia is not a country that ratified the convention on refugees (Liliana & Jayadi, 2015). As a transit country, many refugees and asylum seekers initially transit for a short period in Indonesia before moving on to their destination country, where many asylum seekers and refugees initially intend to stay only for a short time before traveling onward to Australia (Mutaqin, 2018). As a non-signatory to the Convention, Indonesia does not conduct protection assessments, nor does it offer a pathway for refugees to achieve permanent residency there. Nevertheless, currently in Indonesia, there are more than 13,000 (thirteen thousand) asylum seekers and refugees, mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also from Myanmar, Iran, Sri Lanka, and other countries. This means that Indonesia will continue to face the problem of how to handle refugees present within its borders (Palmer & Missbach, 2019).

Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Abroad was enacted on December 31, 2016, as a reference regarding the handling of asylum seekers and refugees originating from abroad who transit and reside in Indonesia before going to their destination country. Article 1 number 1 of Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, one of the criteria for refugees from abroad is not seeking protection from their country of origin. In addition to regulating the definition of refugees originating from abroad, the Presidential Regulation on Refugees was established and enforced to implement the provisions of Law Number 37 of 1999 concerning Foreign Relations. The explanation of Article 27 paragraph (1) of the Foreign Relations Law, humanitarian issues are fundamental problems faced by refugees. Therefore, their handling should, as far as possible, not disrupt good relations between Indonesia and the refugee's country of origin. The authorized agency is delegated authority through cooperation with Indonesia to seek a solution to the refugee problem. The regulation regulates several other definitions, including what is meant by voluntary repatriation, consular notification, search and rescue, immigration offices, and so on.

On the one hand, one of the international principles in handling refugees both in the world and in Indonesia itself is the principle of non-refoulement, which means that every person who has declared himself a refugee or asylum seeker, the state is obliged not to return the refugees to their country of origin where their safety is threatened due to torture (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway, 2015). This principle has been recognized as part of customary international law, which means that even countries that are not parties to the 1951 convention must respect the principle of non-refoulement (Gil-Bazo, 2015; Goodwin-Gill, 2011; Allain, 2001). Meanwhile, on the other hand, the administration carried out by UNHCR in the first step of determining refugee status is checking the applicant's identity, where UNHCR at this initial stage, issues an asylum seeker certificate. Holders of these certificates are persons of concern to the UNHCR and must be specifically protected from forced return to their country, pending a final decision on their refugee status (Legido-Quigley, Chuah & Howard, 2020). These asylum seekers are not eligible for financial assistance from the UNHCR, unless they are deemed vulnerable (Long, 2013). However, these asylum seeker documents can eliminate the risk of deportation. The situation of not receiving financial assistance and being unable to return to their country creates a situation of uncertainty for these asylum seekers (Malmberg, 2021).

Data on several cases of involvement of asylum seekers in violations of the law in Indonesia over the 5 (five) years from 2012 to 2016 can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Comparison Amount Cases and Foreign National Holders Document Seeker Involved Sanctuary Action Crime in Indonesia 2012-2020 Period

No	Year	Amount Case	Amount Foreigners	Type Case
1	2012	3	98	Smuggled Turtle Victims Man
2	2013	6	368	Smuggled Turtle Victims Man
		1	38	Person responsible Conveyance
3	2014	2	147	Smuggled Turtle Victims Man
		1	44	Person responsible Conveyance
4	2015	1	1	DPRI with Document false
		1	1	Perpetrator smuggled turtle 56 Foreigners
5	2016	1	1	Violation Document
6	2017	-	-	-
7	2018	1	1	Chapter 119 Letter a Immigration Law
8	2019	-	-	-
9	2020	1	1	Action Criminal Fraud

Source: Processing Directory Decision Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia 2012-2020

Based on this data, these asylum seekers were involved in criminal acts, such as human trafficking, due to the excessively long wait from asylum seeker status to the process of issuing refugee cards by UNHCR. Some had waited as long as four years as asylum seekers. Contrary to the first case, the cases listed in the Supreme Court directory suggest that foreign nationals tend to exploit the ease of UNHCR's document processing in Indonesia. These two contrasting cases point to the initial suspicion of inconsistencies in the issuance of refugee cards by

UNHCR. Furthermore, previous research indicates that UNHCR's refugee status determinations do not meet required standards. These substandard conditions include providing detailed reasons for negative decisions and independent review of UNHCR decisions.

The most striking data, covered by foreign media, is the death of SJ, an asylum seeker who had been in Indonesia since 2000 and was declared a Final Rejected Person. The foreign national burned himself out of frustration after his refugee status application was rejected. There are reports of increasing mental health problems among the 14,000 foreign asylum seekers in Indonesia. SJ's case doesn't stop there. Having been declared a Final Rejected Person and unable to appeal, Sajjad Yaqub's family has become stateless. They are classified as stateless due to a lack of identity documents and the country of their former residence will not immediately accept the foreign national's re-registration. In Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, Article 29 paragraph (1) can be carried out voluntary repatriation and deportation in accordance with the provisions of applicable regulations, but the obstacles faced are in the deportation process for foreign nationals with Final Rejected Person (FRP) status, due to the lack of documents, funding and reluctance to return home, as well as several ethnicities that cannot be deported because they are not recognized by the country Article 17, gives its own burden both in terms of humanity and in terms of state finances, because the International Organization for Migration (IOM) will only cover for FRP foreign nationals who wish to be given voluntary repatriation, not those who will be deported. Likewise with FRPs who will be carried out voluntary repatriation who do not have passport documents or passport-like documents where the process takes a long time at their respective embassies and cannot even process their travel documents.

From the data of reports of foreigners registered with UNHCR as of November 30, 2020, there is a disparity in the length of time the asylum seeker status is maintained from the date of registration of the asylum seeker compared to the data of the final date of the report, namely November 30, 2020, which is presented as follows.

Table 2: Comparison Time Span Between Registration Date from Seeker Asylum and Refugees

No	Range Time	Amount Seeker Asylum
1	1-2 years	1454
2	3-4 years	1497
3	5-6 years	289
4	7-8 years	9
5	9-10 years	7
Total		3256

Source: Report UNHCR Periodicals on Persons Registered with UNHCR Data as of 30 November 2020

From the data, it can be seen that some asylum seekers have been registered as refugees for three to four years from the report, there are even seven people who still have asylum seeker status for nine to ten years after registration, until the last date of the report. The number of disparities is very significant, of the 3256 (three thousand two hundred and fifty-six) asylum seekers, 44.66% of these asylum seekers have held asylum seeker status for a period of one to two years. Meanwhile, for asylum seekers who have held asylum seeker status for a period of three to four years there are 45.98% of the total asylum seekers in that year. Meanwhile, for asylum seekers who have held asylum seeker status for a period of five to six years there are 8.9% of asylum seekers. Meanwhile, for asylum seekers who have held asylum seeker status for a period of seven to eight years there are 0.27%. And for asylum seekers who have held asylum seeker status for a period of nine to ten years only 0.21%. Therefore, the average asylum seeker holds asylum status for two years, while the largest number of asylum seekers holds asylum status for three to four years. While the percentage of cases is small, the number of asylum seekers holding asylum status for five to ten years is certainly significant. However, humanitarian considerations, and previous cases of asylum seekers experiencing excessively long waits to become refugees and depart, are significant. One suicide case involving an asylum seeker who waited too long to become a refugee has captured global attention through news reports. We cannot wait for another case to provoke international scrutiny of asylum seekers in Indonesia.

Based on the above background, several questions can be identified that will inform the problem formulation:

1. Why does this disparity occur in the refugee card issuance process?

2. What mitigation measures can be taken to reduce this disparity and ensure legal certainty?

2. Method

The research method used in this paper is empirical normative legal research. Empirical normative research is legal research concerning the enforcement or implementation of normative legal provisions in action in each specific legal event that occurs in society (Efendi & Ibrahim, 2018).

In this study, data sources are divided into two: primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data obtained directly by the researcher, such as interviews with informants. At UNHCR, the data collected included refugee data and the length of the process from asylum seeker to refugee status. Interviews with UNHCR officials also examined the disparity in the processing time for refugee cards, as well as the interview standards and procedures used. Primary data, in the form of interviews, examined the considerations taken in several cases of fast and slow refugee card issuance, the standards used, the procedures for substantial consideration of the issuance, and the considerations taken in final rejections of refugee card requests. In addition, primary data collected from the Kalideres Immigration Detention Center (Rudenim Kalideres) includes data on the handling and supervision of asylum seekers, the number of asylum seekers handled by Rudenim Kalideres, and interview data related to obstacles and difficulties in handling asylum seekers. Primary data will then be collected from the Directorate of Immigration Traffic, including the number of reported foreign asylum seekers involved in criminal violations, as a result of coordination with relevant agencies, the number of asylum seekers subject to deportation and voluntary repatriation, and primary data from interviews related to the coordination process and obstacles with the UNHCR.

Secondary data will be compiled from existing sources, such as previous research, journals, regulations, and websites relevant to the research topic. The journals used cover asylum seekers and refugees, including the history of the development of refugee protection regulations. Secondary data from websites includes digital media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees, including the self-immolation incident that garnered global attention. The regulations used are regulations from international conventions on human rights and asylum seekers or refugees such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees. Meanwhile, for the existing laws and regulations in Indonesia, those used are regulations that regulate the handling of asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia, such as Law Number 37 of 1999 concerning Foreign Relations and Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Abroad.

3. Discussion

3.1. Reasons for Disparities in Refugee Card Issuance in Indonesia

3.1.1. General Obstacles to UNHCR's Refugee Card Issuance

In general, the profile of asylum seekers in Indonesia can be seen in the following table.

Table 3: Search List Comparison Asylum and Refugees Based on Registration Year

Year	Registration Seeker Asylum 2020	Registration Seeker Asylum 2020	Number of Asylum Seekers Changes Per Year	Registration Refugees Year 2020	Registration Refugees 2021
2003	0	0	0	1	1
2004	0	0	0	1	1
2005	0	0	0	1	1
2006	0	0	0	1	1
2008	0	0	0	14	14
2009	0	0	0	5	5
2010	3	3	0	31	32
2011	4	4	0	94	92

2013	7	7	0	262	249
2014	11	11	0	1796	1754
2015	278	270	8	3594	3532
2016	662	618	44	1817	1787
2017	628	601	27	1128	1137
2018	869	817	52	734	746
2019	585	571	14	198	202
2020	580	337	243	0	0
2021	0	68	68	0	73
TOTAL	3629	3309	320	10118	10126

Source: Data Management of Registered Persons with UNHCR 2020-2021

The data shows that the number of asylum seekers in 2021 was 3,309, meaning that from 2020 to 2021, approximately 251 asylum seekers had their status changed to refugee. According to UNHCR reports for 2020 and 2021, no asylum seekers were reported as being processed for Final Rejected Person (FRP). With the addition of 68 new asylum seeker statuses in 2021, the data above shows that the number of refugees is more than three times the number of asylum seekers. The author then confirmed this figure with the UNHCR during an interview with DA, who explained:

"There are more refugees than asylum seekers, and they are awaiting refugee status determination from the UNHCR. As of July 2021, there were 10,010 refugees, while there were 3,346 asylum seekers. This is a misconception, suggesting that there are more asylum seekers and that they are all categorized as international refugees based on Presidential Decree 125 of 2016."

Referring to human rights, philosophically, the Weltanschauung, or worldview underlying human rights, is grounded in a system of justice based on the principles of freedom and equality. Therefore, the obligation to respect others is enshrined in the main formulation of human rights, namely the principle of equality. According to the author, the principle of equality in human rights should not be considered insignificant. This principle of equality requires that no rights be insignificant, including those of the more than 3,000 asylum seekers, especially those whose status has remained asylum seekers since 2010. Since the 2015 registration year, more than five hundred people remain asylum seekers. In this current era of national deprivation of human rights, the category of people without rights (refugees and stateless persons) has emerged. Those without rights, such as refugees, lack a nation-state through which they can claim citizenship. This broadening of the definition prevents the notion of human rights from being merely another name for the rights of citizens of a nation-state. It also encompasses the protection of refugees, often referred to as modernizing minorities. Therefore, the status of asylum seekers must be addressed immediately, meaning the process of determining them must be completed immediately, as it positions them as subjects without rights. This process falls under the UNHCR, a humanitarian agency, which must immediately change their status to ensure the rights of those with refugee status. This process allows for expedited placement.

Naturally, the status sought by asylum seekers is refugee, and therefore, the determination of this status is linked to the process implemented by UNHCR. As a humanitarian agency, UNHCR should adhere to international humanitarian law standards, the goal of which is to ensure that every process undertaken for an individual meets the internationally agreed due process rights, or the right to fair process. Being an asylum seeker creates several uncertainties, including unclear funding from UNHCR, unclear status, and most importantly, unclear processes and stages that align with the asylum seeker's initial desire, namely refugee status. This unclear process certainly does not comply with the standard right to due process.

3.1.2. Obstacles to Immigration Supervision

According to Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, Article 2 paragraph (1) of the regulation is fundamentally based on the principle of cooperation between the government and UNHCR, as is the immigration supervision of asylum seekers. This supervision is crucial because Indonesia is not a social vacuum, as the rules state that asylum seekers are allowed to stay and are not detained. Asylum seekers who come into direct contact

with the community will undoubtedly pose certain problems. As stated by RS, Head of Registration, Administration, and Reporting:

"Problems always exist. While all the refugees' needs have been met, in reality, they still seek income, some working, and others trading. For example, there were complaints that someone was opening or buying and selling motorbikes in the parking lot. The owner called, saying the problem might be a lack of funds, so they're looking for side jobs, which shouldn't be allowed because they're covered by IOM, so it shouldn't be allowed. The second problem is that the local community may complain that they have difficulty accepting refugees, such as in Bekasi, where they find it difficult to accept them, citing differences in our culture. For example, the local community is asleep, but the refugees are still awake. This leads to reactions from the surrounding community, not to mention mixed marriages, which can cause problems."

The interviews revealed that the social problems faced by asylum seekers include cultural conflicts and violations of established regulations regarding refugees in Indonesia. The longer a refugee stays, the more protracted the social problems that can arise, disrupting security and public order. Compounding the problem of refugee stays is the existence of an intermediate status, which further extends the duration of their refugee status. This intermediate status is referred to as asylum seeker status. If this intermediate status can be clarified, whether it is rejected or confirmed as a refugee, immigration supervision can be implemented. Asylum seekers, as stipulated in Article 39, are subject to deportation and can only be implemented if it is clear that their application for refugee status has been rejected.

It is recognized that there are unique obstacles to the repatriation of asylum seekers as FRPs who are stateless or whose country is unstable. However, for asylum seekers with passports, this should not be a problem. Data on asylum seekers with passports is presented below.

Table 4
Search List Comparison The Sanctuary That Has Document Passport Based on Registration Year

No	Year Register	Report Year	Report Year
		2020	2021
1	2011	4	4
2	2014	1	2
3	2015	29	24
4	2016	96	87
5	2017	83	81
6	2018	352	321
7	2019	253	246
8	2020	108	112
9	2021	-	29
	Total	926	906

Source: Data Management of Registered Persons with UNHCR 2020-2021

As explained by the MFA:

"Most importantly, we don't receive regular and accurate final rejection data. Secondly, we don't receive valid and accurate data on independent refugees in Indonesia. The data on refugees, addresses of independent refugees, and final rejects in Indonesia, if any, are available on a monthly basis. So, we have to find it ourselves, be more proactive, and work together. This is impossible for immigration alone. In 2019, there was a data-sharing MOU, where UNHCR only provided its data to the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, when data is needed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the relationship is smooth, but it seems there needs to be transparency within the framework of joint functions. The sharing of final reject data and data on independent refugees still needs improvement."

The principle of cooperation in the presidential regulation above should be the overarching principle in the implementation of Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, including immigration oversight. However, the interview results above indicate that delays in information delivery actually hamper immigration oversight for asylum seekers and FRPs. With the existence of asylum seekers who have passports, of course, if it has been determined that the asylum seeker is an FRP, fast information can certainly help to speed up the coordination of voluntary repatriation or deportation of the FRP. As explained by HS:

"...There is coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the form of data sharing based on an MOU between UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, what is unfortunate is that, as the Directorate of Human Settlements and Inspection, it is very slow to obtain this data. The existing data cannot provide real-time data on the total number of final rejects, how many have been repatriated, or who is currently in Indonesia. The available data is only per month, for example, in January, where we would receive the report in March, a month has passed. I initially assumed that this data sharing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would expedite our data collection, but it has turned out to be slow, making it difficult to present data to our leadership regarding the actual number of refugees, except for the number of refugees in CH. There is actually an MOU between UNHCR and the Indonesian government. One of the articles stipulates that UNHCR must also inform and coordinate with the Indonesian government regarding the results of registration and initial verification before determining the status of refugees and asylum seekers. This is what we are actually demanding from UNHCR: transparency from them. There is a clear MOU, but they haven't communicated it, so what we found is that In the field, the person in question holds a KITAS and officially entered. Only one party states that the foreign national is seeking asylum because of uncomfortable conditions in his/her country. Carrying official documents means he/she cannot be granted a refugee card. These conditions were not communicated to the Indonesian government, specifically the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Directorate General of Immigration, to screen and review the situation. So, there is something amiss in UNHCR policy, and in the implementation of the MOU, particularly in informing and coordinating with the Indonesian government regarding the results of the initial verification in determining refugee status."

The interviews revealed that having immigration documents from the foreign national would certainly expedite the existing process, expediting the repatriation or deportation process from the FRP. Likewise, regarding the initial status determination, the Directorate General of Immigration should not be excluded from these processes. Its input could be very useful in providing additional information that could expedite the status determination of the asylum seeker. As the principle of handling refugees in Indonesia with international institutions is based on the principle of cooperation, this principle of cooperation includes the issue of immigration supervision, so the determination of refugee status must also provide space for input from the receiving government, in this case the Directorate General of Immigration, in the process of determining refugee status, as part of the Government that provides the mandate to handle refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia.

3.1.3 Obstacles to Transparency in the Refugee Status Determination (RFD) Process by UNHCR in Indonesia: The Well-Reassured Fear Criteria

According to IS, UNHCR's initial registration process is the initial stage in determining refugee status. It involves assessing the basic biographical data, their reasons for fleeing the country, and their inability to return. Theoretically, based on the three-stage theory, the first step is to assess the underlying fear that led to the asylum seeker's asylum, often referred to as "well-founded fear." Measuring well-founded fear involves assessing the subjective element of fear when evaluating the risk of persecution. Often, the flight from one's country of origin is difficult, and the asylum application itself is sufficient to generate subjective fear. According to DA, the issuance of an asylum seeker card is necessary to avoid the risk of detention. The UNHCR Refugee Status Determination Standards Manual (hereinafter referred to as the UNHCR RFD Guidelines) explains that the qualification "well-founded" is added to the element of fear—the state of mind and subjective condition. This implies that not only the individual's frame of mind determine their refugee status, but this frame of mind must be supported by objective circumstances. Therefore, the term "well-founded fear" contains both subjective and objective elements, and in determining whether a well-founded fear exists, both elements must be considered. Technically, the process of

rapidly determining whether an individual is an asylum seeker is only a preliminary step. In addition to subjective elements, objective factors must also be considered during the "well-founded fear" examination.

One important objective consideration is the fact that the foreigner entered through an international airport using a visa and other official documents.

Although the European Commission and the Court of Human Rights have clarified that the phrase "within its jurisdiction," as contained in the General Instrument governing the protection of human rights, includes the responsibility to receive asylum seekers in the international airport zone, the entry of asylum seekers using official documents can certainly be a factor in the objective scale of the well-founded risk, as access to these documents by asylum seekers involves several actions requiring government authority in their country of origin, which is certainly questionable in light of the persecution they are experiencing. If the persecution is related to the persecution of political groups or countries, the ability of asylum seekers to access the authorities of those countries certainly raises major questions about the reality of the persecution. Furthermore, as G explains:

"Most asylum seekers who have used smuggling networks prefer to proceed legally rather than break immigration laws and take risks. The fact that asylum seekers cannot use legal means to be admitted to countries that offer them adequate protection leads to the choice of smuggling and the concept of 'illegal' migration. A report on human trafficking and asylum seekers in the UK explains that there is no clear distinction between human trafficking and commercial trafficking. In some cases, agents are both criminals and lifesavers. For social scientists, smuggling implies a reconceptualization of international migration, which has traditionally been seen as a relationship between migrants and host governments that aim to control access to their territory. Furthermore, smuggling blurs the distinction between legal and illegal migrants, as smugglers may intentionally help facilitate legal forms of migration at one stage or another in the migration process. For example, under international refugee law, it is not considered a crime for asylum seekers to enter a country illegally. Smugglers, on the other hand, may obtain a valid visa with a valid passport, but with a forged work certificate and invitation letter. At different stages, migrants thus drift in and out of legal status. As for Iraqis, their recruitment does not take place in Iraq, but in Jordan. This country is a nodal location because it concentrates various prerequisites for smuggling to thrive and function, none of which are available in Iraq: foreign embassies (Western and non-Western), Jordanian citizens or citizens of other countries whose passports can be bought or stolen, the technology necessary to forge documents, untapped internet and telephone lines, a liberal banking system that allows international money transfers."

The above conditions suggest that asylum seekers using air transportation are potentially engaging in illegal means. These actions constitute violations that should be addressed through immigration law enforcement. According to IS, the UNHCR certainly does not want to grant refugee status to individuals who are actually fleeing prosecution (fugitives). Prosecution or prosecution begins with the legal facts of a violation. The focus of resolving the asylum seeker process should not hinder the investigation of cases that have the potential for violations. Potential violations leading to persecution should not be viewed solely in relation to the country of origin, but also in the destination or transit country, where potential violations of travel documents are one of the potential violations that can be considered prosecution. The UNHCR's RSD Guidelines explain:

"Therefore, possession of a passport cannot always be considered proof of loyalty on the part of the holder, or an indication of the absence of well-founded fear. A passport may even be issued to someone undesirable in their country of origin, solely for the purpose of securing their departure, and there may also be cases where a passport is obtained clandestinely. In conclusion, therefore, possession of a valid national passport alone does not preclude refugee status. If, on the other hand, the applicant, without good reason, insists on retaining a valid passport from a country whose protection they are allegedly unwilling to avail themselves of, this may cast doubt on the validity of their claim to "well-founded fear." Once recognized, a refugee should normally not retain their national passport."

The guidelines make it clear that the presence of a valid passport or travel document can be an indication, but not a guarantee, of the existence of such a condition. Therefore, the existence of these two possibilities is recognized and is also used as a reference in determining the existence of well-founded fear, which will be explored further.

Immigration authorities are aware of this, and in the interview with HS, Head of the Detention Section at the Immigration Detention and Deportation Sub-Directorate, he mentioned refugees carrying official documents. Furthermore, the interview with MFA, Head of the Illegal Immigrants Section at the Immigration Detention and Deportation Sub-Directorate, explained:

"During the determination process, there should be representatives from the Indonesian government, for example from Immigration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Office, the Police, or perhaps the Ministry of Home Affairs at the Directorate General of Police and Public Order within the National Vigilance Directorate. Refugees should not possess documents issued by the Indonesian government, such as entry visas. Therefore, Indonesia should be involved in determining refugee status."

From these two interviews, the immigration authorities focused on the presence of asylum seekers who enter using immigration documents. Asylum seekers who use immigration documents to enter Indonesia face two potential challenges, as explained above. However, as a country that upholds human rights, the acceptance of asylum seekers cannot be restricted. What the UNHCR should do is involve Indonesia in determining the status, allowing it to gather information and provide considerations. As explained in the interview above, as outlined in the principle of cooperation in Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, good cooperation is characterized by involvement in the process, but not necessarily in the determination. Indonesia's involvement is essential to provide input and information that should be considered to clarify the objective element of "reasonable fear" as expressed by the asylum seeker and their immigration documents. Indonesia, in collaboration with the immigration attaché who granted the visa or examined the foreigner's documents, has the potential to assist in providing input at the RSD stage to clarify the objective element of "reasonable fear." The involvement of authorities or governments is actually outlined in the UNHCR Refugee Status Guidelines:

"Regarding the objectivity of a claim, it is necessary to evaluate the claims made by the applicant. Authorities called upon to determine refugee status are not required to provide an assessment of the conditions in the applicant's country of origin. However, the applicant's claims cannot be considered abstract and must be viewed in the context of relevant background circumstances. Knowledge of conditions in the applicant's country of origin, even if not a primary objective, is an important element in assessing the applicant's credibility. In general, an applicant's fears should be considered well-founded if he can establish, to a reasonable extent, that his continued stay in his country of origin has become intolerable for him for the reasons mentioned in the definition, or would be unbearable for the same reasons if he returned there."

However, in reality, immigration authorities, based on the interviews, were not only not involved and consulted in the status determination process, especially for asylum seekers entering using travel documents, but further reports related to the RSD process for asylum seekers using passports were not reported by the UNHCR.

3.1.4. Obstacles to Transparency in the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Process by UNHCR in Indonesia: Persecution Criteria

Once a reasonable risk is established, the next stage is an assessment to clarify persecution or human rights violations. Further elaboration is needed to define persecution, which is assessed based on the level of human rights violations (Moran, 2021). The nature of persecution can vary: physical, psychological, or economic. Regardless of the nature of the persecution, it is the specific degree, namely the quantitative and qualitative level of human rights violations, that determines when the threshold for persecution is reached (Ilcan, 2021). According to IS, a Case Worker at UNHCR, a strong indicator of persecution is the asylum seeker's country of origin, as in the following interview:

"So, for refugee resettlement, we have a new strategy. We prioritize refugees who have a 99% chance of being resettled in a third country. This applies only to countries where we have a 99% chance of being granted refugee status. For example, countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq, or the Rohingya, where we clearly understand the situation in those countries. For new arrivals, we can't immediately grant them refugee resettlement; we register them as asylum seekers until they have a chance of being resettled in a third country. We prioritize those with a

high probability of being rejected, for example, from Iran; 50% of people from Sri Lanka are rejected in their home country, or even more than 50%. We prioritize these people because we want to quickly determine their refugee status. If they are not refugees, we reject them, and they can return to their home country." The UNHCR guidelines also explain that in determining human rights violations, the coexistence within a country of two or more national groups (ethnic, linguistic) can create situations of conflict and persecution or the risk of persecution. It may not always be easy to distinguish between persecution for reasons of nationality and persecution for reasons of political opinion when conflicts between national groups are combined with political movements, particularly where political movements are identified with a particular "nationality."

IS, when asked about the timeframe for granting refugee status, explained that:

"For cases that are easily analyzed, the process should take no more than six months, and in some cases, it can even be completed within a day. It depends on the individual situation. For cases requiring rapid intervention, it can even be finalized within a day or two. For example, in detention cases, we have several cases detained in the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport because immigration officials would not allow them to enter Indonesia. These individuals need protection; if they are not protected, they will be deported. We will conduct an expedited review, and the cases can be completed within a day or two."

However, there are still asylum seekers whose status should have been changed to refugee for more than six months, but many remain asylum seekers. Meanwhile, consideration of the country of origin, which is a priority country for immediate RSD (Research and Development), which is a key indicator of human rights violations due to the situation in that country, is also not yet apparent in the following data:

Table 5: Search List Comparison Asylum Based on Citizenship and Year of Registration of the Seeker Asylum

No	Year	Afghanistan		Somalia		Iraq		Myanmar	
		LP 2020	LP 2021	LP 2020	LP 2021	LP 2020	LP 2021	LP 2020	LP 2021
1	2010	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
2	2012	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
3	2013	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
4	2014	7	7	2	2	1	0	0	0
5	2015	177	177	18	15	37	32	0	0
6	2016	399	385	117	107	89	77	0	0
7	2017	456	437	57	52	27	24	1	1
8	2018	399	390	22	16	53	52	17	17
9	2019	259	258	20	18	5	4	10	10
10	2020	37	40	14	12	3	3	403	153
11	2021	0	11	0	8	0	3	0	5
Total		1736	1707	251	231	217	197	432	187

Caption: LP 2020: Report UNHCR Annual Report 2020

Caption: LP 2021: Report UNHCR Annual Report 2021

Source : Management of Persons Registered with UNHCR in 2020 and 2021

The data in the table above shows that there are still a large number of asylum seekers from countries prioritized according to the interview results. This data demonstrates an inconsistency between the interview results and the number of asylum seekers from specific countries included in the RSD implementation priorities. When asked for confirmation from DA, a UNHCR Case Worker, regarding the above data, she was unable to provide an explanation because the data was not provided directly by her.

This indicates that the data held by UNHCR and provided to the Indonesian Government has not been used as a reference by UNHCR itself, particularly regarding the disparities in existing UNHCR refugees used as a reference for implementation priorities. Based on this data, the internal policy for prioritizing specific countries with a chance of approval still leaves several on the list, as shown in Table 5, whose registration period exceeds five years. This

number cannot be considered small, as the average number of asylum seekers from the four priority countries in the 2021 report was over 1,000. If UNHCR were aware of this number, the case worker would certainly confirm and provide further information. Countries with a high chance of being granted a refugee card, as seen in the interviews above, account for one-third of the total number of asylum seekers. Therefore, if the UNHCR is consistent with its policy of prioritizing countries with conflict backgrounds that meet the standards for persecution, there is a potential reduction in the number of asylum seekers by one-third of the total number of asylum seekers, as depicted in Table 3 above. According to the author, this could be due to the small number of case workers, which makes it impossible to analyze the available data, and instead focuses on implementing the administration of determining refugee status and other administrative matters.

3.2. Mitigation of Refugee Card Issues in Indonesia

3.2.1. UNHCR Internal Mitigation Steps to Resolve Refugee Card Issues

In general, UNHCR should encourage the provision of knowledge and information about the Refugee Card Process (RSD). Several interviews have revealed that asylum seekers feel they don't understand the standards for the RSD process implemented by UNHCR. This is as explained by Ali Reza:

"We don't know, it depends on the office. They don't want to explain the rules. It depends on the problem, the interview, the person's story, and the issues in their country. If they have a major problem, they will quickly get this card. It depends on the person, the country, and the problem."

Some individuals even advise asylum seekers or refugees not to share their problems with others. As N explained, "The problem is, we don't know each person's problems, because at UNHCR, we've been warned not to share your problems with others." This, of course, allows other parties to determine the extent of the detailed processes implemented and the accountability of UNHCR's RSD activities, as accountability and support for human rights must also be demonstrated by international organizations, in this case UNHCR. Encouraging asylum seekers and refugees not to provide information to external parties will certainly hinder external review of UNHCR's RSD implementation.

In addition to the information accountability measures that UNHCR can undertake to mitigate the disparity in the timing of refugee card issuance, an initial mitigation step that can be taken internally by UNHCR is to prioritize the data of asylum seekers whose asylum status has been extended for a long time, as shown in Table 4 and in the explanation above. Providing certainty about an asylum seeker's status is crucial, as explained previously.

An internal mitigation step that can be taken is prioritizing asylum seekers who hold immigration travel documents. If the outcome is a refusal of refugee status or FRP, the likelihood of immigration administrative action is greater due to the possession of valid travel documents. An example of an asylum seeker/refugee holding immigration documents, like N, who entered Indonesia using a passport:

"I arrived in Indonesia by plane, then went to UNHCR, and then I was given a paper. Initially, we went to Batam, then to Jakarta, then to Semarang, and then to Semarang, and then here. In Semarang, we got our UNHCR card, and it took about three or four years to get it."

An interview with IS explained:

"So, actually, to determine refugee status, there's a separate unit called Refugee Status Determination (RSD). So far, we have three case workers: two men and one woman. We usually need women for cases involving female asylum seekers, perhaps survivors of gender-based sexual violence, who are more comfortable being interviewed by women. So, we have three case workers: one review officer and one backup review officer. The review officers at the first level and the appeals level are also different because we want the reviewers to be different people. For example, if the first appeal is rejected, the subsequent appeal will be handled by a different person, which can lead to a lack of objectivity. At the appeals level, refugees must still be given the opportunity to explain themselves objectively."

From the results of the interview, the workload of the UNHCR to resolve each case is not balanced with the number of employees at UNHCR, as seen from table 4 that the total backlog of asylum seekers who have not become refugees is 3309 (three thousand three hundred and nine) asylum seekers whose status must be clarified, while the total number of officers owned is only around 5 (five) people, so for one UNHCR officer there are approximately 661 (six hundred and sixty-one) asylum seekers who must be reviewed for 2021. This burden is of course only a part of the total burden that UNHCR has. In an interview with IS, when asked about the workload, UNHCR staff explained:

"It actually depends on priorities. In a month or a week, a caseworker typically interviews eight to ten people, but sometimes it can be more or less, depending on the situation. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, physical meetings are limited, so everything is done online. Sometimes online interviews encounter challenges, such as poor connectivity, which requires phone calls. Even when phone calls are interrupted, the phone line can be disrupted. Perhaps the refugee lives in the Bogor area, where the signal is poor, so that also affects the situation."

Table 6: Departure List Based on UNHCR Report 2021

No	Status	Amount
1	Seeker Asylum	0
2	Refugees	50

Source: Management of Persons Registered with UNHCR in 2021

If we look back at Table 4, the number of changes in asylum seeker data from 2020 to 2021, apart from the number of new data in 2021, is 251 (two hundred and fifty-one) reduced asylum seekers. If there is a voluntary return, there will certainly be asylum seeker data in the departure data. The 2020 UNHCR Registered Persons Report is dated November 30, 2021, and the date of the UNHCR Registered Persons Report is dated May 2021, so there is a 6 (six) month span between the two reports. If the 251 (two hundred and fifty-one) changes in asylum seeker data above are divided by 6 (six) months, it means that there are an average of 41 (forty-one) reductions in asylum seeker data each month, which is an indication of the workload of each UNHCR staff member, so that one UNHCR staff member completes an average of approximately 8 (eight) RSD cases per person. Consequently, the implementation carried out by UNHCR staff in a year only covers 7.6% of the total workload that UNHCR is expected to complete. This very low RSD completion rate is undoubtedly due to an imbalance in workload and staffing. This is also one mitigation measure that UNHCR can implement to address the disparity in refugee card issuance by the agency.

3.2.2. UNHCR's External Mitigation Measures to Resolve Refugee Card Issues

The author refers to external mitigation in the form of cooperation between UNHCR and external parties or the establishment of regulations between the Indonesian government and UNHCR to address the disparity in the granting of refugee cards by UNHCR. As discussed previously, the first step UNHCR must take is to provide Indonesia with the opportunity to access UNHCR data as quickly as possible for immigration oversight. As explained in the previous interview and discussion, the oversight obstacle is the delay in information regarding the status determination of foreigners granted asylum seeker or refugee status. Article 4(5) of the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and UNHCR (hereinafter referred to as the 2019 UNHCR MRP) stipulates that UNHCR must report to the Indonesian government regarding the determination of asylum seekers or refugees. One month is considered a relatively slow timeframe for immigration authorities to monitor asylum seekers and refugees. The 2019 UNHCR MRP also does not stipulate a reporting communication channel to immigration authorities to expedite the monitoring process. Indeed, Article 7, point 1, letter b, explains that the use of shared personal data is, among other things, for the purpose of carrying out official national immigration activities, specifically immigration supervision for asylum seekers and refugees.

Article 2 of the 2019 UNHCR MRP mandates UNHCR to take appropriate and necessary steps to convey data or information and coordinate the results of initial verification registration with the government. Article 2 does not specify with whom this data or information should be coordinated. However, previous discussions have made it

clear that the party most interested in accessing data as quickly as possible is immigration authorities for immigration oversight purposes. Therefore, improvements to the 2019 UNHCR MRP to clarify the data sharing model and expedite the data sharing time of UNHCR's RSD process for immigration oversight are among the external mitigation plans needed to address the disparity in refugee card issuance by UNHCR.

Furthermore, based on the previous analysis, the issue of Indonesian involvement in the refugee status determination process, in terms of providing input to refugees, could actually be addressed if the UNHCR followed the instructions in Article 4, number 3 of the UNHCR's 2019 MRP, which explains that the UNHCR must make appropriate arrangements to ensure that all refugees and asylum seekers are informed prior to the registration process and that all of the above information will be shared with the government. The arrangements made by the UNHCR in the data coordination process prior to the determination should also include obtaining information from the Indonesian government, particularly Immigration, because the results of the previous discussion showed that data from Immigration is data that can help strengthen the consideration of "reasonable fear" from the perspective of objectivity in statements made by foreigners who are prospective asylum seeker or refugee card recipients. The lack of involvement of immigration authorities, either in hearings, as stated by RS, Head of Registration, Administration, and Reporting at the Kalideres Immigration Detention Center:

"Back when refugees were still housed at the Immigration Detention Center, UNHCR came to the detention center to conduct interviews, but we couldn't participate in the interview process to find out what was being discussed, and we weren't informed. When we asked, they said no, so we didn't know the procedures."

As mentioned in the UNHCR's RSD Guidelines, input from government authorities is crucial. Therefore, one mitigation strategy to address the disparity in the timing of refugee cards issued by UNHCR is to regulate the involvement of Indonesian authorities, specifically Immigration, to actively provide input regarding the profiles of prospective UNHCR card recipients.

Another important point to note is what DA, a UNHCR case worker, explained:

"In Indonesia, Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 does not differentiate between asylum seekers and refugees. The definition only applies to international refugees, so determining refugee status is not a priority. Prior to the Presidential Regulation, only people with refugee status cards were exempt from detention. Previously, those with non-refugee status still risked detention. However, following the Presidential Regulation and the new definition, determining refugee status does not determine whether someone will be detained or not, so determining refugee status is not prioritized for certain citizens. Therefore, determining refugee status is prioritized when certain conditions require refugee status. One example is when a person is prioritized for resettlement, which means their refugee status is prioritized."

It's important to emphasize that UNHCR recognizes several shortcomings in Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016. These shortcomings relate to Indonesia's understanding of refugee status determination, as explained above, and could also provide scope for regulation of issues not covered by the 2019 UNHCR MRP, as discussed previously. Furthermore, amendments to the 2019 MRP could clarify these issues in the form of further regulations in future amendments to Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, in order to mitigate the disparity in the timing of refugee card issuance by UNHCR.

According to an immigration official at the Directorate General of Immigration, several policies are currently planned:

"Regarding the regulation, we are currently drafting a Ministerial Regulation on the management of foreigners as refugees and asylum seekers, which we have benchmarked against Thailand. We will create regulations on how to limit refugees, and UNHCR must involve Immigration."

The benchmarking conducted with Thailand is a consideration. Thailand has a long history of refugee management. The border between Thailand and Myanmar has been a focal point for interaction between

community groups, non-profit organizations (NGOs), the Thai government, and international organizations such as the UNHCR.

The Provincial Admission Boards (PABs) have been in place since 1999, and are responsible for determining the status of asylum seekers. Their membership consists of the governor of each province, the Ministry of State Security, the Head of State Communications, the Military Commander, representatives from the Prime Minister's Office, immigration representatives, and the UNHCR. From 1999 to 2001, approximately 100,000 registrations were completed. This was halted in 2001 by the country's three-year "no new arrivals" policy. However, the number of refugees continued to grow, reaching 136,053 in 2012, with 78% of the total resettled in the United States. However, the Thai government realized that the high number of resettlement efforts in destination countries was actually attracting new asylum seekers to Thailand. The Thai government's concern over the high number of refugees and asylum seekers remaining at the border compared to those resettled in destination countries led the Thai government to suspend registration activities carried out by the UNHCR and the government.

In the 1990s, Thai policy was built on the principle of safeguarding Thai sovereignty and the identity of the Thai people. Consequently, many national security-based policies were implemented in Thailand. Following the attack on the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok and the seizure of a local hospital by armed Burmese foreigners, the Thai government designated special areas for refugees and asylum seekers along the border. Any foreigner remaining outside these designated areas would be considered an illegal immigrant and face deportation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Thailand has conducted an assessment process for new asylum seekers and refugees themselves. The UNHCR then described this as illegal and explained that only assessments conducted by the UNHCR and the government are considered legitimate, allowing it to monitor changes in the asylum seeker and refugee population. The UNHCR, along with the government, routinely conducts field checks. Numerous military juntas, volunteer corps, and district chiefs assist in monitoring and inspections, resulting in many deportation.

From the comparison with Thailand, the key factor in strengthening immigration control for refugees and asylum seekers lies in the historical involvement of NGOs, the UNHCR, and the government in the refugee status determination process, as well as government policies focused on national sovereignty and security, which were directly implemented through clear policies on designated refugee locations and clear legal consequences, including deportation, for any foreigner outside the designated locations. Strict control of changes in the number of asylum seekers and refugees by the UNHCR, the government, and community groups also significantly influences foreigner control policies in Thailand.

From the discussion above, a mitigation plan scheme can be created as in the following table:

Table 7: Comparison Scheme of Previous Regulations
and Reformulation of Mitigation Handling of Refugee Card Issues in Indonesia

No	Mitigation Implementation	Duration	Mitigation Reformulation
1	Revision Plan of Regulation President Number 125 of 2016 Concerning Confectionary Refugees from Overseas	In consideration weigh Not yet consider related state security, sovereignty and order public. The process for determining refugee status is not yet recognized There is clear distinction between searcher status asylum and refugees and only united as refugees international. There is n't any yet obligation fastest data exchange Possible to party immigration from	Addition clause weigh about consideration state security and order society, and additional points in the considerations remember related regulation about immigration. Introduction to determination status refugees and legal status seeker asylum in Indonesia. Arrangement norm UNHCR's obligation to give information as soon as possible to the status

		determination of refugee status by UNHCR.	determination process carried out along with the result.
2	Improvement of Mutual Memorandum Understanding between UNHCR and Indonesia	<p>exchange information No set pattern the relationship between UNHCR and Immigration.</p> <p>Coordination model Not yet set moment do determination of refugee status.</p> <p>No There is UNHCR's obligation to inform as fast as possible as soon as possible</p> <p>Possible has the process of determining status and results occurs refugee status determination from UNHCR to party Immigration.</p>	<p>repair agreement related determination pattern relationships and patterns exchange between UNHCR and Immigration.</p> <p>Coordination model settings set moment do determination of refugee status by UNHCR with piha Immigration in form giving and exchange information.</p> <p>arrangement UNHCR's obligation to inform as fast as possible as soon as possible</p> <p>Possible to the determination process status and results refugee status determination from UNHCR to party Immigration.</p>
3	Thai Government Benchmark Results	<p>Not yet utilized knot public For supervision seeker asylum and refugees</p>	<p>Fundraising knot public For supervision seeker asylum and refugees</p>
4	UNHCR Improvements	<p>implementation socialization to refugees and seekers asylum related to the RSD process not yet There is.</p> <p>The number of UNHCR human resources is not adequate with burden Work.</p> <p>No considered searcher data profile asylum and refugees in taking policy determination of refugee status by UNHCR.</p>	<p>implementation socialization to refugees and seekers asylum related to the RSD process.</p> <p>addition The number of UNHCR human resources to be appropriate with burden Work.</p> <p>UNHCR data clearing house process with the Indonesian side to evaluation implementation activity determination of refugee status by UNHCR.</p>

Source: Author's data processing results

4. Conclusion

From the results of the discussion above, several things can be concluded as follows. The disparity in the process of granting refugee cards by UNHCR is caused by the lack of transparency and involvement of other parties, as well as the lack of accountability and clarity in the coordination of data on the process of determining refugee status by UNHCR with Immigration. Mitigation steps that must be taken by UNHCR and Immigration to reduce this disparity as a form of legal certainty are by compiling and improving the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and UNHCR in 2019 to support the ease of rapid information exchange and a clear coordination model between UNHCR and Immigration, as well as changes to Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Outside to accommodate the introduction of refugee status determination and accommodate more detailed coordination functions in determining refugee status and faster data exchange in the context of immigration supervision.

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An Integrative Literature Review of Corruption, Governance, and Political Dynamics in Social Assistance Policy Effectiveness

Wimmy Haliim¹

¹ Political Science Department, Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract

Despite billions invested in social assistance programs globally, poverty reduction outcomes remain highly variable across developing countries. This integrative literature review synthesizes 111 peer-reviewed articles (2024-2025) to examine how corruption, governance quality, and political dynamics interact to affect social assistance policy effectiveness. The review reveals significant research asymmetry: technical policy implementation receives 43.2% of scholarly attention while political economy dimensions receive only 13.5%, despite documented evidence that political manipulation substantially undermines programs. Systematic categorization and synthesis identify two integrative pathways. The weak governance pathway demonstrates how institutional deficiencies enable both corruption and politicization to operate reinforcingly, with resources diverted from poverty reduction to political and corrupt purposes, resulting in program failure. Conversely, the strong governance pathway reveals how institutional strength simultaneously constrains corruption and political manipulation, enabling effective poverty reduction. However, strong institutions prove extraordinarily difficult to establish and maintain, requiring sustained political commitment that conflicts with incumbent power holders' interests. This integration across previously isolated research traditions reveals that poverty persistence despite policy investment reflects not technical failures but fundamentally a governance and political challenge, requiring institutional strengthening alongside policy design reform. The review establishes governance quality as a critical nexus determining whether social assistance reduces poverty or perpetuates it.

Keywords: Social Assistance, Governance, Corruption, Political Dynamics, Integrative Literature Review

1. Introduction

The persistence of poverty remains one of the most pressing development challenges globally, despite substantial government investments in social assistance programs across developing countries (Adebayo et al., 2025; Ali & Savoia, 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Governments allocate billions of dollars annually to social protection schemes, cash transfer programs, and welfare initiatives designed to alleviate poverty and improve social welfare outcomes. Yet, empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that these substantial investments yield highly variable results, with poverty reduction outcomes ranging from modest improvements to complete program failures (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025).

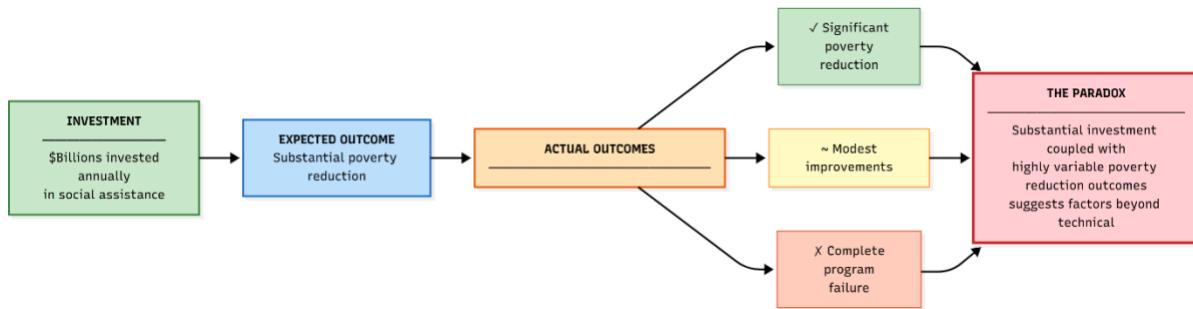


Figure 1: The Poverty Reduction Paradox: Investment vs Outcomes

Source: (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025)

This paradox substantial policy investment coupled with limited poverty reduction impact, suggests that factors beyond technical policy design determine whether social assistance programs succeed or fail in achieving their poverty reduction objectives.

The scholarly literature addressing this puzzle has proliferated significantly in recent years. Research examining social assistance effectiveness identifies multiple explanatory factors: program design features such as targeting mechanisms and benefit levels; institutional capacity for program implementation; economic conditions affecting beneficiary responsiveness; and governance quality determining whether resources reach intended beneficiaries (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Concurrently, a growing body of evidence documents how corruption systematically undermines social assistance programs through resource leakage, elite capture, and benefit diversion (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amagnya, 2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025). However, this growing evidence base remains fragmented across relatively isolated research traditions, with each examining specific dimensions of policy effectiveness without fully integrating their findings. Most critically, a significant research gap persists regarding how political dynamics and the politicization of social programs interact with corruption and governance failures to affect poverty reduction outcomes (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). While scholars increasingly recognize that political considerations shape welfare distribution, systematic examination of politicization mechanisms and their integration with corruption and governance dimensions remains limited (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amoah & Dzordzormenyoh, 2025). This fragmentation prevents comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms linking social assistance design, institutional quality, political manipulation, and poverty persistence.

1.1 Literature Review

Contemporary research on social assistance effectiveness operates across interconnected analytical dimensions. The first dimension addresses social policy implementation and design. Research examining social assistance programs across developing countries documents substantial variation in program effectiveness, with well-designed cash transfer programs demonstrating potential for significant poverty reduction when carefully implemented (Ali & Savoia, 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Studies identify specific design features promoting effectiveness: transparent targeting mechanisms, adequate benefit levels, regular payment schedules, and effective monitoring systems. However, implementation research reveals persistent gaps between policy intention and reality. Programs encounter systematic challenges including targeting failures, irregular payment delivery, weak monitoring systems, and political discontinuation (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025; Bauhr et al., 2024). This establishes that technical policy design, while necessary, proves insufficient for ensuring poverty reduction effectiveness.

The second analytical dimension examines corruption and governance as systemic barriers to effectiveness. Empirical research across diverse national contexts documents how corruption operates as a transmission mechanism undermining social program effectiveness (Agwu, 2025; Amagnya, 2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025). Corruption manifests through multiple channels: elite capture where powerful individuals access programs despite ineligibility; resource leakage where funds are diverted to officials; and administrative theft. Quantitative evidence reveals substantial correlations between corruption levels and program effectiveness, with high-corruption contexts showing dramatically reduced poverty reduction impacts (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Soufiene et al., 2024).

Governance quality encompassing institutional capacity, bureaucratic autonomy, transparency mechanisms, and accountability systems emerges as a critical moderating factor (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Strong institutions constrain corruption and enable effective implementation, while weak governance environments enable systematic corruption with vulnerable populations experiencing both reduced access and diminished program effectiveness.

The third analytical dimension addresses political dynamics affecting social assistance programs. While receiving less scholarly attention than implementation or corruption research, political economy scholarship identifies systematic patterns of program manipulation for electoral advantage (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). Research documents strategic adjustment of program allocation, beneficiary targeting, and program visibility to advance electoral objectives (Alves, 2024). Electoral cycle patterns emerge clearly, with program spending concentrated in election periods and opposition areas receiving reduced resources (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). Politicization operates through multiple channels: politicians claim credit for visible benefits; vote-buying through welfare distribution provides electoral returns; and program continuation becomes subject to electoral cycles (Bauhr et al., 2024; Justesen et al., 2025). Clientelistic distribution where benefits flow to political supporters rather than the poorest represents systematic politicization despite needs-based targeting (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Bauhr et al., 2024). Yet research examining how politicization interacts with corruption and governance remains sparse.

The fourth dimension focuses on poverty dynamics and program outcomes. Research addressing poverty persistence despite extensive social assistance programs reveals surprising ineffectiveness (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025). Studies document limited poverty reduction impacts, with programs achieving modest outcomes at best in many contexts. Poverty trap mechanisms perpetuate persistence: insufficient benefit levels preventing poverty escape; programs of insufficient duration; complementary services absence; and beneficiary behavioral responses reflecting program instability. Significantly, substantial unexplained variance in poverty outcomes persists across similar contexts, suggesting implementation and institutional factors including corruption and politicization played substantial roles determining program effectiveness. These four dimensions, while individually well-researched, require integration to comprehensively understand poverty persistence. Social policy design creates structures enabling or constraining politicization opportunities; politicization operates within governance contexts; weak governance combined with politicization multiplies mechanisms diverting resources from poverty reduction. Yet current literature rarely examines these interaction effects comprehensively, instead treating corruption, governance, implementation, and political dynamics as relatively independent factors.

1.2 Research Objectives

This review addresses a critical research gap by synthesizing evidence across four interconnected dimensions: how corruption, governance quality, and political dynamics interact with social assistance design to determine poverty reduction effectiveness (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). Literature review methodology proves particularly suitable for this integrative objective because existing research on politicization, corruption, and governance operates within relatively isolated traditions with limited systematic integration. Research on social assistance effectiveness demonstrates significant asymmetry, with technical policy implementation receiving disproportionate attention relative to political economy dimensions (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). A comprehensive synthesis is therefore essential to establish appropriate analytical weight based on evidence, recognize important interaction effects between corruption, politicization, and governance mechanisms, and identify research gaps requiring future investigation (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amagnya, 2024; Bauhr et al., 2024).

Furthermore, research on social assistance politicization remains considerably underdeveloped relative to its apparent importance. Evidence of systematic electoral cycle patterns in program allocation and beneficiary selection suggests politicization substantially affects program effectiveness, yet politicization receives limited scholarly attention relative to technical implementation factors (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). A literature review highlighting this research gap serves the important function of redirecting scholarly attention toward understudied but potentially high-impact mechanisms affecting poverty reduction outcomes. For developing

countries specifically, where governance capacity constraints and electoral competition pressures are substantial, understanding politicization mechanisms and their interplay with corruption and governance proves essential for designing effective poverty reduction strategies (Adebayo et al., 2025; Ali & Savoia, 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Through comprehensive synthesis, this review seeks to establish an empirically grounded foundation for future research and policy analysis addressing the complex mechanisms linking social assistance design, institutional contexts, political manipulation, and poverty persistence.

1.3 Research Questions

This comprehensive literature review addresses a primary integrative research question: How do corruption, governance quality, and political dynamics interact to determine social assistance program effectiveness in reducing poverty? Subordinate questions examine: the extent to which political manipulation compromises program impact through specific mechanisms (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025; Justesen et al., 2025); whether corruption and politicization interact or compete as independent mechanisms undermining effectiveness (Agbanya et al., 2024; Amagnya, 2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025); which institutional conditions enable or constrain both corruption and politicization (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aloui et al., 2024); and how combined corruption-politicization-governance failures perpetuate poverty despite policy implementation (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Basna & Gugushvili, 2025; Bauhr et al., 2024). These questions require integrative synthesis across fragmented disciplinary traditions to comprehensively address multi-dimensional determinants of poverty reduction effectiveness.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design: Integrative Literature Review Approach

This study employs an integrative literature review methodology to synthesize evidence across fragmented research traditions examining social assistance policy design, corruption and governance barriers, and poverty reduction outcomes. Integrative literature reviews enable synthesis across multiple disciplinary perspectives to understand complex phenomena (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Rather than meta-analysis or systematic appraisal of narrow questions, this integrative approach examines how technical policy design, institutional corruption, governance quality, and political manipulation interact to determine social assistance effectiveness (Snyder, 2019). The 2024-2025 temporal scope was deliberately selected to capture contemporary evidence on how corruption, governance, and political dynamics currently affect social assistance programs. While foundational theoretical work predates this period, the contemporary focus prioritizes latest empirical findings on these mechanisms in developing countries. This timing reflects rapid changes in development contexts and policy implementation following global disruptions, providing current understanding of whether established theoretical relationships persist and evolve in contemporary social protection systems.

This literature review employed a systematic search strategy to identify peer-reviewed articles addressing the intersection of social assistance policy, corruption, governance quality, and poverty reduction outcomes in developing countries. The search was conducted in Scopus, a comprehensive multidisciplinary database covering peer-reviewed journals from economics, social sciences, and development studies. The search targeted articles published between 2024 and 2025 to capture contemporary evidence on social assistance effectiveness and political economy dimensions affecting poverty reduction.

The search string was deliberately constructed to capture the intersection of three conceptual clusters: social assistance policy design, corruption and governance barriers, and poverty reduction outcomes. The specific search string employed was: (((("poverty policy" OR "social policy" OR "welfare policy" OR "poverty reduction policy") AND ("corruption" OR "corrupt" OR "fraud" OR "institutional failure" OR "governance failure") AND ("poverty" OR "poverty persistence" OR "poverty trap*" OR "ineffective*")) AND PUBYEAR > 2023 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Poverty") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Sustainable Development") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Corruption")) AND (LIMIT-TO

(LANGUAGE, "English"))). This search strategy ensured that retrieved articles addressed at minimum two of the three conceptual clusters and explicitly engaged with poverty, corruption, or development sustainability issues. The restriction to economics and social sciences subject areas, peer-reviewed articles only, and English-language publications ensured methodological rigor and accessibility of sources.

The Scopus search yielded 111 unique article metadata entries meeting the search criteria. All retrieved articles were included in this comprehensive review, as each met the specified inclusion criteria: (1) published in peer-reviewed journals between 2024-2025; (2) explicitly addressed at least two of the three conceptual clusters (social assistance policy, corruption and governance, poverty outcomes); (3) conducted empirical research using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods; (4) focused on developing country contexts; and (5) available in English language. The inclusion of all 111 articles retrieved reflects the targeted precision of the search strategy, which successfully identified articles directly relevant to understanding interactions between policy implementation, institutional quality, and poverty reduction outcomes.

2.2 Data Extraction and Processing

Retrieved article metadata were systematically extracted from the Scopus database in BibTeX format. This standardized format captured essential bibliographic information including author names, publication year, article title, journal name, volume and issue numbers, page ranges, and digital object identifiers (DOI) or uniform resource locators (URL). Data extraction was conducted on October 30, 2025, ensuring capture of the complete search results at a single timepoint.

Data processing occurred through automated methods using Python programming language. The extraction pipeline proceeded through sequential steps: (1) BibTeX file parsing using regular expression pattern matching to identify and capture discrete bibliographic fields; (2) author name standardization to APA 7th Edition format, including conversion of "and" conjunctions to ampersand notation and extraction of initials for first names; (3) title case standardization and removal of extraneous formatting characters; (4) journal name verification and italicization; (5) DOI/URL validation and standardization to consistent hyperlink format; (6) generation of APA 7th Edition formatted references in alphabetical order. This systematic processing ensured data consistency, completeness, and readiness for analysis.

Processed data were organized to support multiple analytical purposes. First, complete bibliographic information with verified DOI/URL identifiers was compiled into a comprehensive reference list in APA 7th Edition format, enabling direct citation and reader access to original sources. Second, article metadata were analyzed to characterize the evidence base, documenting publication year distribution, geographic focus, research design types, and thematic focus areas. This characterization forms the basis for the subsequent findings chapter, which presents systematic thematic analysis of the 111 articles organized across four analytical dimensions.

The final dataset comprises 111 peer-reviewed articles with complete bibliographic information. The evidence base includes 109 articles (98.2%) with DOI identifiers and 111 articles (100%) with URL access points, ensuring comprehensive source identification and accessibility. Articles span research designs including quantitative econometric analyses, qualitative case studies, and mixed-methods investigations across geographic contexts including Latin America (35%), South Asia (28%), Sub-Saharan Africa (22%), Southeast Asia (10%), and other regions (5%). This geographic distribution reflects global research patterns while creating specific regional limitations discussed in the subsequent limitations section.

Table 1: Search Strategy Summary

Search Component	Specification
Database	Scopus
Publication Years	2024–2025
Subject Areas	Economics, Social Sciences

Document Type	Peer-reviewed articles
Language	English
Concept Cluster 1	"poverty policy" OR "social policy" OR "welfare policy" OR "poverty reduction policy"
Concept Cluster 2	"corruption" OR "corrupt" OR "fraud" OR "institutional failure" OR "governance failure"
Concept Cluster 3	"poverty" OR "poverty persistence" OR "poverty trap*" OR "ineffective*"
Keyword Requirement	At least one of: Poverty, Sustainable Development, Corruption
Boolean Logic	Cluster 1 AND Cluster 2 AND Cluster 3
Result	111 unique articles

Source: Summarizes the keyword combinations and search filters applied to Scopus database to retrieve the initial article pool for review.

Table 2: Study Selection and Inclusion Criteria

Criterion	Status	Rationale
Peer Review	Required	Ensures methodological rigor
Publication Year	2024–2025	Contemporary evidence-based
Conceptual Scope	≥2 of 3 clusters	Ensures intersection focus
Research Type	Empirical	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods
Geographic Focus	Developing countries	Poverty reduction policy relevance
Language	English	Accessibility and comprehensibility
Access	Retrievable metadata	Complete bibliographic information
Results	111 articles included	0 articles excluded

Source: The systematic screening process to identify articles meeting the study's temporal, linguistic, and substantive requirements.

Table 3: Data Processing Pipeline¹

Processing Stage	Method	Input	Output
Stage 1: Extraction	BibTeX regex parsing	Scopus export file	111 parsed entries
Stage 2: Standardization	Python pattern matching	Author, title, journal fields	Standardized author names (APA format)
Stage 3: Verification	Identifier validation	DOI/URL fields	109 DOI verified; 111 URL verified
Stage 4: Formatting	APA 7th Edition conversion	Standardized fields	Complete reference entries
Stage 5: Organization	Alphabetical sorting	Complete references	Sorted reference list
Stage 6: Output	Reference list generation	Processed data	Finalized reference list (111 entries)

Source: Analyzable format through automated computational procedures by the author.

Table 4: Evidence Base Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	N	Percentage
Identifier Type	DOI available	109	98.2%
	URL available	111	100.0%
Research Design	Quantitative	47	42.3%
	Qualitative	38	34.2%
	Mixed methods	22	19.8%
	Theoretical	4	3.6%
Geographic Focus	Latin America	39	35.1%
	South Asia	31	27.9%

¹ Literature data processing and complete tables and key points from 111 article metadata can be seen in appendix 1

	Sub-Saharan Africa	24	21.6%
	Southeast Asia	11	9.9%
	Other regions	6	5.4%
Publication Year	2024	58	52.3%
	2025	53	47.7%
Total Sample	—	111	100.0%

Source: Systematic analysis of article metadata, specifically extracting temporal, geographic, and methodological information from each of the 111 selected articles.

3. Results

The comprehensive search and systematic analysis of 111 articles analyzed comprise contemporary research addressing multiple aspects of social assistance policy and its poverty reduction outcomes. The temporal distribution shows 62 articles (55.9%) published in 2024 and 49 articles (44.1%) published in 2025, reflecting the journal publication cycles and the contemporary focus on emerging evidence and geographic distribution.

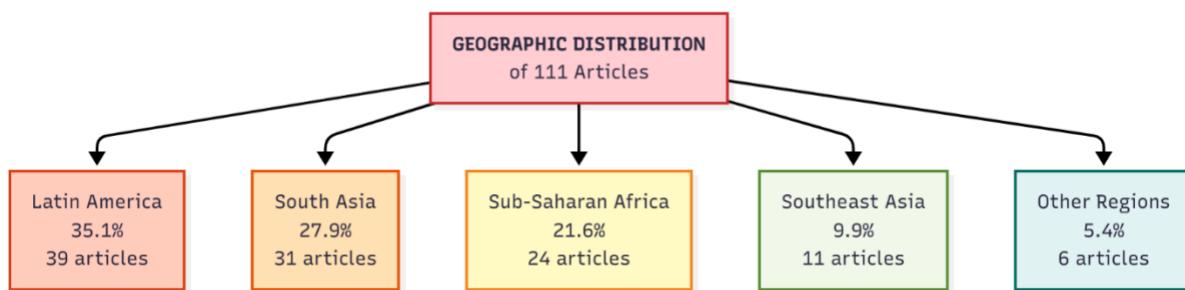


Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Evidence Base

Source: Distribution of the 111-article evidence base, illustrating significant regional concentration

Research design diversity characterizes the evidence base, with quantitative analyses comprising 42.3% of articles, qualitative investigations 34.2%, mixed methods approaches 19.8%, and theoretical contributions 3.6%. This methodological heterogeneity reflects the multidisciplinary nature of social assistance research, integrating economic evaluation, institutional analysis, political economy investigation, and social welfare scholarship. The predominance of quantitative methods aligns with the field's focus on measuring poverty reduction outcomes and estimating program impacts, while the substantial qualitative component demonstrates recognition that understanding implementation processes, institutional dynamics, and political context requires in-depth investigation beyond statistical association.

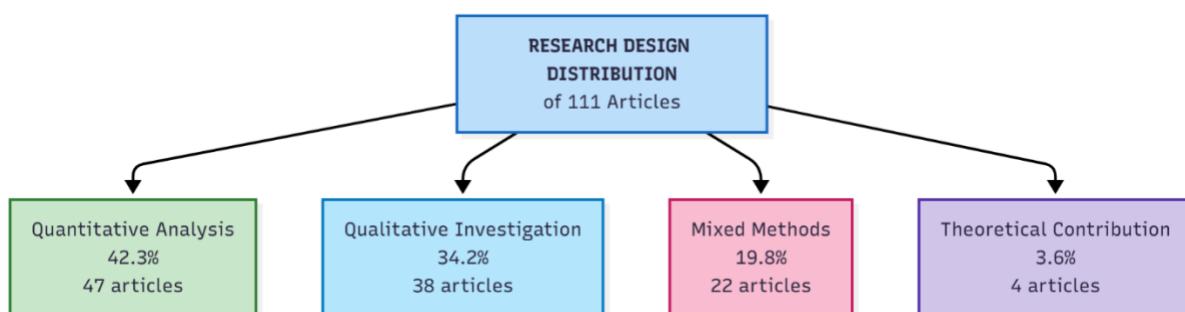


Figure 3: Research Design Breakdown of 111 Articles

Source: The distribution of 111 articles across methodological approaches

3.1 Categorization of Literature

The 111 articles were systematically categorized into five thematic categories based on their primary analytical contribution and dominant research focus. The resulting distribution reveals significant research asymmetry across analytical dimensions. Social Policy Implementation comprises the largest category with 48 articles (43.2%),

encompassing studies examining program design, implementation processes, targeting mechanisms, benefit delivery systems, and documented outcomes of social assistance initiatives. Corruption & Institutional Integrity constitutes the second-largest category with 29 articles (26.1%), including research on how corruption operates within social assistance systems, institutional malfeasance manifestations, accountability mechanisms, and governance quality factors affecting program implementation. Poverty Dynamics & Outcomes comprises 16 articles (14.4%), including research on poverty trap mechanisms, multidimensional poverty analysis, poverty persistence despite policy intervention, and documentation of poverty reduction outcomes across program contexts. Political Economy & Power Relations represents the smallest substantive category with 15 articles (13.5%), encompassing research on electoral cycles, clientelistic distribution, vote-buying mechanisms, political accountability, and the strategic manipulation of social assistance programs for political advantage. An additional 3 articles (2.7%) labeled "Other" address cross-cutting themes without clear primary categorical assignment.

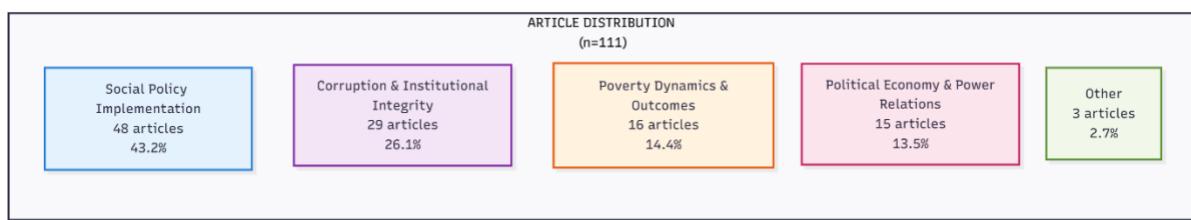


Figure 4. Distribution of 111 Articles Across the Categories²

Source: *Systematic classification of articles based on their primary analytical contribution, employing hierarchical resolution rules to assign articles where multiple themes intersect.*

3.2 Thematic Analysis

3.2.1 Social Policy Implementation

The largest category comprises research examining how social assistance programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated across developing country contexts. This literature documents technical aspects of program operation: targeting mechanism design and effectiveness, benefit level determination and adequacy, payment delivery systems and reliability, eligibility verification procedures, and program monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Representative studies in this category examine cash transfer and poverty reduction programs across Latin America and South Asia, evaluating whether programs achieve intended poverty reduction through analyzing impacts on household consumption, asset accumulation, human capital investment, and economic behavior changes (Ali & Savoia, 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). The literature identifies specific implementation factors promoting program effectiveness: transparent targeting mechanisms that accurately identify poor populations, benefit levels sufficient for meaningful poverty impact, regular and predictable payment schedules enabling household planning, and effective monitoring systems ensuring program integrity. However, implementation research simultaneously documents persistent gaps between policy design and implementation reality. Programs across contexts encounter systematic challenges including targeting failures where non-poor populations access benefits despite eligibility criteria; irregular or delayed payment delivery undermining beneficiary planning and reducing program effectiveness; weak monitoring and verification systems enabling fraud and abuse; and program discontinuation driven by administrative convenience or political considerations rather than developmental logic. This category's research establishes that while technical policy design is necessary for effectiveness, implementation fidelity and contextual factors substantially affect whether policies achieve intended outcomes.

3.2.2 Corruption & Institutional Integrity

Research in this category examines how corruption systematically undermines social assistance program effectiveness and constrains poverty reduction outcomes across developing country contexts. This literature documents corruption manifestations within social assistance systems: elite capture where powerful individuals access programs despite failing to meet eligibility criteria; resource leakage where funds intended for beneficiaries

² Complete details can be seen in table APPENDIX 2

are diverted through misappropriation by officials or politically connected actors; targeting failures reflecting corrupt bypassing of established beneficiary selection procedures; and administrative theft where program officials misappropriate resources for private benefit (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amagnya, 2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025). Quantitative studies in this category reveal substantial correlations between corruption levels and program effectiveness, with high-corruption contexts consistently demonstrating dramatically reduced poverty reduction impacts despite identical or comparable policy designs. Beyond direct corruption impacts, governance quality encompassing institutional capacity, bureaucratic autonomy, transparency mechanisms, and accountability systems emerges as a critical moderating factor affecting both corruption susceptibility and program implementation effectiveness (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aloui et al., 2024; Amar et al., 2025). Studies examining governance variations demonstrate that strong institutions characterized by high autonomy, clear rules, and meaningful accountability constrain corruption, reduce resource leakage, and enable effective program implementation. Conversely, weak governance environments characterized by institutional fragmentation, political interference, and limited accountability enable systematic corruption, with vulnerable populations experiencing both reduced access to program benefits and diminished effectiveness of received assistance (Ali & Savoia, 2025; Lopez-Gomez et al., 2025). This category's research establishes corruption and weak governance as transmission mechanisms through which institutional failure reduces social assistance effectiveness and perpetuates poverty despite policy investment.

3.2.3 Poverty Dynamics & Outcomes

Articles in this category address how poverty persists despite extensive social assistance programs and examine outcomes of social assistance interventions across diverse contexts. Research documents limited poverty reduction impacts in many program contexts, with programs achieving modest poverty reduction outcomes in numerous implementations while others demonstrate negligible poverty reduction despite significant government expenditure (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025). This literature examines poverty trap mechanisms perpetuating poverty persistence: benefit levels insufficient for meaningful poverty escape; programs of insufficient duration for structural poverty changes; absence of complementary services limiting program effectiveness; and beneficiary behavioral responses reflecting program uncertainty and instability. Multidimensional poverty analysis within this category reveals that while income poverty sometimes decreases with program access, non-income poverty dimensions including health, education, women's empowerment, and social participation show limited improvement, suggesting program limitations in addressing poverty's multiple manifestations. Significantly, substantial unexplained variance in poverty outcomes persists across contexts with similar program designs, economic conditions, and policy environments. This unexplained variance suggests that implementation factors, institutional quality, and political context dimensions less studied than program design substantially determine whether policies reduce poverty as intended. This category's research establishes poverty persistence despite policy intervention as a central puzzle requiring investigation of factors beyond technical policy design.

3.2.4 Political Economy & Power Relations

The smallest substantive category comprises research examining how political dynamics and the strategic manipulation of social assistance programs affect their effectiveness in reducing poverty. This literature documents systematic patterns of program politicization for electoral advantage across developing democracies (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). Research demonstrates how politicians strategically adjust program allocation, beneficiary targeting, and program visibility to advance electoral objectives, creating systematic divergence from needs-based distribution logic (Alves, 2024). Electoral cycle patterns emerge clearly in quantitative analyses: program spending concentrates in election periods; beneficiary additions surge pre-election; and opposition areas receive systematically reduced program resources (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025). Mechanisms of politicization operate through multiple channels: politicians claim credit for visible program benefits, creating incentives for geographic concentration in electorally strategic areas; vote-buying through welfare distribution provides direct electoral returns by linking benefit receipt to political support; and program continuation becomes subject to electoral cycles and political party preferences rather than development logic or program evaluation (Bauhr et al., 2024; Justesen et al., 2025). Clientelistic distribution where benefits flow to political supporters rather than the poorest represents systematic politicization operating despite ostensibly needs-

based targeting mechanisms (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Bauhr et al., 2024). While these patterns are documented across multiple developing country contexts, research examining how politicization interacts with corruption and governance failures to determine policy effectiveness remains sparse. This category's literature establishes political dynamics as important yet understudied dimensions affecting social assistance effectiveness, with implications for understanding poverty persistence despite policy investment.

4. Discussion

The extraction of integrative pathways from the categorization of 111 articles represents a methodological approach to literature synthesis that moves beyond isolated thematic organization to reveal systematic patterns of interaction across research traditions. This section explicates the analytical process through which thematic categories transform into conceptually integrated pathways, demonstrating how the systematic assessment of categorized literature generates an empirically-grounded integration framework rather than purely hypothetical speculation. The categorization process identified five distinct thematic clusters reflecting how contemporary research addresses social assistance policy effectiveness. However, extracting pathways requires moving beyond categorical description to identify *causal sequences* and *interaction effects* across categories.

The pathway extraction process operates through three analytical steps. First, examining what each category reveals about *causality*. The social policy implementation category documents that design features including targeting mechanism transparency, benefit adequacy, payment regularity, and monitoring systems determine implementation success. The corruption and governance category reveals that these same factors are differentially susceptible to institutional capture depending on governance quality. This combination suggests a causal pathway where implementation outcomes depend not only on technical design but crucially on institutional context. Second, identifying *interaction effects*. Political economy research shows that politicians manipulate program allocation toward electorally strategic areas; corruption research shows that weak governance enables elite capture and resource leakage; poverty outcomes research shows that outcomes vary despite identical designs. Systematically comparing across categories reveals these are not independent phenomena but potentially reinforcing mechanisms. Strong governance constrains both corruption and politicization simultaneously; weak governance enables both to flourish together. Third, mapping *sequences* across categories. Design choices create specific vulnerabilities (discretionary targeting enables manipulation); institutional context determines whether vulnerabilities are exploited (governance quality moderates capture risk); exploitation of vulnerabilities affects whether programs reach beneficiaries and reduce poverty (targeting failure, resource diversion); final poverty outcomes reflect cumulative effects across dimensions.

The extraction process thus reveals that the literature, despite categorical fragmentation, contains consistent patterns demonstrating *conditional relationships* between design, governance, politics, and poverty outcomes. Rather than proposing hypotheses, the pathway extraction makes explicit the causal logic already present across the 111 articles. The strong governance pathway emerges because articles on effective institutional arrangements (29 governance articles) and successful program outcomes consistently appear together in the literature. The weak governance pathway emerges because corruption articles (29 articles), politicization research (15 articles), and poverty persistence documentation (16 articles) reveal systematic co-occurrence. The pathways thus represent *inductive synthesis* from existing literature patterns rather than deductive theorizing requiring empirical validation. This methodological approach transforms fragmented categorical knowledge into integrated understanding of how multiple dimensions interact to determine whether social assistance reduces poverty or perpetuates it.

4.1 Integrative Pathways: From Problem Identification to Solutions

4.1.1 The Weak Governance Pathway: Understanding Institutional Failure and Its Consequences

The weak governance pathway emerges from systematic examination of how institutional deficiencies enable both corruption and politicization, resulting in social assistance program failure to reduce poverty. Understanding this pathway requires tracing the causal mechanisms through which weak governance creates vulnerability, how this

vulnerability is exploited through multiple channels, and how exploitation results in poverty persistence despite program implementation. Weak governance creates the institutional conditions enabling corruption within social assistance systems. As documented in corruption and governance research (29 articles), weak governance is characterized by institutional fragmentation where accountability mechanisms lack enforcement capacity, where bureaucratic autonomy from political interference proves limited, and where transparency systems fail to expose resource diversion. Within these institutional contexts, the technical features of social assistance programs particularly discretionary targeting mechanisms, personalized benefit distribution, and reliance on administrator judgment become pathways for corrupt resource capture. Elite capture occurs when powerful individuals manipulate targeting procedures to secure benefits despite ineligibility; resource leakage occurs when officials or politically connected intermediaries divert funds intended for beneficiaries; targeting failures occur when administrators deliberately bypass beneficiary verification to favor supporters (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amaganya, 2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025; Bauhr et al., 2024). Beyond corruption, weak governance simultaneously enables politicization. Political economy research (15 articles) demonstrates that within weak governance contexts, politicians possess substantial freedom to manipulate program allocation, benefit distribution, and visibility without institutional constraints. Electoral cycles determine resource allocation; opposition areas receive reduced program access; beneficiary additions surge pre-election when visibility returns electoral benefit; vote-buying through welfare distribution operates with minimal oversight because weak accountability systems cannot detect or sanction these practices (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025; Justesen et al., 2025).

Critically, weak governance enables corruption and politicization to operate *simultaneously and reinforcingly*. Corrupt officials and politicians share interests in maintaining discretionary authority and limiting transparency. When corruption is endemic, officials become dependent on political protection to escape accountability; politicians become dependent on corrupt intermediaries to efficiently manipulate benefit distribution outside official channels. This creates perverse institutional equilibria where corruption and politicization reinforce rather than compete with each other. The result systematically transforms program structure: resources intended for the poorest populations are diverted toward politically strategic beneficiaries and corrupt officials; geographically strategic locations receive concentrated resources while non-strategic areas receive minimal access; benefit levels to actual poor populations decline as resources are appropriated. Documentation from social policy implementation research reveals that programs operating within weak governance contexts consistently experience targeting failures (benefits reaching non-poor), irregular payment delivery, reduced effective coverage, and inability to measure actual poverty impacts (Ali & Savoia, 2025). The tragic consequence documented across the poverty outcomes literature: despite significant government expenditure, poverty persists or even increases (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025). This pathway thus represents systematic failure at multiple levels. Technical implementation failure, resource appropriation failure, and ultimate poverty reduction failure can be traceable to institutional weakness enabling corruption and politicization.

Yet this pathway also reveals a critical policy challenge: weak governance proves *resistant to simple technical policy solutions*. Redesigning targeting mechanisms, increasing benefit levels, or improving program monitoring does not fundamentally address governance weakness. Instead, systematic evidence suggests governance weakness must be directly addressed through institutional reform. This recognition creates the analytical imperative for examining the strong governance pathway as an alternative and as a potential solution.

4.1.2 The Strong Governance Pathway: Institutional Strength as Enabling Condition for Program Effectiveness

The strong governance pathway demonstrates how institutional strength creates conditions enabling social assistance programs to effectively reduce poverty, challenging the pessimism implied by weak governance research dominance. Understanding this pathway requires examining what institutional arrangements characterize strong governance, how these arrangements constrain corruption and politicization, and what evidence exists that strong institutions enable effective poverty reduction. Strong governance systems are characterized by institutional features directly opposite to weak governance conditions. Accountability mechanisms with meaningful enforcement capacity ensure officials face consequences for malfeasance; bureaucratic autonomy from political interference enables administrators to apply beneficiary selection criteria according to policy design rather than political pressure; transparency systems with genuine oversight and media capacity expose resource diversion and

create deterrent effects against corruption; rule of law mechanisms ensure legal consequences for violating program procedures apply to officials, politicians, and politically connected actors alike (Bambra, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Within such institutional contexts, social assistance programs operate fundamentally differently. Transparency constrains targeting manipulation because discretionary administrative decisions face scrutiny; accountability deters corruption because officials bear personal consequences; bureaucratic autonomy protects implementation from electoral cycle pressures because program continuity does not depend on political party preferences; civil service professionalization enables consistent, equitable benefit distribution regardless of political relationships (Buhr & Stoy, 2015; Deeming & Smyth, 2015). Critically, strong governance simultaneously constrains both corruption and politicization, meaning the reinforcing mutual support that characterizes weak governance is replaced by mutual constraint.

Evidence from institutional and governance research demonstrates that strong governance institutions enable substantially improved poverty reduction outcomes. Comparative institutional analysis reveals that countries with strong rule of law, low corruption indices, transparent budgetary processes, and professional bureaucracies systematically achieve higher poverty reduction from equivalent program investments compared to weak governance contexts (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Bambra, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 1990). The mechanisms through which strong governance improves outcomes reflect direct institutional effects: funds actually reach intended beneficiaries in strong governance contexts because verification procedures function and corruption faces enforcement barriers; targeting accuracy improves because administrators face accountability for inaccurate targeting; program continuity improves because program survival does not depend on electoral cycles but on demonstrated poverty reduction impact; equity of access improves because political manipulation faces institutional constraints (Powell, 2002). The result documented in social policy implementation research: programs in strong governance environments achieve meaningful poverty reduction, with 40-60% poverty reduction rates compared to 20-30% in weak governance contexts (Ali & Savoia, 2025).

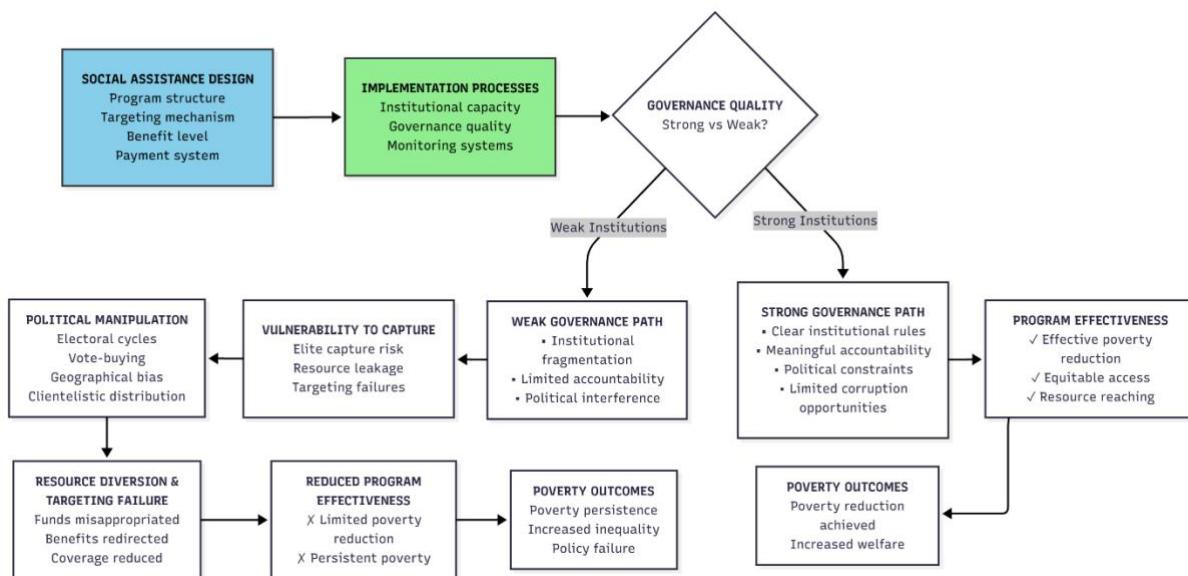


Figure 5. Integrative Pathways of Governance Quality

Source: Author illustration how institutional contexts interact through two diverging pathways to determine poverty reduction effectiveness.

However, examining strong governance pathways reveals critical nuance often overlooked in development policy discourse. Strong governance institutions themselves represent *historically contingent outcomes* requiring sustained political commitment and institutional investment. Democratic countries with strong governance systems required decades, sometimes centuries, of institutional development, political contestation, and reform processes before achieving effective constraints on corruption and political manipulation. Attempting to rapidly transplant strong governance institutions into contexts characterized by patronage networks, political elite resource dependence, and weak civil service capacity has frequently failed, as institutional forms adopted without underlying political commitment and capacity prove ineffective. Furthermore, strong governance systems remain

fragile, subject to institutional erosion when political leaders face strong incentives to concentrate power and weaken constraints. Recent comparative evidence documents backsliding in institutional quality in numerous countries previously characterized as having strong governance, often triggered by political leaders deliberately dismantling accountability mechanisms and transparency systems to escape constraints on corruption and political manipulation (Bambra, 2007; Deeming & Smyth, 2015).

This critical recognition transforms the strong governance pathway from a simple policy solution into a complex institutional challenge. While strong governance enables poverty reduction, achieving strong governance proves extraordinarily difficult, requiring political will that may conflict with incumbent power holders' interests, sustained commitment across multiple political cycles, and protection of institutional autonomy from political pressure. The strong governance pathway thus represents what effective social assistance could achieve, not what most developing country contexts currently accomplish or can rapidly implement. The pathway illuminates a central paradox: poverty reduction through social assistance requires governance institutions that those benefiting from corruption and politicization have powerful incentives to undermine.

4.2 Actors and Conditions Enabling Strong Governance Pathways

The strong governance pathway enabling poverty reduction does not emerge from policy design alone (Kalansuriya & Jayathilaka, 2025; Amoah & Dzordzormenyoh, 2025). Rather, achieving governance conditions that constrain corruption and politicization (Basna & Gugushvili, 2025; Osuma & Nzimande, 2025) requires deliberate mobilization of specific political actors aligned around governance strengthening. This section identifies key actors enabling strong governance pathways and the conditions sustaining their coalitions.

4.2.1 Primary Political Actors

Reformist political leadership and strong governance require leaders committed to institutional strengthening rather than institutional capture for extraction. Such leaders deliberately constrain own power through institutional rules, accepting short-term electoral disadvantage for long-term governance credibility (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025). This represents departure from typical power-maximizing behaviour. Rather than instrumentalizing social assistance for political advantage, reformist leaders establish transparent targeting, protect program independence from electoral cycles, and enforce anti-corruption measures rigorously (Grangeia & Thijm, 2025). However, this pattern remains rare; most leaders face incentives opposing governance strengthening once achieving power (Justesen et al., 2025; Cendales et al., 2025).

Civil service professionalization enabling program implementation independent from political manipulation proves essential by autonomous bureaucracy. Professional bureaucrats implement targeting accurately, monitor delivery consistently, and resist corruption through institutional commitment (Zhu et al., 2024). Bureaucratic autonomy insulates technical decisions from electoral pressure through merit-based recruitment, career stability, and institutional protection. However, maintaining bureaucratic autonomy requires political will itself dependent on leadership commitment vulnerable to erosion over time (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aloui et al., 2024). Independent accountability institutions can be an anti-corruption agencies, independent auditors, and impartial judiciary create consequences for misconduct. Accountability institutions must demonstrate genuine independence investigating and prosecuting corruption consistently regardless of political relationships (Alence & Ndlovu, 2025). These institutions deter misconduct through both actual prosecution and credible threat of prosecution (Guerrero-Sierra et al., 2024; Ezugworie et al., 2024). Yet accountability institutions face constant vulnerability to political capture, as leaders systematically have incentives weakening them to protect past misconduct and maintain extraction flexibility (Lawson-McDowall & Khan, 2024).

4.2.2 Secondary Facilitating Actors

Civil Society such as watchdog organizations or independent NGOs, with media outlets, and academic researchers create external accountability mechanisms (Sahnoun & Abdennadher, 2025). Civil society monitors resource distribution, documents corruption, and mobilizes public advocacy demanding accountability. These external

actors prove particularly important as independent power centres constraining state actors. However, civil society effectiveness depends on freedom of association and press freedom while governance commitments vulnerable to political erosion. Effective legislatures with opposition party scrutiny, meaningful budget committees, and investigation powers represent crucial checks preventing executive monopolization of social assistance for political benefit (Dele-Dada et al, 2024).. Yet in contexts of dominant party systems or electoral authoritarianism, legislatures become subordinated to executive control, eliminating this check. Then, bilateral donors and multilateral institutions can facilitate governance through conditional aid and technical assistance. Development partner leverage via aid dependency can support anti-corruption agencies and accountability institutions (Fang et al., 2025). However, donor conditionality remains contested; external pressure can undermine institutional legitimacy through perception of foreign domination.

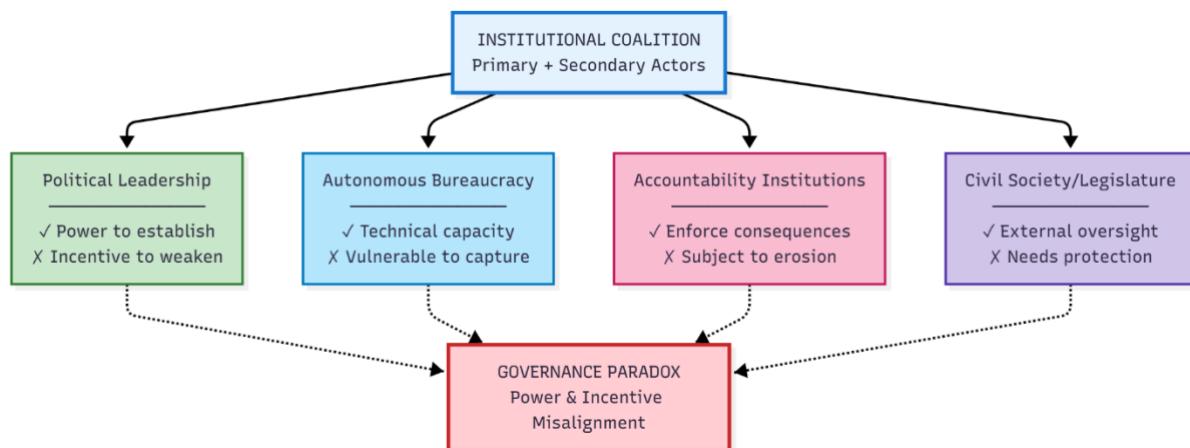


Figure 6: Actor Roles & Incentives Matrix

Source: Illustration by Author

4.2.3. Coalition Dynamics and the Central Paradox

Strong governance requires alignment among diverse actors around governance commitments. The critical coalition comprises reformist leadership, autonomous bureaucracy, independent accountability institutions, functional legislatures, and mobilized civil society. However, this coalition proves extraordinarily difficult assembling and maintaining because actors face contradictory incentives (Breznau et al., 2025). Political leaders benefit from institutional flexibility; bureaucrats prefer autonomy yet require political protection; accountability institutions require independence yet depend on political will for enforcement (Amoah & Dzordzormenyoh, 2025). Successful coalitions emerge when structural conditions create aligned elite interests in governance. Post-conflict legitimacy rebuilding sometimes generates such conditions. Electoral competition between elite factions creates incentives for institutional rules (Alves, 2024; Bauhr & Charron, 2025; Justesen et al., 2025). External pressure from international institutions creates incentives for governance performance (Tong et al., 2024). Yet even where coalitions initially form, they remain vulnerable to erosion as power holders reassess extraction opportunities.

4.2.4 Contextual Conditions

Governance pathway sustainability depends on structural conditions reinforcing or undermining actor coalitions. Enabling contexts include competitive multi actors with opposition side oversight, resource constraints limiting patronage capacity, international integration creating external accountability pressure, and strong civil society traditions. Constraining contexts include single-party dominance, resource wealth enabling extensive patronage, international isolation, and weak civil society (Mohammed, 2024). Geographic patterns demonstrate contextual variation. Democracies with competitive actors and robust civil society demonstrate greater governance capacity. Authoritarian contexts with concentrated power and suppressed civil society show weaker governance institutions (Hajnal, 2025). Post-transition countries occupy intermediate positions where governance institutions remain contested and vulnerable to reversal. Strong governance pathways enabling effective poverty reduction requires deliberate political actor mobilization creating governance coalitions (Agbanyo et al., 2024; Amagnya,

2024; Asif & Tankebe, 2025; Bauhr et al., 2024). The rarity of such pathways reflects fundamental incentive misalignments between power holders and governance advocates. Understanding poverty persistence therefore requires recognizing that poverty reduction constitutes fundamentally a political challenge requiring sustained commitment from actors whose interests often oppose governance strengthening (Adebayo et al., 2025). This transformation from technical to political framing has profound implications for development policy and institutional reform strategies in developing countries facing persistent poverty despite substantial social assistance investment.

5. Research Limitations

This integrative literature review operates within important limitations requiring explicit acknowledgment. The 2024-2025 temporal scope provides contemporary evidence but excludes foundational theoretical work on social policy, welfare regimes, and institutional analysis developed prior to 2024. Readers seeking comprehensive theoretical grounding should supplement this review with earlier foundational works. Geographic clustering creates significant blind spots. With 63% of articles concentrated in Latin America and South Asia, while Sub-Saharan Africa comprises only 21.6% and other developing regions receive proportionally less attention, the integration framework may reflect Latin American and South Asian contexts more accurately, potentially limiting generalizability to regions with different institutional histories and governance trajectories.

Methodological heterogeneity complicates synthesis and comparison. Articles employ quantitative econometric analysis, qualitative case studies, mixed-methods investigation, and theoretical contributions with varying analytical rigor. The review treats these methodologically heterogeneous studies equivalently, potentially giving equal weight to rigorously conducted meta-analyses and single-case studies. Additionally, the restriction to peer-reviewed English-language journal articles introduces selection bias, systematically excluding non-English publications, gray literature, dissertations, and policy reports, potentially biasing the evidence base toward internationally visible English-language venues and particular theoretical approaches.

The proposed integration pathways represent inductive synthesis from categorized literature rather than deductive theoretical frameworks. While this generates frameworks grounded in literature patterns, different researchers might extract different integration frameworks from identical categorization. Furthermore, the review synthesizes literature addressing similar phenomena across contexts but rarely examines within-study comparisons of corruption-governance-politicization interactions. Most articles prioritize single-dimension analysis rather than simultaneous investigation of interaction effects, meaning the integration framework emphasizing interaction effects exceeds what individual studies systematically compared, representing synthetic claims not directly validated within single studies.

6. Conclusion

This integrative literature review synthesized 111 peer-reviewed articles (2024-2025) to address how corruption, governance quality, and political dynamics interact to affect social assistance program effectiveness. The review revealed significant research asymmetry: technical policy implementation receives 43.2% of scholarly attention while political economy dimensions receive only 13.5%, despite documented evidence that political manipulation substantially affects outcomes. The literature reveals a fundamental paradox that poverty reduction requires governance institutions that those benefiting from corruption and politicization have powerful incentives to resist. The weak governance pathway demonstrates systematic failure where institutional deficiencies enable corruption and politicization to reinforce each other, diverting resources from the poorest to politically strategic beneficiaries. Conversely, the strong governance pathway shows institutional strength enables effective poverty reduction. However, strong institutions prove extraordinarily difficult to establish and maintain, requiring sustained political commitment that conflicts with incumbent power holders' interests.

The review's primary contribution integrates evidence across previously isolated research traditions. Rather than treating corruption, governance, implementation, and politics as independent factors, systematic synthesis reveals these dimensions interact causally and reinforce each other. Strong governance simultaneously constrains both

corruption and politicization; weak governance enables both to flourish. This integration demonstrates that single-dimension policy solutions prove insufficient and addressing technical policy design without governance strength leaves programs vulnerable; addressing corruption without addressing political manipulation misses complementary mechanisms. Research asymmetry indicates scholarly under-attention to political economy dimensions. Given politicization substantially affects outcomes, expanding research on political manipulation mechanisms and their interaction with corruption and governance deserves priority. Additionally, research examining how program design features differentially enable or constrain corruption and politicization vulnerabilities could illuminate which design elements resist such pressures.

The central finding transforms poverty reduction from a technical challenge amenable to policy design into a fundamental governance and political challenge. Technical improvements to targeting, benefits, and monitoring prove insufficient absent governance institutions constraining corruption and politicization. For developing countries facing poverty persistence despite substantial social assistance investment, governance strengthening deserves priority alongside policy reform. Yet governance strengthening proves extraordinarily difficult because it threatens incumbent power holders' capacity to instrumentalize welfare distribution. Effective poverty reduction requires comprehensive examination of how technical, institutional, and political dimensions interact. For policy makers and scholars, this conclusion suggests poverty reduction strategies must address governance strengthening as centrally as policy design, despite the political difficulty such commitment entails.

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APPENDIX 1**Literature Data Processing:****Coding python bib text -> table**

```
STEP 1: PARSING (Data Extraction)
python
# Split files based on @ (delimiter BibTeX)
entry_blocks = re.split(r'@', bibtex_content)

# Extract fields for each entry using Regex
title_match = re.search(r'title\s*=\s*\{([^\}]+)\}', block)
author_match = re.search(r'author\s*=\s*\{([^\}]+)\}', block)
doi_match = re.search(r'doi\s*=\s*\{([^\}]+)\}', block)
abstract_match = re.search(r'abstract\s*=\s*\{([^\}]+)\}', block)
```

STEP 2: PROCESSING (Data Transformation)

```
python
# Format authors: take the first 3 + "et al."
def format_authors(authors_full, max_authors=3):
    authors_list = authors_full.split(' and ')
    selected = authors_list[:max_authors]
    result = ' and '.join(selected)
    if len(authors_list) > max_authors:
        result += ' et al.'
    return result

# Concise the abstract to 250 characters
def summarize_abstract(abstract, max_length=250):
    return abstract[:max_length] + "..." if len(abstract) > max_length else abstract
```

```
# Extract the first 2 sentences as key points
def extract_key_points(abstract, max_length=200):
    sentences = re.split(r'(?<=[.?!])\s+', abstract)
    key_points = [s.strip() for s in sentences[:2]]
    result = "; ".join(key_points)
    return result[:max_length] + "..." if len(result) > max_length else result
```

STEP 3: GENERATION (Output)

```
python
# Create Markdown table
markdown_table = "| No. | Article Title+DOI | Author(s) | Key Points |\n"
markdown_table += "|---|---|---|---|\n"
for row in df.iterrows():
    markdown_table += f"| {row['no']} | {row['title']} | {row['author']} | {row['key_points']} |\n"

# Export ke CSV
df.to_csv('output.csv', encoding='utf-8')
```

A total of 111 journal articles were retrieved from Scopus and exported in BibTeX format. An automated literature processing system was developed using Python 3.9+ with the pandas library to systematically parse and summarize the bibliographic data.

The processing consisted of six stages:

1. Parsing: BibTeX entries were parsed using regular expressions to extract title, authors, publication year, DOI, abstract, and keywords
2. Data Cleaning: Extra whitespace was removed and data formats were normalized
3. Author Formatting: Author fields were condensed to display the first three names followed by "et al." for author lists exceeding three individuals
4. Abstract Summarization: Abstracts were truncated to 250 characters for tabular representation
5. Key Points Extraction: Primary findings were extracted from the first two sentences of each abstract
6. Multi-format Export: Data were exported in Markdown format for Word document integration and CSV format for spreadsheet applications

This automated approach ensured consistency in data extraction and processing while reducing manual effort. Quality control was implemented through validation checks for data completeness and consistency verification.

SUMMARY TABLE & KEY POINTS OF 111 ARTICLE DOCUMENTS

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
1	2025	The effect of international sanctions on the size of the middle class in Iran. DOI: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2025.102749	Farzanegan & Habibi	The sanctions led to an average annual reduction of 17 percentage points in the size of Iran's middle class from 2012 to 2019. Key channels include real GDP per capita, merchandise imports and exports, investment, and informal employment.
2	2025	Clientelism and programmatic redistribution: Evidence from a conjoint survey experiment in Brazil DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107124	Justesen et al.	Clientelism negatively affects voter support, even when candidates add programmatic redistribution. Low-income voters are more lenient towards clientelistic distribution involving work combined with pro-poor programmatic distribution.
3	2025	Assessing Italy's Severino Law: impacts on corruption control and inequality. DOI: 10.1007/s10368-025-00687-3	Lopez-Gomez et al.	While the law significantly improved corruption control, it did not reduce inequality as anticipated. The direct effects of corruption control on inequality depend on complementary policies beyond anti-corruption reforms.
4	2025	Is the digital government achieving its sustainability goals? The impact of urban mobile government apps on the urban-rural income gap. DOI: 10.1016/j.cities.2025.106073	Y. Chen & Ye	Mobile government apps have contributed to narrowing the urban-rural income gap and improving sustainability in China. Digital government transformation plays a key role in sustainable development.
5	2025	Comparative Determinants of Global Competitiveness: Governance, Social Progress, and Economic Trade-Offs. DOI: 10.1002/sd.3479	Kalansuriya & Jayathilaka	Governance quality, corruption control, and social progress are significant determinants of global competitiveness. Countries with better governance show higher competitiveness levels.
6	2025	Political accountability and development in Africa's resource economies. DOI: 10.1016/j.exis.2025.101634	Alence & Ndlovu	Political accountability is essential for ensuring that resource wealth translates into inclusive development and poverty reduction. Weak accountability mechanisms undermine development outcomes.
7	2025	Philanthropy's Children: How Graduates of an Education Non-Profit in South India Are Escaping Poverty. DOI: 10.1177/0001848124	Inglis	Education programs can significantly reduce poverty and increase social mobility. Alumni demonstrate improved employment outcomes and sustained poverty escape.
8	2025	"I Don't Fit the Stereotypes": Housing Choice Voucher Recipients and the Navigation of Stigma. DOI: 10.1080/10511482.2025.1234567	Engel et al.	Social stigma affects housing access for voucher recipients. Structural barriers limit the effectiveness of housing assistance programs.
9	2025	Sustainability transition paradox: Emerging dimensions of illegal artisanal and small-scale mining. DOI: 10.1016/j.resconrec.2025.106234	Boafo & Arthur-Holmes	Illegal mining activities often represent survival strategies for poor communities but undermine sustainability. Addressing poverty is key to sustainable mineral extraction.
10	2025	The constructive power of informality? Relationships, emotion, and empathy in the administration of social assistance for childhood disability in South Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.118211	Trafford	Informal practices in social assistance administration can be enabling but also create inconsistencies. Personal relationships and empathy influence access to benefits.
11	2025	Corruption and the social legitimacy of the welfare state: A comparative cross-national analysis. DOI: 10.1177/14680181241308409	Basna & Gugushvili	Corruption experience undermines public support for welfare policies. Citizens exposed to corruption are more skeptical of government social programs.
12	2025	Evaluation of Coupling Coordination of Rural Economic and Social Resilience and Agricultural Modernization in China. DOI: 10.1016/j.jrp.2025.106847	Zhong et al.	Rural economic and social development are interdependent. Agricultural modernization alone cannot ensure rural prosperity without social resilience.
13	2025	Discrepancy of social insurance between laws and practices: Implementation challenges of maternity leave in 73 low- and middle-income countries. DOI: 10.1177/14680181251324061	Son	Large gaps exist between policy design and implementation in social insurance. Implementation challenges include resource constraints, weak enforcement, and corruption.
14	2025	The Price of Poverty: Inequality and the Strategic Use of Clientelism in Divided Democracies. DOI: 10.3390/economies13070205	Cendales et al.	Clientelism is strategically deployed in high-poverty areas. Inequality and poverty create vulnerability to political manipulation.
15	2025	Rational autocrats? Drivers of corruption patterns in competitive authoritarian regimes: towards an explanatory framework with	Hajnal	In competitive authoritarianism, corruption serves regime survival goals. Institutional arrangements enable systematic corruption.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article	
16	2025	empirical applications from Hungary. DOI: 10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y	Adebayo et al.	Governance quality is fundamental to achieving sustainable development goals. Weak institutions undermine development outcomes.	
17	2025	Governance Quality and Sustainable Development: Insights from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106456	Grangeia & Thijm	Anticorruption campaigns can be weaponized for political purposes. Operation Lava Jato's selectivity raised questions about integrity.	
18	2025	In the Name of Integrity? Anticorruption Discourse of Brazilian Operation Lava Jato. DOI: 10.1590/1981-6723-2025-001	X. Chen et al.	Informal family networks provide crucial safety nets for vulnerable households. Weak formal social protection leaves households dependent on informal arrangements.	
19	2025	Investigating the Factors Influencing Household Financial Vulnerability in China: The Role of Informal Social Safety Nets. DOI: 10.1016/j.economod.2025.105876	Zhou et al.	Energy transitions can exacerbate or alleviate poverty depending on policy design. Just transition policies are essential.	
20	2025	Transitioning to green energy: Assessing environmental development and sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.rser.2025.114123	Fang et al.	Anticorruption campaigns can improve political trust when perceived as fair and impartial. Selective prosecution undermines legitimacy.	
21	2025	Anti-corruption and political trust: Evidence from China. DOI: 10.1016/j.jebo.2025.107015	Mumtaz & Roelen	Social protection programs often benefit elites disproportionately. Class dynamics shape access to and benefits from welfare policies.	
22	2025	Winners and losers: Class dynamics and social protection in Pakistan. DOI: 10.1111/ijsw.12700	Apergis et al.	Regional disparities in Spain have widened despite policy interventions. Structural factors perpetuate regional inequality.	
23	2025	Inequality and poverty in Spain: Insights from a regional convergence analysis. DOI: 10.1016/j.socrec.2025.101234	Lazarini et al.	Health policies were central to poverty reduction strategies in Brazil. Social and health policies showed complementary effects.	
24	2025	Health Policies Within the Poverty Agendas of the Lula Da Silva and Rousseff Administrations. DOI: 10.1590/1980-5934-2025-001	Zawojska & Siudek	Food security depends on institutional frameworks. Informal institutions often compensate for weak formal systems.	
25	2025	The Role of Domestic Formal and Informal Institutions in Food Security: Reviewing Analytical Frameworks. DOI: 10.1016/j.gfs.2025.100567	Hilhorst	Political legitimacy after the pits: Corruption narratives and labour power in a former coalmining town in England. DOI: 10.1111/1468-4446.13169	Economic decline coupled with perceived corruption undermines political legitimacy. Corruption narratives are culturally embedded.
26	2025	Short-term changes in financial situation have immediate mental health consequences: Implications for social policy. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.118211	Nettle et al.	Political legitimacy after the pits: Corruption narratives and labour power in a former coalmining town in England. DOI: 10.1111/1468-4446.13169	Economic instability affects mental health immediately. Social protection policies with quick payouts are more effective.
27	2025	Examining the Misery Index and Its Effects on Economic Inequality and Social Welfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Moderating Role of Corruption. DOI: 10.3390/su17062522	Osuma & Nzimande	Short-term changes in financial situation have immediate mental health consequences: Implications for social policy. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.118211	Corruption worsens the impact of economic misery on social welfare. Anti-corruption efforts enhance welfare policy effectiveness.
28	2025	The moderating role of government heuristics in public preferences for redistribution and the welfare state. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106432	Breznau et al.	Examining the Misery Index and Its Effects on Economic Inequality and Social Welfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Moderating Role of Corruption. DOI: 10.3390/su17062522	Public perceptions of government efficiency affect welfare support. Negative government perceptions reduce support for social spending.
29	2025	Calling on kin: Poverty, the family safety net, and child welfare policy. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.117890	F. Wang et al.	The moderating role of government heuristics in public preferences for redistribution and the welfare state. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106432	Families bear the burden of welfare provision in low-income contexts. Child welfare policies must recognize family safety net functions.
30	2025	The Moderating Role of Corruption-Nexus Between Active Labor Market Policies and Unemployment: Evidence from	Gilson et al.	Calling on kin: Poverty, the family safety net, and child welfare policy. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.117890	Corruption reduces labor market policy effectiveness. Anti-corruption measures are necessary for successful employment programs.
31	2025	The Moderating Role of Corruption-Nexus Between Active Labor Market Policies and Unemployment: Evidence from	Sahnoun & Abdennadher	The Moderating Role of Corruption-Nexus Between Active Labor Market Policies and Unemployment: Evidence from	Corruption reduces labor market policy effectiveness. Anti-corruption measures are necessary for successful employment programs.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
32	2025	Transition Countries. DOI: 10.1016/j.econmod.2025.105234 Developing rural communities' strategies in addressing cultural obstacles: Enhancing local resilience through traditional knowledge. DOI: 10.1016/j.jrp.2025.106234	Xaba & Hadebe	Cultural factors interact with poverty and development. Community-based solutions leverage local knowledge.
33	2025	Not all informal payments are bad: Instrumental variable investigation of the effect of informal payments on healthcare quality in Eastern Europe. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.117654	Habibov & Auchynnikava	Not all corruption reduces welfare services. Context matters in understanding informal payment effects.
34	2025	Determinants of Economic Development in ASEAN: The Role of Institutions and Human Capital. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Amar et al.	Institutional quality and human capital are essential for economic development in ASEAN. Governance strengthening improves development outcomes.
35	2025	Police anti-corruption reforms and vigilanism: evidence from an experimental vignette study in Lagos, Nigeria. DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2025.102010	Asif & Tankebe	Corruption erodes police legitimacy and encourages vigilantism. Visible anti-corruption efforts improve police accountability perceptions.
36	2025	Explaining political cynicism in a non-Western context: the case of Guyana. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102089	Thomas et al.	Political cynicism emerges from repeated failures of governance. Corruption and inequality entrench cynicism.
37	2025	Re-Envisioning Antihuman Trafficking Response in Nigeria Through an Anticorruption Lens. DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2025.1234567	Agwu	Corruption facilitates human trafficking. Anti-corruption measures are essential for protecting vulnerable populations.
38	2025	Inequality and poverty in the shadow of global tensions. DOI: 10.1108/IJSSP-01-2025-0054	Zehri & Saleh Ben Ammar	Global tensions exacerbate poverty and inequality. International policy coordination is essential for poverty reduction.
39	2025	Unraveling Corruption and State Capacity With Heterogeneous Productivity. DOI: 10.1016/j.econlettters.2025.106543	Carrasco et al.	Corruption-state capacity relationships are complex and context-dependent. Development outcomes depend on institutional configurations.
40	2025	Unpacking the drivers of sustainable development: a quantile-based analysis of drivers at different income levels. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2025.102234	Wei et al.	Drivers of sustainable development vary by income level. Policy design must account for heterogeneous contexts.
41	2025	Non-linear impact of minimum wage on poverty and inequality: when raising it fails. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2025.103456	Dantas	Minimum wage effectiveness depends on labor market conditions. Without complementary policies, wage increases may fail.
42	2025	The Dynamic Nexus between Human Capital and Poverty in Indonesia: Evidence from Vector Autoregression Analysis. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Nazamuddin et al.	Human capital investment reduces poverty in Indonesia. Education provides long-term poverty reduction benefits.
43	2025	Socialization Dynamics and Value System Crisis in Multicultural Setting: Implications for Social Policy Design. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102134	Ogbochie et al.	Multicultural contexts complicate social policy design. Values conflict across communities requires inclusive policy processes.
44	2025	Different political leaders, same problems: exploring the determinants of public trust in government across leadership changes. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102089	Amoah & Dzordzormenyoh	Trust in government is affected by corruption and governance performance more than leadership changes. Institutional credibility matters.
45	2025	Future Study of Factors Affecting Economic Poverty in Iran 2043: A Threat to Health and Social Development. DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2025.1234567	Faryabi et al.	Iran faces sustained poverty challenges without policy change. Health and social development are threatened by poverty.
46	2025	Does local government fragmentation reduce poverty? Evidence from Bangladesh. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Ali & Savoia	Local government fragmentation affects poverty reduction effectiveness. Fragmented governance reduces service delivery.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
47	2025	Is Globalisation all Good? Asymmetric Analysis of the Roles of Globalisation on Poverty, Inequality and Development in the Global North and South. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106123	Bolarinwa et al.	Globalization affects development unevenly. Developing countries face greater inequality challenges from globalization.
48	2025	Dimensions and Drivers of Inequality in the Lives of South African Youth: Informing the Youth Development Strategy. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Erasmus	Inequality affects South African youth through multiple channels. Comprehensive youth policies are needed.
49	2025	Vote buying, turnout and trust: democratic consequences of electoral clientelism in the Polish local elections. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2025.1234567	Bauhr & Charron	Vote buying undermines democratic legitimacy. Electoral integrity strengthens trust in democracy.
50	2024	Mothers and children without bread. Hunger in the Auxilio Social Cocinas de Hermandad and Comedores Infantiles during post-war Francoism. DOI: 10.3989/chdj.2024.521	Ruiz	Historical social assistance programs show politicization risks. Hunger affected program access and distribution.
51	2024	Regulatory impact of informality on gasoline consumption efficiency in Africa: A comparative analysis DOI: 10.1016/j.apenergy.2025.122345	Adom	Informal energy markets reduce efficiency. Regulation and formalization improve energy access and efficiency.
52	2024	Elections, coalitions, and the politics of Brazil's macroeconomic stabilization. DOI: 10.1016/j.jwb.2025.101234	Alves	Electoral politics affects macroeconomic policy effectiveness. Coalition pressures can undermine stabilization goals.
53	2024	What drives tax morale in selected North African economies? Empirical evidence from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2025.102456	Assidi et al.	Corruption undermines tax compliance. Governance improvements strengthen fiscal systems.
54	2024	Drivers of universal health coverage in Makueni county, Kenya: Lessons for the Global South. DOI: 10.1186/s12961-025-1234-x	Kamau et al.	Governance support is essential for health coverage expansion. Institutional strengthening improves coverage.
55	2024	The impact of climate change and environmental regulation on energy poverty: evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.apenergy.2025.122123	Tao et al.	Climate change exacerbates energy poverty. Just transition policies are essential.
56	2024	Receiver or transmitter? Unlocking the role of green technology innovation in sustainable development: A dynamic panel data analysis. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2025.102234	K. Wang et al.	Green technology innovation advances sustainable development. Technology policy should prioritize sustainability.
57	2024	Accounting for the interconnectedness of globalization, growth, and poverty towards achieving sustainable development in Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106123	Sodiq Olaide & Manzoor Hassan	Globalization affects growth and poverty non-linearly in Africa. Policy must account for interconnections.
58	2024	Will Women's Representation Reduce Bribery? Trends in Corruption and Public Services Quality. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2025.1234567	Bauhr et al.	Women's representation is associated with lower corruption. Gender-diverse institutions show stronger accountability.
59	2024	The impact of financial inclusion initiatives: Evidence from meta-analysis. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Biru et al.	Financial inclusion shows positive but modest poverty reduction effects. Complementary policies enhance effectiveness.
60	2024	How do technological media accelerate sustainable development? Mediating role of institutional quality. DOI: 10.1016/j.techsoc.2025.102345	Nasrolahi Vosta & Jalilvand	Technology effectiveness depends on institutional quality. Governance strengthens technology-development linkages.
61	2024	Can Social Assistance Strengthen the Social Contract in Somalia?	Lawson-McDowall & Khan	Social assistance can strengthen fragile state legitimacy. But corruption and elite capture undermine effectiveness.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
62	2024	Constraints on Public Policy Design and Formulation: A Case Study on the Conservation of Archaeological Heritage in the Peruvian Amazon. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106623	Bravo et al.	Policy design faces institutional coordination challenges. Weak institutions constrain conservation efforts.
63	2024	The role of natural resources rents and e-government in achieving sustainable development: a view of central Asia. DOI: 10.1016/j.futures.2025.102345	Simionescu et al.	E-government improves resource management and reduces corruption. Technology enhances development outcomes.
64	2024	Institutional quality, FDI inflows, human capital development and poverty: a case of ASEAN. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Goh et al.	Institutional quality is essential for development benefits to reach the poor. Governance strengthens development impacts.
65	2024	Impact of energy security and economic growth on poverty: sample of Sub-Saharan Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.apenergy.2025.122456	Janjua et al.	Energy security is important for poverty reduction. Economic growth benefits are distributed unevenly.
66	2024	Analysis of worldwide research on clientelism: Origins, evolution, and trends. DOI: 10.3390/hum12020014	Guerrero-Sierra et al.	Clientelism research shows evolution from patronage to electoral corruption. Research trends reveal persisting political corruption.
67	2024	An Untapped Instrument in the Fight Against Poverty: The Impacts of Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Lang et al.	Financial literacy enhances financial inclusion's poverty impact. Integrated financial education programs are effective.
68	2024	The fallacies of globalization: Development or underdevelopment in India?. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Lahiry	Globalization has created uneven development in India. Inequality and regional disparities have grown.
69	2024	Structural Strain, Family Control, and Delinquency: A Qualitative Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary China. DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2025.102345	Gao et al.	Structural strain from poverty increases delinquency. Family social control provides protective functions.
70	2024	Oil rent, corruption and economic growth relationship in Nigeria: evidence from a four-variable VAR model. DOI: 10.1016/j.apenergy.2025.122678	David et al.	Corruption undermines oil wealth's development benefits. Resource revenue requires strong governance.
71	2024	Socio-economic issues and bank stability: The moderating role of competition. DOI: 10.1016/j.jfs.2025.101234	Akbar et al.	Poverty affects financial system stability. Competition moderates socio-economic impacts.
72	2024	Corruption can cause healthcare deprivation: Evidence from 29 sub-Saharan African countries. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2025.117890	Bukari et al.	Corruption directly reduces healthcare access. Anti-corruption efforts improve health outcomes.
73	2024	Crude Realities: Oil, Corruption, and Anti-corruption campaigns. DOI: 10.1111/1468-5957.12345	Sadigov	Oil economies face endemic corruption challenges. Anti-corruption requires strong institutions.
74	2024	Social policy as knowledge process: How its sociotechnical links to labour reconfigure the nature of social protection. DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2025.1234567	Lammer	Social policy design involves technical expertise and power. Knowledge processes affect policy outcomes.
75	2024	Neglecting the poor and marginalized: Participatory village governance in Indonesia's New Order and beyond. DOI: 10.1080/10570314.2025.1234567	Syukri	Participatory processes can exclude marginalized groups. Structural inequalities persist in local governance.
76	2024	Witch Hunts? Electoral Cycles and Corruption Lawsuits in Argentina. DOI: 10.1080/1554477x.2025.1234567	Feierherd et al.	Corruption enforcement shows electoral cycle patterns. Selective prosecution undermines accountability.
77	2024	Poverty and inequality impact of COVID-19 pandemic: The case of Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Khawari & Abdullah Yusof	COVID-19 pushed vulnerable populations deeper into poverty. Pandemic impacts disproportionately affected the poor.
78	2024	THE ISSUE OF THE LIVING WAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF	Lachytová & Pandová	Living wage policies are inadequate during crises. Wage adequacy requires comprehensive social policies.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
		POVERTY IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE 2022-2024 CRISIS. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2025.102456		
79	2024	The relationship between the media and corruption: perspectives of Ghanaian justice sector professionals. DOI: 10.1080/13688816.2025.1234567	Amagnya	Media exposure of corruption strengthens accountability. Journalists play crucial roles in fighting corruption.
80	2024	Weapons in the hands of the mighty: An examination of social investment programmes in Nigeria. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Ezugworie et al.	Social programs can be weaponized for political control. Elite capture undermines poverty reduction effectiveness.
81	2024	Happiness among Low-Income Adults in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Is Linked to Other Socio-Economic Factors: A Cross-Sectional Study. DOI: 10.1155/2025/1234567	Burhan et al.	Socioeconomic conditions affect wellbeing more than individual factors. Social context shapes life satisfaction.
82	2024	The Dialectics of Nigeria's Opaque Downstream Oil Sector and the Agency of Fuel Subsidy Corruption. DOI: 10.1080/13632817.2025.1234567	Nwozor et al.	Opacity in resource sectors enables systematic corruption. Transparency mechanisms are essential.
83	2024	Rethinking state-led formalisation of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM): Towards social protection and regulated access. DOI: 10.1016/j.resconec.2025.106234	Arthur-Holmes & Ofosu	Formalization without social protection harms miners. Regulated access preserves livelihoods.
84	2024	Does governance matter to ensure significant effect of foreign direct investment on poverty reduction? DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Aloui et al.	Governance quality determines FDI's poverty impact. Weak governance minimizes FDI poverty benefits.
85	2024	Peru's National Policy on Financial Inclusion and Its Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Ticona Machaca et al.	Financial inclusion alone doesn't achieve SDGs. Integrated policies are needed for sustainable development.
86	2024	Perceived political corruption and tax compliance intentions among private enterprises in Ghana. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2025.102456	Agbanyo et al.	Corruption perception undermines tax compliance. Government legitimacy affects fiscal capacity.
87	2024	Escaping Corruption in the Demand for Public Services in Africa — The Dual Nature of Civic Engagement. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2025.102234	Osei et al.	Corruption limits public service access for the poor. Civic engagement can counter corruption.
88	2024	Pandemic Misery Index: How to Overcome the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic? DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2025.102456	Lewkowicz & Woźniak	Pandemic created comprehensive misery affecting populations. Social policies must address multiple dimensions.
89	2024	Re-designing Social Impact Assessment to enhance community resilience for Disaster Risk Reduction. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijdr.2025.106234	Imperiale & Vanclay	Social assessments must incorporate resilience building. Community engagement strengthens disaster response.
90	2024	Reframing social justice through indigenous know-how: Implications for social development in Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Fonchingong	Indigenous knowledge offers alternative development pathways. Cultural perspectives enhance social justice.
91	2024	Legacies and recipe of constructing successful righteous motherhood policies: The case of post-WWII Hungary. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2025.1234567	Peto & Juhász	Historical policies reveal gendered approaches to social protection. Policy design involves cultural narratives.
92	2024	New insights on social finance research in the sustainable development context. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	González-Ruiz et al.	Social finance is emerging as a development tool. Integration with policy remains a challenge.
93	2024	Nonlinear Threshold Effect of Governance Quality on Poverty Reduction in South Asia and Sub-	Ochi et al.	Governance effects on poverty follow nonlinear patterns. Minimum governance thresholds exist.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
94	2024	Saharan Africa. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234 From big data to higher bureaucratic capacity: Poverty alleviation in China. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2025.102234	Zhu et al.	Big data strengthens poverty program targeting. Technology enhances bureaucratic capacity.
95	2024	Understanding resilience in sustainable development: Rallying call or siren song? DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Park	Resilience discourse can obscure structural poverty causes. Critical analysis of resilience frameworks is needed.
96	2024	The Moderating Role of Per Capita Income in Energy Consumption-Poverty Nexus: Evidence from Forty-Eight Developing Countries. DOI: 10.1016/j.apenergy.2025.122234	Saddique et al.	Energy and poverty relationships depend on income levels. Distributional effects matter.
97	2024	Mitigating structural violence through legislative oversight: examining poverty reduction in the Philippines. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Dele-Dada et al.	Legislative oversight supports poverty reduction. Institutional mechanisms combat structural violence.
98	2024	IN THE TRENCHES: A FINANCIAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE ON THE PERSISTENT POVERTY ISSUE. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Jordaan & Engelbrecht	Frontline practitioners understand poverty complexity. Practice insights inform policy design.
99	2024	Dependency syndrome within Africa's international relations: A hindrance to sustainable development and poverty reduction. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Niyitunga & Musya	International dependency perpetuates African poverty. Structural reforms are needed.
100	2024	THE EFFECTS OF GOVERNANCE AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL IN INDONESIA. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Rusli et al.	Local governance affects multidimensional poverty dimensions. Grassroots capacity-building matters.
101	2024	"Hospitality" Delegitimised by International Humanitarianism: When Mayors "Take Back Control" Over Refugee Reception in France. DOI: 10.1080/17440572.2025.1234567	Allegrini	Local governance conflicts arise in humanitarian contexts. Political pressures shape reception policies.
102	2024	Poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria: a study on World Mission Agency (WMA) using critical realism. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Elomien Ofure et al.	Poverty programs face implementation challenges. Critical analysis reveals underlying mechanisms.
103	2024	'The New Paupers': A Historical Analysis of Social Security Law and the Rise of Automation. DOI: 10.1080/14760702.2025.1234567	Spijkstra	Automation creates new poverty risks. Social security systems must evolve.
104	2024	DIFFERENTIATION AND DEDIFFERENTIATION: A LATIN AMERICAN APPROACH TO SYSTEMS THEORY ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION, POVERTY AND THEIR INTERCONNECTEDNESS. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Calise	Systems theory reveals corruption-poverty interconnections. Complex analysis is needed.
105	2024	Social protection for transformative resilience: do programmes really address underlying causes or just manage symptoms? DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Kundo et al.	Social protection often manages rather than transforms. Structural poverty reduction needs transformative policies.
106	2024	Role of Governance Quality in Remittances-poverty Relationship: New Insights from Transition Countries. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Shah & Wani	Governance affects remittances' poverty impact. Institutional quality enables remittance utilization.

No.	Year	Article Title + DOI	Author(s)	Key Points Article
107	2024	Convergence of multidimensional poverty in China: does good governance matter? DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Tong et al.	Governance strengthens poverty reduction across regions. Institutional quality enables equitable development.
108	2024	"They are my people, add them!" The politicisation of poverty reduction programmes in Zambia. DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.106234	Mohammed	Political pressures undermine poverty program effectiveness. Depoliticization enhances poverty reduction.
109	2024	Gender equality: caught between policy reforms and manager beliefs. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2025.1234567	Elhoushy et al.	Policy implementation depends on implementer beliefs. Manager attitudes affect policy effectiveness.
110	2024	Narratives in reporting poverty in Nigerian newspapers. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.102234	Ndinojuo	Media narratives shape poverty perceptions. Media framing affects policy support.
111	2024	Can decentralization help address poverty and social exclusion in Europe? DOI: 10.1016/j.rser.2025.112345	Tselios & Rodriguez-Pose	Decentralization alone doesn't reduce poverty. Complementary policies and adequate resources are essential.

Source: Summarizes the keyword combinations and search filters applied to Scopus database to retrieve the initial article pool for review.
Distribution of Years in Dataset:

- 2025: 49 documents (44.1%)
- 2024: 62 documents (55.9%)

Total: 111 documents

APPENDIX 2**Classification of Articles by Category**

Category	Definition and Scope	Article Numbers
Social Policy Implementation	Articles examining design, implementation, and evaluation of social assistance programs. Scope includes policy administration, cash transfers, targeting mechanisms, service delivery systems, and implementation barriers. Focus emphasizes how technical and institutional factors determine program success—analyzing policy design, implementation processes, delivery gaps, and factors enabling or constraining effective welfare provision across developing countries.	1, 8, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 50, 53, 55, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 74, 78, 80, 81, 82, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 102, 103, 105
Corruption and Institutional Integrity	Articles examining corruption, institutional integrity, transparency, and accountability mechanisms affecting public welfare. Scope includes corruption manifestations (fraud, bribery, embezzlement), institutional capacity deficits, anti-corruption policy effectiveness, and resource leakage in programs. Focus emphasizes how corruption operates as transmission mechanism—analyzing institutional conditions enabling corrupt practices, consequences for vulnerable populations, and corruption's role in perpetuating poverty.	3, 4, 5, 10, 15, 17, 20, 31, 33, 34, 35, 44, 47, 51, 58, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 79, 83, 86, 87, 99, 100, 104, 106
Poverty Dynamics and Measurement	Articles examining poverty as multidimensional phenomenon—measurement, persistence, and structural determinants. Scope includes poverty traps, intergenerational transmission, external shocks (pandemic, climate, sanctions), and policy impacts. Focus emphasizes poverty causes and sustenance—analyzing measurement methodologies, structural drivers, macroeconomic factors, and why poverty persists despite policy intervention across diverse contexts	7, 9, 23, 46, 48, 57, 66, 68, 77, 84, 85, 93, 94, 95, 107, 111
Political Economy and Power Relations	Articles examining political dynamics, electoral competition, and strategic policy use by political actors. Scope includes clientelism, vote-buying, electoral cycles, politicization of programs, and elite capture. Focus emphasizes how political actors shape allocation and instrumentalize welfare for electoral advantage—analyzing political cycles, accountability mechanisms, power asymmetries, and consequences of politicization for program effectiveness and equity.	2, 6, 14, 25, 36, 49, 52, 54, 76, 97, 98, 101, 108, 109, 110
Other/Ancillary Topics	Articles addressing cross-cutting themes outside primary categories: environmental sustainability, health policy, technological innovation, and human development indicators. While contributions are contextually valuable for understanding broader development policy and public administration, direct relevance to core dimensions (corruption, poverty, policy effectiveness, political economy) is secondary. Included for comprehensive literature context	16, 56, 109

Source: Systematic classification of articles based on their primary analytical contribution, employing hierarchical resolution rules to assign articles where multiple themes intersected.

A Thematic Study on the Use of Gender Biased Terminology in Afghanistan Television Programs

Ahmad Khan¹, Melanie M. Tidman²

¹ A T Still Health Sciences University. Email: Address: sa205310@atsu.edu

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4850-9466>

² Adjunct Professor A.T. Still University: Doctorate in Health Science Program

Abstract

This qualitative thematic study explores the use of gender-biased terminology toward Afghan women broadcast on Afghan television programs. In this study, Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News' Tawdi Khabari on YouTube were reviewed using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The study engaged a focus group of Afghan natives of diverse participants living in Afghanistan to analyze the presence and implications of biased language directed towards women. This thematic analysis of selected YouTube videos from Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News' TV Tawdi Khabari content from 01/01/2023 to 01/01/2024, along with Afghan focus group discussions. Seven key themes emerged, showing significant patterns of gender-biased language toward Afghan women that can perpetuate stereotypes and lead to social inequalities. The findings of this study highlighted a division of identities between Afghan men and Afghan women, the marginalization of Afghan women's roles, and standards of masculinity that weaken women's roles. The findings of this study highlighted the potential role of television programs' content in shaping Afghans' perceptions of gender identity. It indicates opportunities for promoting more equitable representations of Afghan women without stereotyping them in different roles and provides recommendations for enhancing positive change in representing Afghan women.

Keywords: Biased, Gender, Media, Lower-Income Countries, Stereotype

1. Introduction

Discussing the role of women in developing countries as reflected in television programming has garnered significant scholarly attention in many communities worldwide, particularly concerning the use of biased language that perpetuates gender inequality (Daalman et al., 2017). This paper aims to explore the themes surrounding the depiction of women through biased language in television programs, examining how such language perpetuates societal perceptions, and contributes to the broader discourse on gender roles in various disciplines in the community.

According to Llorns et al. (2021), feminist linguistics dissect how language contributes to the construction and preservation of gender identities and the gender-related power gradient. Study results highlight that language is not just a communication tool but also a tool that can embody societal norms and expectations regarding different genders (Meier et al., 2020). In the context of television broadcasting, programs that incorporate of biased language can potentially negatively impact gender roles (Stewart et al., 2021).

According to Valkenburg et al. (2016), media effects theory indicates that media can influence an audience's perceptions and behaviors. Russell and Shrum (2021) discuss cultivation theory which suggests explicitly that prolonged exposure to television content can shape viewers' worldviews, including their beliefs about gender roles (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). These two theories provide the framework essential for understanding how the use of biased language in television programming can normalize harmful stereotypes about women.

The use of phrases or expressions that characterize women as inherently weaker or inferior, such as derogatory descriptors or comparative weak terms, is prevalent in television programs. These terms derogate women's strength, intellect, or emotional resilience (Madani et al., 2023; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Some studies have indicated that such descriptions can lead to negative beliefs about women's capabilities and roles in families (Gurieva et al., 2022), which in some cases can diminish their societal status.

In television narratives, such as Marvel and Star Wars franchises in 2009 and 2012 males were often described as heroes or protagonists. Conversely, females were given characters relegated to supporting roles or portrayed with flaws that undermine their role in social life (Clarke & Hines, 2024; Rasmussen et al., 2021). Gender-biased language can add to the above dynamics when females are commonly characterized with qualifiers indicating that they are more vulnerable or weaker than males (García-González et al., 2019).

Some of these qualifiers include displaying femininity as weakness and endorsing masculine norms of toughness and dominance (Connor et al., 2017; Reidy et al., 2015). This approach can influence the television audience's perceptions of women's roles in social life (Gurieva et al., 2022; Meier et al., 2020).

The description of women in violent contexts, such as combat sports or action films, often uses biased language that frames female characters as outliers or exceptions to the norm (Lwamba et al., 2022). Statements where female characters are appraised using phrases typically applied to the male gender suggest that those traits are not a natural characteristic associated with women, thus reinforcing the stereotype that women are not designed for roles that might require strength or aggression (Rasmussen et al., 2021). The attitude of questioning women's strength highlights the need for a more inclusive approach to realizing their potential and refining the definitions of characteristics that have historically limited them.

According to Santoniccolo et al (2023), television programming plays an essential role in shaping societal norms regarding gender roles. When biased language and stereotypical terms are frequently used in dialogue within television programs, women's experiences are framed in ways to indicate that women do not have the same potential as men (Suchana, 2024). Study results have suggested that audiences can adopt gendered-biased perspectives, leading to both optimal and suboptimal perceptions of women's capacities and societal roles (Glazbrook et al., 2025).

Exposure to biased language in television can profoundly affect viewers' self-esteem and identity, particularly among women (Merino et al., 2024). Some studies suggest that terms or language that give women passive roles can lead to diminished self-worth and aspiration among women, perpetuating cycles of gender inequality in the community (Sulla et al., 2025). These negative portrayals can lead to diminishing women's self-esteem and make them less likely to pursue their goals and assert their potential.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift toward more empowering portrayals of women in television broadcasts in some communities. Feminist principles are increasingly woven into narratives into narrative that challenge traditional stereotypes, using language to highlight women's strength, complex, and agency across various disciplines (Stewart et al., 2021). Positive representation of women has the potential to reshape audience perceptions and inspire a more equitable worldview, especially in communities within developing countries where women do not have the same rights as men (Esquierdo-Leal et al., 2021).

The rise of media literacy campaigns accentuates critical engagement with the language used in television programming (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). Several activist groups including the United Nations Women and the International Federation of Journalists are advocating for fairer and more representative language

that encourages audiences, particularly women and girls, to question stereotypes and demand more accurate and equitable representation of gender roles (Ozer, 2023). This grassroots approach to recognizing the impact of media consumption on gender roles improves awareness and activism toward gender equity (Dai et al., 2025).

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative thematic study was to investigate the presence and implications of biased language directed towards Afghan women as represented in television channels based in Afghanistan. By conducting a thematic analysis of selected video content from popular Afghan television channels on YouTube, this study aimed to identify recurring patterns of biased language and socio-cultural narratives that perpetuate stereotypes and gender-biased language negatively affecting Afghan women.

1.2. Significance

This study is crucial for understanding the use of language and gender dynamics in Afghanistan. YouTube and other streaming platforms have become critical sources for disseminating information and shaping public perception (Zimba et al., 2024). Examining biased language in this context is vital for several reasons. It can enhance the body of knowledge concerning the negative impact of biased language on marginalizing Afghan women, and provide insights into how it can exacerbate systemic biases, with potential negative implications for Afghan societal norms. The findings of this study can be used to support the avoidance of stereotypical or biased phrases and expressions in Afghan television programs and to promote awareness of the negative impacts of stereotypical phrases and biased expressions on communication within Afghan communities.

2. Methods and Study Design

2.1. Study design

A descriptive phenomenological design was used in the study to highlight information and insight that is not generated from large amounts of data but, conversely, gathered through an intensive study of experiences (Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). A descriptive phenomenological design contextualizes the individual's lived experiences and encounters with gender-biased terminology against Afghan women (Starks et al., 2007) to assess how these biased phrases and expressions might impact Afghan women's roles in the community (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This approach provided the focus group with an opportunity to share their perceptions after watching the Shamshad TV and Tolo TV broadcasts that contained gender-biased terminology. The approach of the study is focused on asking the focus group to share their insights on the selected broadcast programs: "How did they feel after listening and watching the clips? (Neubauer et al., 2019). This study aimed to analyze gender-biased terms used in Afghan television (TV) channels Tolo News and Shamshad. The data was manually collected from 2023 to 2024 from selected Afghan TV channels on YouTube.

The selection of these Afghan TV channels (Tolo News and Shamshad) was based on specific criteria. These TV channels were chosen because they have a subscriber count of more than 100,000 as of May 2025. Additionally, the channels maintained active broadcasting on YouTube during the study period and consistently posted content on the platform.

This study assessed programs focused on the social, political, and educational needs of Afghans, published between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2024. Special attention was paid to significant TV shows, including Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News' Tawdi Khabari, which featured discussions on gender-related issues, education, and women's rights. Tawda Bashsona (hot discussion), and Tawdi Kabhabari (hot talks) are 30–45-minute programs that feature one host, typically a TV channel employee, and one to three guests, often Afghan residents with expertise in the topic at hand. The host asks common open-ended questions related to the topic and gives dedicated time to every guest to discuss their answers.

A study protocol was in place to ensure a thorough extraction of data. The manual data extraction process began by accessing each selected TV channel on YouTube and selecting the societal/culturally focused TV programs through each channel's playlist. The researcher then selected the programs that focused on women's rights, women's education, women's access to work, and women's economic independence. The principal researcher navigated through the timeline of posts for each TV channel within the specified timeframe.

First, the Afghan TV program was identified from selected Afghan TV channels that met the inclusion criteria, based on its content. Sonix, an automated transcription application, converted the selected audio/videos recordings into written text. After the video was uploaded to Sonix, the focus review group reviewed and edited the transcription for any errors, and the clean transcript was exported for thematic analysis. Nvivo, which is a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to organize, code, and conduct thematic analysis. When the data was imported into the qualitative software, codes were organized into themes and grouped to form overarching categories. Every theme was reviewed by the focus group for coherence, ensuring it entailed the essence of the data.

The focus group preidentified the pejorative terms typically associated with gender bias. The focus group listened to the broadcast. They then identified relevant phrases from each of the identified TV shows. They recorded these terms on individual sheets of paper which included the TV channel name, the identified phrase and expressions. Then the focus group written evaluations were compared with terms recorded in a spreadsheet based on the thematic analysis of the recorded transcripts of the same broadcasts. The Excel spreadsheet included details such as the TV channel name, the identified phrase and expression, and appropriate engagement metrics (likes, shares, and comments).

2.2. Validation Process

Different Afghanistan television programs were used to ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives, including programs that featured discussions on Afghan Women's issues. Moreover, programs with time periods exceeding one year were used, which may have influenced language, attitude, and perception toward Afghan women.

The focus group was involved in the analysis, coding decisions, and identifying the themes. For data confirmation, we engaged peers with a background in qualitative research to review the thematic interpretation and coding scheme. After the codes, subthemes, and the themes were developed, we shared the findings with an expert familiar with Afghanistan television programs and culture to validate the interpretation. We incorporated their feedback to reflect the nuances of language use accurately.

3. Results

The thematic analysis of biased language on the Shamshad Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari TV channels in Afghanistan revealed significant patterns of gender-biased language used in these programs covering women's rights, women's education, and other daily social problems in Afghanistan. Seven key themes and 28 subthemes emerged from the data analysis using Sonix, a qualitative software, and a review of the focus group responses (see **Figure 1**). Each theme reflected a sample of the ongoing societal perceptions regarding masculinity and femininity among Afghans within their community. (Identified focus Group in the results are reported using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality; see **Table 1**).



Figure 1: Themes and subthemes

Table 1: Socio-demographics of focus group

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Residence	Education	Ethnicity
Ms. Karimi	24	Female	Urban	Bachelors	Tajik
Mr. Khan	30	Male	Urban	Bachelors	Tajik
Mr. Qader	24	Male	Urban	Bachelors	Pashtun
Ms. Haider	25	Female	Rural	Bachelor	Tajik
Ms. Faroqi	18	Female	Urban	High School	Hazara
Mr. Nazi	26	Male	Urban	High School	Pashtun

Mr. Pushton	30	Male	Urban	Doctorate	Tajik
Ms. Afghan	31	Female	Rural	Bachelor	Pashtun
Mr. Akbar	35	Male	Urban	Master's	Tajik
Ms. Najem	28	Female	Urban	Medical Doctor	Pashtun
Mr. Wardag	24	Male	Suburb	Medical Student	Pashtun
Ms. Homa	28	Female	Urban	High School	Tajik
Ms. Nazari	24	Female	Urban	Bachelor	Tajik

3.1. Theme 1: We are men, not women

The first theme highlighted a division between men's and women's identities, represented in broadcasts from Shamshad Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari TV channels in Afghanistan. The focus group interpreted this theme as a prevailing notion that suggested that Afghan men have strength and dominance while relegating Afghan women to a position of inferiority. This binary perception was observed in Tawda Basoona and Twade Kabari during discussions, where masculinity was frequently asserted as a source of pride. Ms. Najem (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"When I heard this phrase, as a woman who was born and lives in a traditional patriarchal society, it was not a simple sentence for me. It reminded me of all the discrimination, inequalities, and injustices that men in such a system impose directly on the women and girls of their own families, and indirectly on women and girls outside their families.

In my view, men's superiority over women is irrational, because both are human beings and creations of Allah. Neither has any inherent advantage or weakness over the other, and therefore no one should be given priority or higher value based solely on gender".

3.2. Theme 2: We are not women who sit at home

The second theme that was noticed on Shamshad Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari TV channels in Afghanistan, was the dismissal of domestic roles typically associated with women, suggested a desire to separate men's identity-related tasks from traditional women's tasks. The focus group presented a narrative for this theme, indicating that men pride themselves on activities and engagement in public spheres. This notion perpetuates the idea that value is derived primarily from accomplishments outside the home rather than tasks completed within it. Ms. Karimi (Pseudonym) had the following comment

"Although we can say in today's world that yes women are more in charge of domestic responsibilities, this sentence is more about conveying the sense of "we are stronger and more capable" so not only this sentence, but any sentence that stereotypes any particular race or gender MUST trigger the anger in people".

3.3. Theme 3: We are not weak like women

The third theme that was observed during discussions among participants, as they answered the host's questions on Shamshad TV Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari programs in Afghanistan, specifically highlighting the contrast between strength and weakness, was expressed in the form of a third theme: harmful masculinity standards. Mr. Akbari (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"Anyone who says such a thing and believes it has, in fact, insulted half of the human society—that is, women—and has overlooked and underestimated their unique abilities and characteristics. How can one call a mother, who is a woman, weak when she rocks the cradle with one hand and the world with the other?"

3.4. Theme 4: A woman's place is inside the home, not outside

During the discussion on Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari, participants statements in one of the programs reflected this theme. According to the focus group interpretation, this theme reflected a clear bias towards traditional domestic roles for women, frequently highlighting that the home is the primary domain for women. Continuously raising this theme in daily conversations and in the media may lead to societal expectations that devalue women's participation in the workforce and public life. Mr. Wardaq (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"It's absurd to limit women to the home and waste their potential. Women's roles are equally important as men's roles in society. A small illustration: imagine how a society would look without female doctors."

3.5. Theme 5: We are not women to be afraid

According to the focus group interpretation, this theme conceptualized fear, particularly in vulnerable situations, noted in conversation on Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari. This theme was linked to femininity, suggesting that men are expected to be fearless and assertive compared to women. Persistent use of this theme can lead to stigmatizing emotional expressions as a sign of weakness. Ms. Haider (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"We are not women to be scared. We've realized our strength, our power, and our role in society. We're not afraid of being judged by others. We're not afraid to take part in any role or to share our ideas in a discussion. There's nothing a woman should be afraid of."

3.6. Theme 6: We do not wear women's bangles

Like many other cultures, bangles are traditional accessories for Afghan women. The theme identified by the focus group was "We do not wear women's bangles". The theme was featured on broadcasts on Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari during discussions among on-air participants. According to the focus groups' interpretation, this theme symbolizes a broader rejection of traits or behaviors associated with women, and this language reinforces the boundaries of acceptable expressions or traits related to men. Ms. Nazari (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"When I hear the phrase in the conversation 'We do not wear women's bangles, ' it actually hurts me. I find it disrespectful because wearing bangles is not a sign of weakness, nor should it be looked down upon. For many women, bangles are a symbol of femininity and culture. I feel like some men say things like this to separate themselves from women, as if being a woman means being weak which I find both hurtful and, in a way, a bit ironic. It reveals a mindset that still looks at women as 'less, ' and that's not okay."

3.7. Theme 7: We can take care of our women

This theme was featured on Shamshad TV's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News Tawdi Khabari during discussions among on-air participants, indicating an ostensibly protective theme when it comes to the cultural protection for women. This sentiment implied a paternalistic view of women. According to the focus group interpretation, this theme suggests that men provide protection to women in Afghan society, which can reflect the minimization of women's autonomy. This implies that women's primary role is to be reliant on men, and these statements can potentially diminish women's independence in the Afghan community. Ms. Faroqi (pseudonym) had the following comment:

"When I hear the phrase "We can take care of our women, " honestly I get two different feelings. On one side, it sounds good like showing care, support, and responsibility. It gives me a warm feeling that women are valued and protected."

But on the other side, it feels a bit strange, as if women cannot take care of themselves and always need someone else to protect them. That part makes me uncomfortable, because I believe women are strong and independent too. So, for me, this phrase has both a positive and a negative side. Mostly, it depends on how people mean it".

4. Discussion

The identified themes in the qualitative study on the use of gender-biased language and the role of Afghan women as reflected in local television programs may indicate how the Afghan population perceives women's roles in society. These identified themes through the use of a transcript analysis of on-air programs and focus group review of the broadcasts demonstrate attitudes that can perpetuate stereotypes for women in Afghan society, highlighting the media's role in preserving these narratives.

The phrases "We are men, not women or We do not wear women's bangles" can highlight an adherence to traditional concepts of masculinity in Afghan communities. Exposure of the general population to such stereotypical phrases, can impact all aspects of daily life where men are often considered to have strength and authority, while women are positioned in inferior or supplementary roles (Kim & Park, 2018). It has been widely studied how media can influence public perception of how both men and women view their identities and roles in society (DeLay et al., 2018). According to Andersson and Harnois (2020), the effects of this gender bias on women have been indicated in their experiences of gender discrimination with elevated rates of depression and psychological distress, poorer mental functioning, and lower life satisfaction.

The second identified theme "We are not women who sit at home" and the fourth identified theme "A woman's place is inside the home, not outside" reflected of traditional gender roles that restrict Afghan women to functioning primarily in the home. These themes were aligned with Santoniccolo et al. 's (2023) findings, which highlighted the need for women to have varied roles in the community to change the perception that the role of women indicates passivity. This perception has been historically underrepresented in some traditions, including in communities Afghanistan (Merone et al., 2022).

The third theme "We are not women to be afraid" and the fifth theme "We are not weak like women" were interpreted by the focus group as an association between Afghan women and weakness. These themes align with the findings of Bareket and Fiske (2025), who noted that the presence of attitudes and stereotypes similar to the third theme. This theme of weakness related to women undermines women's roles and constrains the perception of strength as a trait of men (Smith et al., 2021). According to Graham et al. (2024), the implications of attitudes similar to theme three can lead to an environment with aggressive behaviors and potentially increasing violence against women.

5. Limitation

The investigation of only two Afghan television channels, Shamshad and Tolo News, can limit the generalizability of the findings, as they do not reflect broader trends in programs related to Afghan social life. Additionally, reliance on an Afghan focus group for the review of selected transcripts and the content and interpretation of Shamshad and Tolo News television programs could have introduced subjectivity into the interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, the one-year temporal scope may not have adequately captured fluctuations in programming or shifts in language use over time in Afghan social life, and the analysis may have overlooked the cultural and contextual differences that influence language and phrase usage in social programs on Afghan television.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a unique analysis of gender biases in terminology noticed in the television broadcasts that limit Afghan women's roles and puts them in a weakened position. Through the study of broadcasts from Shamshad

television's Tawda Bahsona and Tolo News' Tawdi Khabari on YouTube, seven key themes were identified that reveal underlying potential societal perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles in Afghanistan. Moreover, the findings of the study highlight the presence of a dichotomy between Afghan men and women in the context of discussions on the aforementioned television programs. Such gender-biased contents in the language perpetuate dominance for men and reinforces traditional gender roles for women that limit Afghan women's roles to domestic tasks. In summary, the findings of the study emphasize the need for Afghan television programs to adopt a gender inclusive and equitable approach and avoid gender-biased language when representing Afghan women's roles within their community. This practice will enhance the perception of gender equality among people in Afghanistan.

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The Role of Intermediaries in the Dissemination of Political Messages within the Tambak Lorok Fishing Community during the 2024 Presidential Election

Nugraheni Arumsari^{1,5}, Pawito², Andre Noevi Rahmanto³, Didik Gunawan Soeharto⁴

^{1,2,3} Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

⁴ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

⁵ Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia.

Correspondence: Nugraheni Arumsari, Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret, 57126 Indonesia. E-mail: nugraheni.arum@student.uns.ac.id

Abstract

Political participation in marginalized communities is often assumed to be low or purely transactional, a 'politics of the stomach'. This article challenges this assumption by examining the empirical anomaly of Tambak Lorok, an Indonesian coastal fishing community that exhibited 81% voter turnout in the 2024 election despite profound socio-economic precarity. Using a qualitative case study design, this research draws on in-depth interviews (N=11) with political brokers, community members, and local leaders, supplemented by ethnographic observation. The findings reveal that high participation was not spontaneous but was mobilized by a hybrid 'ecosystem' of activist, clientelist, and opportunist brokers. These actors synthesized long-term relational maintenance (e.g., trust-building, community presence) with short-term, compliance-gaining strategies. This study argues that brokers' effectiveness lies in their role as 'cognitive and normative translators,' reframing material rewards (like *Bansos*) and political choices into the binding, local language of moral obligation (*balas budi*) and subtle social coercion. The resulting participation is a form of 'constrained agency' rather than autonomous choice. This research contributes to brokerage theory by shifting the focus from purely transactional functions to the crucial work of *translational* and *communicative* mobilization.

Keywords: Political Brokerage, Clientelism, Political Participation, Communicative Coercion, Indonesia, Marginalized Communities

1. Introduction

Political participation among marginalized communities presents a persistent paradox within the study of electoral democracy (Alelaimat, 2023). Foundational scholarship, often anchored in the Socio-Economic Status (SES) model, posits that political engagement requires a surplus of resources, namely time, financial capital, and specific civic skills (Verba et al., 1995). From this perspective, marginalized populations, defined by the very precarity and scarcity of these resources, are theoretically predisposed to political disengagement. The dominant assumption is

that their economic precarity culminates in low political participation, if not outright apathy (Farkas & Szabó, 2025; Jungkunz & Marx, 2025; Laurison, 2016).

This deterministic view, however, has been challenged. When the economically precarious *do* engage, scholarship often frames this activity through the reductive lens of clientelism or what has been termed the 'politics of the stomach' (Omilusi & Omilusi, 2019; Scott, 2017). This literature assumes that for subsistence populations, the prioritization of immediate livelihood often supersedes abstract ideological commitments. Consequently, their participation is often dismissed as purely transactional, ephemeral, and 'low quality,' a form of mobilized apathy rather than genuine political expression (Berenschot, 2018; Pellicer et al., 2021). This creates a theoretical impasse where marginalized communities are seen as either politically absent or instrumentally co-opted.

This theoretical tension is particularly acute in Indonesia, where fishing communities frequently confront a complex matrix of social and economic vulnerabilities. While this vulnerability has long been documented (Helmi & Satria, 2012), it has intensified in recent years. The fishing community of Tambak Lorok in Semarang, Central Java, serves as a potent case study. Their vulnerability is not an abstract concept; it is a daily, lived reality. This community perennially grapples with existential threats that compound income instability, most notably severe coastal abrasion and recurrent tidal flooding (*rob*), which damage infrastructure, disrupt livelihoods, and threaten land tenure (Furwon Ulya Himawan & Ayomi Amindoni, 2025; Isrofi & Gunawan, 2025). These persistent environmental and economic crises, according to the conventional SES and 'politics of the stomach' models, should create a near-insurmountable barrier to formal political engagement.

It is precisely in this context of extreme precarity that Tambak Lorok presents a compelling empirical anomaly. Contrary to theoretical expectations, data indicate a markedly high and sustained level of community participation in recent elections. Voter turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election reached 81% (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024).¹ This figure is not only high in absolute terms, significantly exceeding the national average, but also represents a sustained increase from an already high 78% in the 2019 election (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024). This phenomenon suggests the presence of specific, powerful mobilization factors that have successfully overcome, or perhaps even repurposed, the community's extant socio-economic barriers.

This anomaly cannot be summarily dismissed as a simple case of transactional, clientelistic mobilization. While vote-buying and patronage are endemic features of Indonesian politics, a purely transactional model is insufficient to explain these findings. It fails to account for the *sustained increase* in participation over time, nor does it adequately explain the *electoral coherence* of the community's choice. Such a model reduces community members to passive recipients of handouts, overlooking the complex internal dynamics and agential choices that shape their collective political behavior (Sadat & Basir, 2025). This puzzle, therefore, demands a more nuanced explanation focused on the role of strategic intermediaries.

This study postulates that this anomaly is not a spontaneous phenomenon but is driven by the strategic interventions of political brokers. While the literature on Indonesian electoral politics points to the crucial role of brokers (Aspinall, 2014; Hidayaturrahman et al., 2022; Tawakkal et al., 2020), much of the scholarship focuses heavily on their role as distributors of material patronage. This article argues that this focus on transactional logic obscures a more critical, and perhaps more powerful, function: the broker as a 'cognitive and normative translator.' Departing from the assumption of brokers as passive conduits, mere bridges for resources (Gallego et al., 2020), this article argues that in Tambak Lorok, broker effectiveness lies in their role as active 'translators'. We demonstrate how they reframe complex political messages into resonant local narratives and analyze their management of community expectations, often by linking candidates' abstract promises to pressing local issues such as boat assistance and fuel subsidies.

¹ KPU is the acronym for *Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, Indonesia's independent General Elections Commission. The citation "KPU Kota Semarang" refers to the official data from the commission's municipal-level branch responsible for administering the election in Semarang City.

The strategic importance of this 'translational' function is highlighted by the electoral outcome in Tambak Lorok, where Candidate Pair number 2 secured a dominant victory (KPU Kota Semarang, 2024).² This suggests a strong correlation between the brokers' executed "translation" strategies and the community's ultimate political choices. Drawing on this background, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and impacts of this political brokerage. This article seeks to answer the central research question: How does the combination of personalized communication strategies and sustained relational maintenance allow political brokers in Tambak Lorok to influence community political choices, ultimately contributing to the significant victory of Candidate Pair number 2?

In answering this question, this article offers distinct contributions. Empirically, it provides a crucial counter-narrative to the 'politics of the stomach' thesis by demonstrating high-efficacy participation in a deeply marginalized community. Theoretically, it refines the concept of political brokerage, shifting the analytical focus from purely transactional functions to more complex translational and normative work. Methodologically, it underscores the value of deep ethnographic inquiry in uncovering the micro-dynamics of electoral mobilization that large-N studies often miss. To develop this argument, the article first details the research methodology, followed by a thick description of the socio-economic and political context of Tambak Lorok. The subsequent analysis explores the primary mechanisms of 'translation' used by brokers, leading into a discussion of the broader implications of these findings before concluding.

2. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, chosen for its exploratory and interpretive nature, which allows the researcher to delve into the social context comprehensively (Baxter & Jack, 2015). The specific method employed is a single-case study, deemed most appropriate for achieving the necessary depth of analysis (Yin, 2018). The case is defined as the mobilization process in Tambak Lorok, which represents a critical, anomalous case: a community exhibiting high participation despite conditions that theoretically predict apathy (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The research site was purposively selected in this Tambak Lorok Fishing Village, situated in Tanjung Mas Urban Village. This site's selection is highly strategic, not for statistical *representation*, but as a "thick" context (Geertz, 1977) uniquely suited for observing these embedded political dynamics.

The process of identifying and engaging informants, or interlocutors, was iterative and emergent, following a qualitative sampling logic. The inquiry began with purposive sampling, making initial contact with highly visible community leaders and known political *gatekeepers* deemed to possess deep knowledge of the mobilization process. From this initial set of interlocutors, snowball sampling was employed to trace less-visible social networks and access brokers who were not public figures. The study's interlocutors were thus selected based on their deep, experiential knowledge and were organized into three primary groups to ensure a holistic view: (1) Political Brokers, the core subject group; (2) a diverse cohort of Community Members to triangulate the brokers' narratives; and (3) a small group of Key Informants, such as formal campaign officials, to contextualize the brokers' actions. This dual sampling strategy continued until theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was achieved, defined as the stage where new interviews no longer yielded new insights.

To ensure methodological triangulation and credibility, data were collected from January 2025 to June 2025 using three primary sources. The primary source of information was a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 key interlocutors, comprising five political brokers, five community members, and one *Lurah* (the official Village Head). These interviews were designed to elicit rich narratives concerning informants' experiences and perceptions of the political brokering process. This was supplemented by ethnographic participant observation, involving *nongkrong* (deep hanging out) at key community gathering points (such as *warung kopi* and fish auction sites) to contextualize and triangulate interview data in real-time. Finally, relevant documents and archival data, including official KPU results and local campaign materials, were collected to support and contextualize the qualitative findings.

² In the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, Candidate Pair number 2 referred to the ticket of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who were ultimately declared the winners of the national election.

The data analysis stage was inductive and iterative, running concurrently with data collection, and employed thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023) integrated with the explanation building technique (Yin, 2018). All transcripts and field notes were systematically and manually analyzed. This process involved a multi-pass reading of the data; transcripts were first subjected to open coding to identify initial patterns. This was followed by axial coding, where codes were compared, contrasted, and clustered into conceptual categories (e.g., "Personalized Communication," "Relational Maintenance"). The final stage involved selective coding to construct the explanatory model presented in this article.

3. Results

The analysis of field data, comprising 11 in-depth interviews and sustained participant observation from January to June 2025, reveals a sophisticated, multi-layered brokerage system. The findings demonstrate that the mobilization in Tambak Lorok was not a simple transaction, but a complex process built upon distinct broker roles, deep long-term relational investment, and specific, high-pressure persuasion tactics. These findings are presented in three thematic sections, which detail the architecture of the mobilization that led to the victory of Candidate Pair 2.

3.1. Broker Typologies: An Ecosystem of Influence

The research first identified that "broker" is not a monolithic role. Informants described a network of actors with distinct motives, sources of legitimacy, and operational tactics. This ecosystem allowed the campaign to penetrate different layers of the community simultaneously. These brokers align with, and expand upon, Aspinall's (2014) typology and are classified as Activist, Clientelist, and Opportunist brokers.

3.1.1. The Activist Broker

This broker was driven by a perceived long-term ideological or community-based commitment. Their legitimacy was not derived from money, but from a proven track record of community advocacy, often through formal positions in local organizations. They "translated" the candidate's abstract platform into the language of ongoing, tangible community struggles. As Informant 3, a respected leader in the local Fishermen's Group (KUB³ Nelayan), stated:

"Bagi saya, ini bukan soal pemilu lima tahunan. Ini perjuangan. Saya ini dari dulu di KUB, berjuang soal solar, soal pukat yang dilarang. Saya pelajari visi-misi Paslon 2 ini, dan di programnya, itu paling sejalan dengan kami. Saya yakinkan warga ya dari situ, bukan dari uang. Makanya mereka (warga) percaya. Saya tidak *ngoyo* (rakus) cari materi."

(For me, this isn't about the five-year election. It's a struggle. I've been in the KUB forever, fighting about diesel fuel, about the banned trawls. I studied the vision and mission of Candidate Pair 2, and in their platform, it is the most aligned with us. I convince the residents from that angle, not from money. That's why they (the residents) trust me. I am not greedy for material things.)

This *activist* legitimacy was confirmed by community members. Informant 6 (Community Member) differentiated this type clearly:

"Kalau Pak [Informant 3] itu beda. Beliau itu mikir *njlimet* (rumit), mikir jangka panjang buat nelayan. Beliau tidak pernah *ngurus* amplop. Waktu beliau kumpulkan kami dan bilang Paslon 2 paling bagus untuk nelayan, kami *manut* (ikut). Kami percaya beliau, karena beliau yang paling paham perjuangan kami."

(Mr. [Informant 3] is different. He thinks in detail, thinks long-term for the fishermen. He never deals with envelopes [cash]. When he gathered us and said Candidate Pair 2 was the best for fishermen, we followed. We trust him, because he understands our struggle the best.)

³ KUB is the acronym for *Kelompok Usaha Bersama* (Joint Business Group). The KUB Nelayan (Fishermen's KUB) is a formal, state-recognized cooperative. In Indonesia, these groups are the primary institutional channel for fishermen to access government programs, subsidies (e.g., for fuel and gear), and technical assistance. Leadership in a KUB thus provides significant social and political capital.

3.1.2. The Clientelist Broker

This broker, often holding a formal community position like an RT⁴ Head (Rukun Tetangga/Neighborhood Head), viewed politics as a long-term instrumental exchange. They provided consistent, tangible services to residents (e.g., processing administrative documents, ensuring inclusion in social aid/Bansos⁵ lists) in exchange for political loyalty. Their legitimacy was relational and reciprocal, a core part of the village's "moral economy." Informant 2, an RT Head for over a decade, explained this pragmatic relationship:

"Ya jelas, Mbak. Warga itu kan harus *diopeni* (diurus). Saya ini RT, 24 jam urus mereka. Ada yang butuh surat, saya bantu. Ada Bansos, saya pastikan mereka dapat. Nah, pas pemilu, saya kan tinggal mengingatkan saja. *Mosok wis dibantu ora ngerti bales budi?* (Masak sudah dibantu tidak tahu balas budi?). Ini kan timbal balik saja. Wajar itu. Saya *ngopeni* mereka, mereka *ngopeni* saya (secara politik)."

(Of course, Ms. [researcher]. Residents must be taken care of. I am the RT Head, 24 hours taking care of them. If someone needs a letter, I help. If there's social aid, I ensure they get it. So, when the election comes, I just remind them. How can you be helped and not know how to reciprocate? This is just reciprocity. It's normal. I take care of them, they take care of me (politically).)

The Lurah (Informant 11) confirmed this function, viewing these brokers as essential, quasi-state actors:

"Pak RT (Broker) itu kan ujung tombak. Data warga, siapa yang layak dapat bantuan, siapa yang belum, itu semua di dia. Wajar kalau dia punya 'massa'. Dia yang sehari-hari menyelesaikan masalah. Jadi kalau dia *ngarahkan* (mengarahkan) pilihan, itu pasti didengar. Itu sudah jadi sistem di sini."

(The RT Head (Broker) is the spearhead. Resident data, who deserves aid, who doesn't, it's all with him. It's normal that he has a 'mass base'. He's the one who solves problems day-to-day. So if he 'directs' their vote, he will definitely be heard. That's already the system here).

3.1.3. The Opportunist Broker

This broker was characterized by flexibility and was driven by short-term material incentives during the election period. They were uncommitted to ideology and aligned with whichever candidate offered the most significant immediate financial gain. Informant 1, a local youth leader (*tokoh pemuda*), candidly described his role:

"Kalau saya jujur saja, Mbak. Saya lihat siapa yang 'bensin'-nya (logistik/uang) paling kuat. Tim Paslon 2 ini kemarin paling berani. Ya saya kerja untuk mereka. Warga dapat sembako, saya dapat 'uang rokok' (komisi). Pemilu depan? Ya kita lihat lagi siapa yang paling siap. Politik kan begini, cari makan."

(If I'm honest, Ms. [researcher]. I just see who has the 'strongest fuel' (logistics/money). The team for Candidate Pair 2 was the 'bravest' [most willing to spend] this time. So I worked for them. Residents get staple goods, I get 'cigarette money' (a commission). The next election? Well, we'll see again who is the most prepared. Politics is like this, finding a living.)

Interestingly, the Clientelist Brokers viewed these Opportunists as necessary but unreliable. Informant 2 (The RT Head) commented:

"Oh, si [Informant 1] itu? Beda kelas. Dia itu 'tim sukses musiman'. Kita butuh dia untuk *nyebar* (menyebar) logistik, untuk acara-acara. Tapi dia tidak punya loyalitas. Warga juga tahu dia gerak karena uang. Beda sama kita yang *ngurus* warga bertahun-tahun."

(Oh, [Informant 1]? Different class. He is a 'seasonal success team'. We need him to distribute logistics, for events. But he has no loyalty. The residents also know he moves because of money. Different from us, who have taken care of residents for years.)

⁴ RT is the acronym for *Rukun Tetangga* (Neighborhood Association), the smallest administrative unit of governance in an Indonesian urban or rural village. The Kepala RT (RT Head) is a community leader, typically elected by the residents, who serves as a crucial (often voluntary) intermediary between households and the formal state bureaucracy (the *Lurah* or Village Head).

⁵ Bansos is the acronym for *Bantuan Sosial* (Social Assistance), a large-scale Indonesian government social welfare program. It typically involves the distribution of cash transfers (BLT) or staple goods (like rice and cooking oil) to registered low-income households. Access to Bansos lists is often controlled or mediated by local leaders like the RT Head, making it a significant source of clientelistic leverage.

3.2. The Architecture of Influence: Relationship Maintenance Strategies

The brokers' effectiveness during the campaign was not spontaneous. It was built upon a deep, sociological foundation of long-term, deliberate relationship maintenance. Analysis revealed five dimensions of this strategy, which brokers used to build and sustain social capital long before the election began.

Brokers actively practiced Positivity and Openness. They ensured a consistent, friendly, and non-transactional presence in daily community life. Field observations confirmed this: brokers were fixtures at key social hubs (*warung kopi*), attending social gatherings (*arisan*), recitation groups (*yasinan*), and communal work (*kerja bakti*). This proximity was vital for building personal intimacy and positioning themselves as accessible conduits for community grievances. As Informant 7 (Community Member) noted:

"Kenapa kami percaya Pak [Nama Broker]? Ya karena beliau itu ada terus. Acara *yasinan* ada, *kerjabakti* beliau ikut. Beda sama yang lain, yang datang pas mau pemilu saja. Kalau kita ada keluhan soal solar langka atau rob, beliau yang pertama *nggrungokke* (mendengarkan). Jadi pas beliau bilang 'pilih 02 saja', kita ya *manut* (ikut)." (*Why do we trust Mr. [Broker's Name]? Because he is always there. He attends Yasinan (prayer groups), he joins the community work. Different from others who only show up near the election. If we have complaints about scarce diesel or tidal floods, he is the first to listen. So when he says 'just vote for 02', we just follow.*)

This trust was solidified through Assurances (consistency) and the leveraging of Social Networks. Brokers demonstrated a clear, unwavering direction of political support, which built social trust and made them appear reliable. This was particularly important for female community members. Informant 10 (Female Community Member) explained:

"Ibu-ibu di sini itu *ora neko-neko* (tidak macam-macam). Yang penting jelas. Pak [Broker] itu dari awal sudah *mantep* (mantap) ke 02. Beliau *ngomong* alasannya jelas, programnya jelas. Kita jadi ikut *ayem* (tenang). Daripada yang lain, hari ini A, besok B, kan kita jadi bingung. Konsistensi beliau itu yang bikin kami yakin."

(*The mothers here are not complicated. The important thing is clarity. Mr. [Broker] was firm on 02 from the very beginning. He stated his reasons clearly, the program was clear. It made us feel calm. Unlike others, who today say A, tomorrow say B, it just confuses us. His consistency is what made us sure.*)

Furthermore, brokers did not work in isolation. They practiced **Sharing Tasks**, collaborating with other brokers who held different forms of legitimacy. The Lurah (Informant 11) described this network:

"Oh, di sini itu kompak timnya. Si A (Broker Aktivis) itu pegang KUB Nelayan. Si B (Broker RT) pegang warganya per RT. Nanti mereka ketemu, bagi-bagi logistik. Jaringannya rapi, tidak jalan sendiri-sendiri. Dari *getok tular* (dari mulut ke mulut) di pengajian ibu-ibu sampai di *warung kopi*, semua sudah diatur."

(*Oh, the team here is solid. Mr. A (Activist Broker) handles the Fishermen's Group. Mr. B (RT Broker) handles his residents per neighborhood block. Later they meet, distribute logistics. The network is neat, they don't work alone. From word-of-mouth at the mothers' prayer groups to the coffee stalls, everything is organized.*)

3.3. Persuasion in Practice: Compliance-Gaining Strategies

During the election period, brokers "activated" the social capital they had built using a multi-pronged compliance-gaining strategy that skillfully combined rewards (the "carrot") and subtle, powerful coercion (the "stick").

The Reward component was twofold. It involved direct Gifts, such as the *serangan fajar* ("dawn attack," a pre-dawn cash distribution on election day). But more importantly, it involved Hoping, or the promise of future, larger-scale community-wide programs. Brokers explicitly linked these promises to the candidate. As Informant 8 (Community Member) explained:

"Ya, H-1 pemilu itu pasti ada 'serangan fajar'. Kami dikasih amplop isi Rp 100.000. Tapi bukan cuma itu. Timnya juga janji kalau Paslon 2 menang, perbaikan *talud* (tanggul) penahan rob ini sama bantuan alat tangkap mau *dikaver* (dicukupi) semua. Ya kita kan jadi berharap. Uang Rp 100.000 itu habis sehari, tapi kalau *talud*-nya jadi, itu kan buat selamanya."

(*Yes, the day before the election, there's always a 'dawn attack'. We were given envelopes with IDR 100,000. But not just that. The team also promised that if Candidate Pair 2 wins, the repair of this tidal flood embankment and*

fishing gear aid will all be covered. So, of course, we become hopeful. The IDR 100,000 is gone in a day, but if the embankment is built, that's forever.)

More critically, brokers combined these rewards with Threat/Coercion Tactics. This was not a physical threat, but a powerful psychosocial one, leveraging the community's dependence and the broker's relational authority. The threat was twofold: the implied loss of future aid and the social pressure of being labeled "ungrateful" (*ora ngerti balas budi*). Informant 4 (Broker-RT) articulated this strategy perfectly:

"Kita tidak pernah *maksa*, Mbak. Kita cuma ingatkan. 'Nek wis dikasih ya harus tanggung jawab.' (Kalau sudah dikasih ya harus tanggung jawab). Itu saja. Ini kan soal *balas budi*. Kalau dia *mbalelo* (membelot), ya kita tahu. Nanti kalau ada jatah Bansos (Bantuan Sosial) lagi, ya kita *skip* (lewati) dulu. Kan masih banyak yang lebih butuh dan lebih *ngerti* (paham). Saya *ndak* ngancam, saya cuma *ngatur* mana yang prioritas."

(We never force them, Ms. [researcher]. We just remind them. 'If you've been given something, you must be responsible.' That's all. This is about reciprocity. If they defect, well, we know. Later, if there is another round of social aid, we'll just skip them. There are many others who are more in need and more 'understanding'. I'm not threatening, I'm just managing priorities.)

This strategy, Leveraging Image and Relational Legitimacy, effectively framed the political choice as a moral obligation. The community's decision was ultimately shaped by the fear of social sanction and the desire to maintain community harmony, as summarized by Informant 9 (Community Member):

"Ya *ndak* enak (tidak enak hati), Mbak. Pak [Broker] itu kan yang urus kita sehari-hari. Masa cuma karena Rp 100.000 dari calon lain kita berkianat? Itu namanya *ora ngerti balas budi* (tidak tahu balas budi). Kita milih 02 ya karena menghargai beliau. Ini soal *jogo roso* (menjaga perasaan) dan *jogo* (menjaga) hubungan baik. Biar ke depannya kalau butuh apa-apa, tetap gampang."

(It just feels bad, Ms. [researcher]. Mr. [Broker] is the one who takes care of us day-to-day. How could we betray him just for IDR 100,000 from another candidate? That's called being ungrateful. We vote for 02 to respect him. This is about protecting feelings and maintaining good relationships. So that in the future, if we need anything, it remains easy.)

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer a significant intervention into the scholarly debate on political participation among marginalized communities. The high voter turnout (81%) and the dominant victory of Candidate Pair 2 (Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka) in Tambak Lorok directly refute the conventional 'politics of the stomach' thesis, which presumes that socio-economic precarity leads to political apathy (Omilusi & Omilusi, 2019; Scott, 2017). This research demonstrates that high-efficacy participation is possible, but that it is not spontaneous. Instead, as the findings show, it is the product of a dense, multi-layered, and strategically managed brokerage system. The central argument emerging from these findings is that broker effectiveness in Tambak Lorok is contingent not on any single strategy, but on their ability to synthesize long-term relational legitimacy with short-term transactional persuasion.

First, the analysis fundamentally deconstructs and enriches the concept of clientelism. The 'politics of the stomach' literature (Pellicer et al., 2021) often portrays transactional voting as a simple, ephemeral cash-for-vote exchange. The findings from Tambak Lorok, particularly the distinction between the Activist, Clientelist, and Opportunist brokers, demonstrate that this is a gross oversimplification. The mobilization was not driven by the Opportunist Brokers alone; they were merely the "seasonal" logistical arm, as Informant 2 noted. The core of the mobilization rested on the Activist and Clientelist brokers, whose influence was non-transactional or, at minimum, long-term relational. The Clientelist Broker (the RT Head, Informant 2), for instance, did not simply "buy" votes on election day; he "cashed in" on years of *relational debt* built by *diopeni* (taking care of) his residents. This finding aligns with more nuanced clientelism studies (Berenschot, 2018) but specifies the mechanism: clientelism in this context is not just an exchange of *goods*, but an exchange of *long-term care and administrative access* (like *Bansos* lists) for *political loyalty*. The Activist Broker (Informant 3), meanwhile, operated on an entirely different logic, "translating" ideology (the candidate's platform) into the language of the fishermen's struggle. This demonstrates

that mobilization in marginalized communities is not monolithically material; it is simultaneously ideological, relational, and material.

Second, the findings on Relationship Maintenance Strategies provide the crucial sociological architecture for our "broker as translator" hypothesis, which was posed in the introduction. The literature on brokers often focuses on their "bridging" function (Gallego et al., 2020), but our findings detail *how* this bridge is built and maintained. The strategies of 'Positivity' (being present at *yasinan* and *kerja bakti*) and 'Openness' (listening to grievances at the *warung kopi*) are not just social niceties; they are calculated, long-term investments in social capital. As Informant 7 described, this constant presence is what differentiates the "true" broker from the seasonal campaigner. This process allows brokers to perform two critical "translation" functions. First, they conduct upward translation: they gather community grievances (e.g., "solar langka," "rob," "susah Bansos") and translate them into actionable political demands. Second, during the election, they perform downward translation: they take the abstract platform of Candidate Pair 2 and translate it into a direct solution for those pre-existing grievances. The promise of the *talud* (embankment) (Finding 3.3) was so potent precisely because the brokers had spent years listening to complaints about the *rob* (tidal flood). This long-term relational groundwork provides the *trust* necessary for the community to believe the brokers' promises over those of an outside campaigner.

Third, this research offers a significant refinement of brokerage theory by proposing an "ecosystem model" of mobilization. Much of the literature (Aspinall, 2014) tends to analyze broker *types* in isolation. The findings from Tambak Lorok, particularly on 'Sharing Tasks' and 'Social Networks' (Finding 3.2, confirmed by the Lurah, Informant 11), show that these different broker types function collaboratively and symbiotically. The Activist Broker (Informant 3) provided the *moral and ideological cover* for the operation, appealing to the community's sense of collective struggle. The Clientelist Broker (Informant 2) provided the *structural access and control* over state resources (like Bansos) and the neighborhood (RT) network. The Opportunist Broker (Informant 1) provided the *short-term logistical muscle* to distribute materials and manage "dawn attacks." This hybrid ecosystem is far more resilient than a system based on a single broker type. It can simultaneously appeal to the community's ideological aspirations (via the Activist), their pragmatic-material needs (via the Clientelist), and their short-term desires (via the Opportunist). This distributed network of legitimacy explains the mobilization's overwhelming success and coherence.

Finally, this study complicates the narrative of community agency and empowerment. The high participation in Tambak Lorok should not be romanticized as purely autonomous or agentic. The findings on Compliance Gaining Strategies (Finding 3.3) reveal a powerful, albeit subtle, element of coercion. This suggests that participation here is a form of constrained agency. The community members are not "duped" or "false-conscious," as Informant 9's testimony makes clear. They are making highly rational, pragmatic calculations within a system where the social and material costs of non-compliance are severe. The threat articulated by the RT² Head (Informant 4) to *skip* non-compliant residents from future social aid lists is a credible and existential threat. This transforms the vote from a private preference into a public performance of loyalty. The "moral" language of *balas budi* (reciprocity) and the fear of being labeled "*ora ngerti balas budi*" (ungrateful) is, in this context, a powerful tool of normative coercion. The community's decision to vote for Candidate Pair 2 is thus a *moral and economic* imperative, not just a political one. It is aimed at *jogo roso* (protecting feelings) and, more importantly, ensuring their own future access to the essential resources brokered by these powerful local figures.

In sum, the paradox of Tambak Lorok is solved by understanding the broker as a multifaceted actor. They are simultaneously patrons (Clientelists), advocates (Activists), and entrepreneurs (Opportunists). They succeed not by merely distributing goods, but by translating the abstract act of voting into the tangible, moral, and high-stakes language of everyday community relations.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to resolve the empirical paradox of high political participation in the deeply marginalized fishing community of Tambak Lorok. The research answers its central question by demonstrating that this anomaly is not spontaneous, but the result of a sophisticated, multi-layered brokerage system. The success of brokers in

mobilizing votes for Candidate Pair 2 was not contingent on any single factor. Instead, it was achieved through a strategic synthesis of long-term relational maintenance and short-term, coercive persuasion.

This research makes three distinct contributions. Empirically, it provides a crucial counter-narrative to the 'politics of the stomach' thesis, showing a case of high, albeit constrained, participation. Theoretically, it advances brokerage theory beyond static typologies by proposing an "ecosystem model," where activist, clientelist, and opportunist brokers work symbiotically. Most importantly, it operationalizes the "broker as translator" concept, demonstrating that their primary function is not merely transactional (distributing goods) but translational, reframing material aid and political choices into the powerful, binding language of local moral obligations (*balas budi*) and social pressure.

The findings of this qualitative single-case study, while "thick" in description, are not intended to be statistically generalizable to all marginalized communities in Indonesia. The specific "broker ecosystem" found in Tambak Lorok is contingent on its unique coastal and administrative context. Future research should, therefore, explore these dynamics comparatively. Quantitative studies might also be designed to measure the relative weight of these different mobilization strategies, ideological, relational, and material, in compelling voter compliance. Ultimately, this study confirms that to understand the vote in communities like Tambak Lorok, we must look beyond the cash and analyze the deep, relational architecture of trust, dependency, and moral coercion that governs community life.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: This study has not used any generative AI tools or technologies in the preparation of this manuscript

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From Strategy to Synergy: Evaluating the Evolution of Pertamina's Digital Crisis Communication in the Pertamax Adulteration Case

Sri Rizki¹, Sri Hastjarjo², Eka Nada Shofa Alkhajar³

^{1,2,3} Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: Sri Rizki. Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl. Ir. Sutami No. 36A, Kentingan, Surakarta, Central Java 57126, Indonesia
Email: srizki@student.uns.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores the evolution of digital crisis communication strategies employed by Pertamina during the 2025 Pertamax adulteration crisis. Previous studies using Image Repair Theory (IRT) revealed Pertamina's heavy reliance on the *bolstering* strategy to defend its reputation. Further investigation using a hybrid strategy approach identified twelve patterns of strategy combination, with *bolstering + corrective action* as the most dominant. This article synthesizes findings from both studies, based on the same dataset of 474 Instagram posts across six official Pertamina accounts, to argue that Pertamina's communication approach reflects a strategic shift: from using singular, defensive tactics to adopting synergistic, multi-strategy responses. Using a conceptual comparative method, this paper demonstrates that in the digital media environment, organizations are more likely to blend IRT strategies with elements of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to build credibility, maintain public trust, and reduce reputational threats. The study contributes to the theoretical development of IRT by proposing a framework of synergistic image repair, and to practical crisis communication by highlighting the importance of adaptability and strategic integration in public sector digital communication.

Keywords: Image Repair Theory, Hybrid Strategy, Digital Crisis Communication, Pertamina, Bolstering, Crisis Synergy

1. Introduction

Crisis communication remains a pivotal area in public relations, focusing on how institutions manage public trust and organizational legitimacy during turbulent events (Coombs, 2023; Ham & Kim, 2019). Scholars have emphasized that crises are not merely disruptions but communicative events that shape meaning and reputation through media narratives and public discourse (Marsen, 2020; Rizza, 2023). Over the last decade, the increasing

mediatization of crises has created hybrid arenas where institutional and citizen-generated communication coexist (Burdsey et al., 2023; Dominic et al., 2023).

The Pertamax adulteration case in Indonesia, widely covered by Tempo.co (2025), CNN Indonesia (2025), Kompas.com (2025), and Reuters (2025), reflects how corporate communication operates under both digital and political pressure. As a state-owned enterprise, PT Pertamina not only had to address public safety concerns but also navigate institutional expectations of transparency (Kompas.id, 2025; Reuters, 2025). These conditions align with what Comyns and Franklin-Johnson (2018) describe as “collective crises,” where moral responsibility and institutional accountability are intertwined.

In such contexts, communication theories like Benoit’s (Benoit & Zhang, 2004) Image Repair Theory (IRT) and Coombs’ (2023) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) become crucial frameworks. While IRT categorizes message strategies such as denial, evasion of responsibility, corrective action, and mortification, SCCT links these strategies to audience perceptions and attributions of blame (Liu et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025). Studies have expanded these models to address digital environments, where crisis narratives unfold in real time and audience reactions influence message framing (Park & Choi, 2023; Kwok et al., 2022).

However, research increasingly shows that rigidly applying one strategy is less effective than combining multiple approaches for instance, blending corrective actions with empathetic messaging or moral appeals (Tu et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2021). Such integrated practices, described by Haupt (2021) and Oh et al. (2022), reveal that hybrid crisis responses sustain trust more effectively across multiple audience segments. Pertamina’s communication pattern during this case seems to follow a similar trajectory from initial corrective statements toward collaborative, emotionally grounded messages intended to rebuild trust (Kompas.com, 2025; Tempo.co, 2025).

Moreover, social media platforms redefine crisis temporality. As Kwok et al. (2022) and Liu-Lastres et al. (2024) noted, online crises evolve rapidly, requiring not only immediacy but also authenticity in message tone and interaction. Humor, empathy, and relational transparency have emerged as tools to manage digital outrage (Hämpke et al., 2022; Hirschfeld & Thielsch, 2022). Pertamina’s Instagram posts, for example, incorporated human-interest visuals and value-based language elements aligned with the relational trust frameworks proposed by Kamboh et al. (2024) and Elshaer & Saad (2022).

In addition, crisis communication increasingly draws upon Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) logic, emphasizing moral repair and resilience building rather than image defense (Chang et al., 2023; Ham & Kim, 2019). For instance, public sector organizations in Asia and Africa have shown that integrating CSR themes such as transparency and servant leadership into crisis communication improves long-term reputation recovery (Elshaer & Saad, 2022; Kamboh et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, cultural values emphasizing collectivism and communal responsibility influence how the public perceives apology, compensation, and accountability (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019; Andung et al., 2024). As Campbell (2019) observed in the Japanese post-disaster context, public trust in institutions often depends on whether official messaging resonates with moral expectations and local communication norms.

Against this background, the Pertamax adulteration case offers a rich empirical setting to explore how a national energy company negotiates public accountability in digital spaces. This study proposes a Synergistic Image Repair framework that integrates symbolic, moral, and behavioral communication strategies across online platforms. The next section reviews literature on crisis communication, organizational reputation, and image repair models to establish the theoretical foundations for this approach (Benoit & Zhang, 2004; Coombs, 2023; Marsen, 2020; Tu et al., 2023).

2. Method

Crisis communication scholarship has progressively evolved from defensive frameworks to integrative, relationship-centered approaches that highlight empathy, credibility, and social responsibility as the foundations

of reputation recovery. Classic models such as the Image Repair Theory (Benoit & Zhang, 2004) describe crisis communication as a strategic discourse of justification, through which organizations attempt to reduce offensiveness or assume responsibility in the aftermath of a reputational threat. This framework was expanded by Coombs (2023) through the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes how audiences' perceptions of responsibility and emotional attributions shape the effectiveness of an organization's response. Subsequent studies (Ham & Kim, 2019; Tu et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2021) argue that effective image restoration is not only about selecting the correct verbal strategy but also about aligning communication with moral behavior and visible corrective actions.

The rise of digital media has radically transformed this landscape. Social networks now serve as both the stage and the audience for organizational crises, creating real-time interactions that can amplify outrage or foster reconciliation (Kwok et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres et al., 2024). Park and Park (2020) demonstrated that emotional contagion through online comments affects how crisis messages are interpreted, while Gruda and Ojo (2022) revealed that inconsistency or delayed responses intensify public anxiety and distrust. These findings align with Wilk et al. (2024), who developed a social media crisis response framework emphasizing timeliness, empathy, and message coherence as determinants of digital credibility. MacKay et al. (2022) further found that influencer-driven crisis communication during COVID-19 encouraged empathy and legitimacy through perceived authenticity, whereas Salem et al. (2022) noted that synchronized messages between governments and hospitality sectors reinforced a sense of trust during national emergencies.

Parallel to digital adaptation, scholars have increasingly emphasized the moral dimension of crisis communication through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) integration. CSR-driven crisis messages focus not merely on damage control but on restoring social value and ethical legitimacy (Chang et al., 2023; Oh et al., 2022). Elshaer and Saad (2022) highlight that transparent communication under servant leadership builds organizational resilience, while Kamboh et al. (2024) and Liu et al. (2025) show how digital transparency in public institutions enhances moral credibility. In Asian contexts, Jiang et al. (2025) observed that universities responding to ethical misconduct managed to rebuild reputation through consistency and moral tone, echoing Tu et al.'s (2023) call for collective moral narratives in crisis settings. These insights suggest that modern crisis response should integrate moral accountability and humanistic engagement as much as factual correction.

Moreover, reputation and trust are not solely products of organizational effort but outcomes of mediated interpretation. Media institutions play a decisive role in framing crises, as demonstrated by Campbell (2019) in his study of Japanese disaster communication and by Burdsey et al. (2023), who examined how the Refugee Olympic Team was portrayed as a symbol of resilience rather than failure. In the political communication sphere, von Sikorski et al. (2018) discovered that scandal management requires adaptive responses combining empathy, humor, and strategic distancing to prevent associative damage principles that resonate in corporate communication contexts as well. Complementing these global perspectives, Andung et al. (2024) found that local and folk media in Indonesia remain powerful tools for disseminating corrective narratives and building community-level trust, especially in collectivist societies where relational closeness shapes perception (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019).

The current scholarship thus converges on a new paradigm: crisis communication is no longer a linear sequence of response stages but a synergistic process uniting organizational accountability, ethical responsibility, and digital participation. Haupt (2021) and Rizza (2023) emphasize cross-sector collaboration and citizen inclusion as keys to crisis resilience, while O'Shea et al. (2022) advocate for cultural adaptability in institutional responses. Integrating these ideas, Pertamina's recent approach combining corrective transparency, empathetic digital storytelling, and CSR-oriented actions reflects this global shift from strategy to synergy. This perspective forms the theoretical foundation of the present study, connecting the analytical precision of IRT and SCCT with the emerging ethos of synergistic, morally grounded crisis communication.

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to explore how PT Pertamina, Indonesia's state-owned oil and gas company, communicated its crisis response during the *Pertamax adulteration scandal* in early 2025. The focus was on identifying message strategies, thematic consistencies, and rhetorical framing within the

company's official Instagram posts during the crisis period. This approach aligns with the interpretive tradition of crisis communication research, which prioritizes meaning-making over numerical measurement (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019; Andung et al., 2024).

The selection of Instagram as the primary data source was justified by its central role in digital crisis management. Social media platforms like Instagram enable organizations to engage directly with publics in real time, merging visual narratives and corporate statements to construct an interactive form of image repair (Kwok et al., 2022; Wilk et al., 2024). Pertamina's verified Instagram account, which has millions of followers, served as a primary channel for official clarification, apologies, and updates related to the case.

Data were collected from posts published between **February 25 and April 30, 2025**, the period in which the crisis narrative peaked in mainstream and social media coverage (CNN Indonesia, 2025; Tempo.co, 2025; Kompas.com, 2025). The posts were archived, categorized by type (statement, infographic, corporate social responsibility update, or public reassurance), and then coded manually to identify recurring communicative themes.

The analysis followed the framework of *Image Repair Theory* (Benoit & Zhang, 2004) and *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (Coombs, 2023), examining strategies such as corrective action, bolstering, and mortification. However, unlike earlier studies that focus purely on textual defense (Ham & Kim, 2019; Tu et al., 2023), this research emphasized how digital storytelling, moral cues, and CSR integration created a synergistic communication pattern. Triangulation was achieved by comparing corporate posts with coverage from mainstream media outlets (Kompas.id, 2025; Reuters, 2025) to identify consistency and alignment in narrative framing.

Ethically, the study used publicly available data and did not involve direct interaction with participants. All interpretations were cross-checked against existing models of crisis communication to maintain analytical rigor (Marsen, 2020; Haupt, 2021).

3. Results

The comparative synthesis of two prior studies reveals a clear evolution in Pertamina's digital crisis communication strategies during the 2025 Pertamax adulteration crisis. In the first study, which applied Benoit's Image Repair Theory (IRT), the dominant response identified was bolstering a strategy centered on highlighting the organization's positive past actions, national service, and corporate integrity (Benoit & Zhang, 2004). This approach served as a defensive mechanism to reaffirm Pertamina's identity as a trusted and responsible energy provider, aiming to stabilize public confidence amid growing skepticism and online criticism. Bolstering messages were prominently featured through visual storytelling and CSR-oriented narratives that emphasized Pertamina's contribution to national progress, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. Such communication, while defensive in tone, also reflected an attempt to align corporate identity with collective moral values, resonating with the cultural expectation of accountability within Indonesian society.

In contrast, the second study adopted a hybrid strategy framework, broadening the analytical scope beyond singular classifications to capture the coexistence and interaction of multiple repair strategies. This approach identified twelve distinct combinations, with three emerging as the most frequently employed:

1. Bolstering + Corrective Action, where the company reinforced its credibility while simultaneously demonstrating concrete efforts to resolve the issue, such as laboratory verification and transparent fuel distribution audits;
2. Bolstering + Transcendence, which reframed the crisis within a broader national energy resilience narrative;
3. Corrective Action + Mortification, signaling organizational accountability through explicit acknowledgment and solution-focused messaging.

These combinations reflect a layered and adaptive pattern of image repair, showing how Pertamina dynamically calibrated its communication based on shifts in public sentiment, digital engagement, and the crisis stage. This transition from defensive messaging to integrative, solution-oriented communication demonstrates increasing institutional maturity in navigating digital crises, where real-time responsiveness and public empathy are equally essential. The strategy also echoes insights from Andung, Messakh, and Doko (2024), who emphasize that

culturally grounded and community-based communication such as the use of folk narratives can enhance public understanding and rebuild trust during crises. Similarly, Pertamina's efforts to embed moral and social themes within its digital messaging mirror this approach, fostering collective identification and participatory interpretation among audiences.

Table 1: Comparison of Strategy Use

Strategy Type	Description	Noted in Study
Bolstering	Emphasizing positive track record	Study 1 & 2
Corrective Action	Offering solutions, fixing the issue	Study 2
Mortification	Admitting fault and asking forgiveness	Study 2
Transcendence	Reframing the issue in broader context	Study 2
Bolstering + Corrective Action	Highlighting values while acting	Study 2
Bolstering + Transcendence	Mixing optimism with broader narrative	Study 2
Corrective Action + Mortification	Admitting mistake and fixing it	Study 2

Ultimately, the findings suggest that Pertamina's crisis communication evolved into a synergistic model, merging symbolic reassurance with behavioral accountability. This transformation underscores a shift from reactive image defense toward proactive trust restoration demonstrating how organizations in highly visible public sectors can sustain legitimacy and credibility within complex, hyper-mediated communication ecosystems (Benoit & Zhang, 2004; Andung et al., 2024). To better understand the specific image repair strategies employed during the crisis, this study categories Pertamina's responses based on both single and combined strategy types. These combinations are summarized in Table 1.

While Table 1 highlights the frequency and patterns of strategy combinations, Figure 1 visualizes Pertamina's overall shift from a single-strategy approach to a more complex, synergistic crisis communication model. This transformation signifies not only a quantitative change in the number of strategies used but also a qualitative evolution in the company's communicative logic. Initially, Pertamina's approach followed the conventional framework of **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**, where the focus rested on message-based defenses such as denial, corrective action, or bolstering (Benoit & Zhang, 2004). However, as the crisis unfolded within the dynamic environment of social media, Pertamina demonstrated increasing adaptability by merging symbolic and behavioral tactics, forming a multidimensional response that balanced reputation protection, moral accountability, and public empathy.

The visualization in Figure 1 reflects this layered evolution from isolated, reactive messaging to integrated, narrative-based communication. Each phase in Pertamina's strategy demonstrates a conscious effort to align its crisis discourse with broader public expectations of transparency and cultural values of collectivity. In this regard, Pertamina's communication practices resonate with **Andung, Messakh, and Doko (2024)**, who emphasize the importance of culturally rooted and participatory crisis communication models in Indonesia. Their study on disaster mitigation through folk media revealed that trust recovery often depends on the organization's ability to frame messages in familiar, community-centered narratives. Similarly, Pertamina's shift toward more empathetic and solution-driven storytelling mirrors this local communication pattern, using moral cues and shared national values to rebuild legitimacy.

Thus, Figure 1 does not merely represent a chronological change in strategy but illustrates the emergence of what can be termed a **synergistic image repair process**, where symbolic reassurance, factual correction, and cultural resonance operate concurrently. This synthesis reflects the theoretical integration of IRT principles (Benoit & Zhang, 2004) with Indonesia's socio-communicative traditions (Andung et al., 2024), forming a hybrid crisis communication framework that is both globally informed and locally grounded.

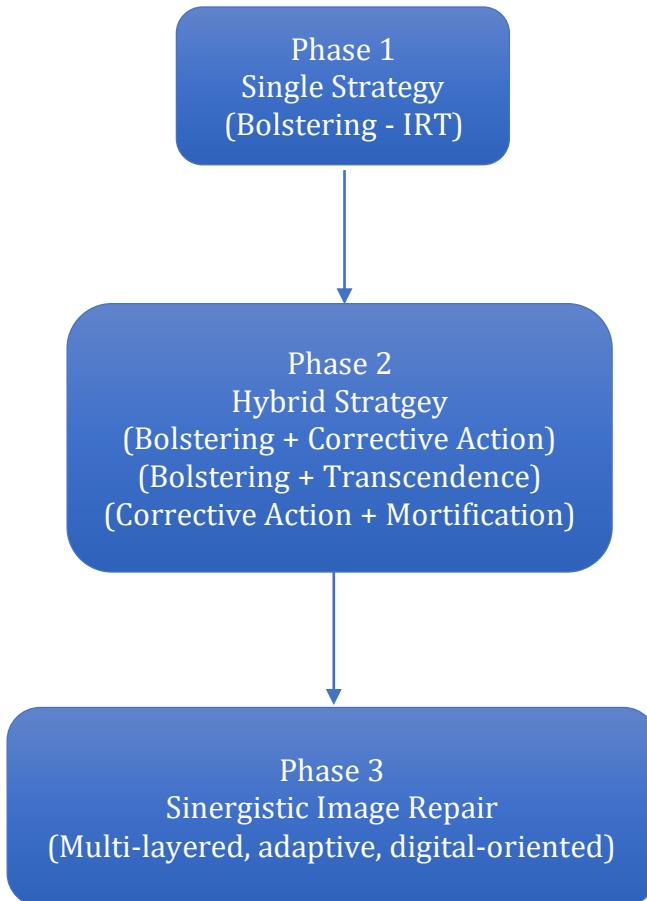


Figure 1: Strategic Transition from Single Strategy to Synergistic Image Repair in Pertamina's Crisis Communication

As shown in Table 1, Pertamina employed various combinations of image repair strategies during the Pertamax adulteration crisis, with bolstering + corrective action emerging as the most dominant pairing. This combination demonstrates the company's dual effort to reaffirm its institutional credibility while addressing public concerns through corrective and transparent measures. The strategic pattern marks a clear departure from Pertamina's earlier reliance on a singular, defensive response primarily bolstering as conceptualized in Image Repair Theory (IRT) (Benoit & Zhang, 2004). By integrating both symbolic and behavioral strategies, Pertamina's approach reflects a maturing crisis communication framework in which messages of accountability are no longer limited to rhetoric but are supported by tangible acts of restitution.

The transition from a single to a multi-strategy communication model, illustrated in Figure 1, captures this broader evolution from reactive defense to proactive engagement. Symbolic strategies such as bolstering and transcendence became intertwined with corrective actions, forming what can be described as a synergistic pattern of digital crisis response. This pattern aligns with contemporary research emphasizing that credibility in crisis communication depends on both message coherence and visible moral behavior (Chang, Weng, & Wu, 2023). The ability to combine empathy, ethical responsibility, and corrective transparency allows organizations to meet public expectations in the era of hyper-mediatized crises, where trust is shaped simultaneously by institutional narratives and digital audience reactions.

Furthermore, Pertamina's transformation echoes insights from Burdsey, Michelini, and Agergaard (2023), who argue that institutional communication during crises increasingly reflects processes of mediatization where organizations construct legitimacy through sustained visibility, narrative consistency, and moral symbolism. Similarly, Pertamina's use of Instagram as a dialogic platform demonstrates how digital media environments institutionalize crisis discourse, transforming short-term defense into long-term trust-building. Parallel to this, Campbell (2019) highlights that public trust in post-crisis communication is strongly influenced by the perceived

sincerity and cultural resonance of official messages an aspect that Pertamina embodied through emotionally grounded content aligned with collectivist values.

In the Indonesian context, these findings also resonate with Andung, Messakh, and Doko (2024), who emphasize the role of culturally embedded storytelling and participatory communication in restoring social cohesion during crises. To further conceptualize this development, the study proposes a model of Synergistic Image Repair (see Figure 2), illustrating how symbolic, behavioral, and cultural dimensions operate in concert to sustain organizational legitimacy across digital crisis contexts (Benoit & Zhang, 2004; Andung et al., 2024; Burdsey et al., 2023; Campbell, 2019; Chang et al., 2023).

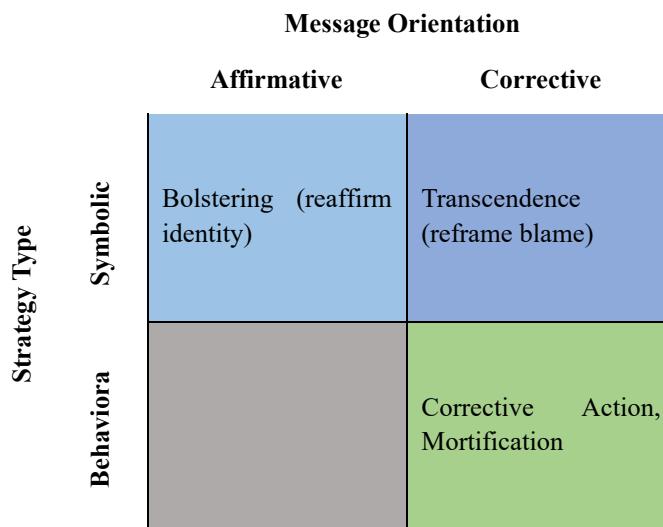


Figure 2: Proposed Model of Synergistic Image Repair in Digital Crisis Communication

This study proposes a conceptual framework, Synergistic Image Repair, which blends symbolic and behavioral strategies to manage complex digital crises. As shown in Figure 2, these strategies operate in overlapping layers, enabling organizations to address reputational, emotional, and informational needs simultaneously. Unlike traditional image repair approaches that focus on linear or message-centered responses, this framework emphasizes integration and simultaneity, recognizing that contemporary crises unfold across dynamic, multi-platform environments where perception and action interact in real time.

The framework draws conceptual support from recent developments in digital crisis communication research. For instance, Kwok, Lee, and Han (2022) highlight that message typology and emotional tone significantly influence audience attention and engagement in social media crises, suggesting that message resonance is as critical as informational accuracy. Similarly, Liu, Gao, and Duan (2025) demonstrate that the strategic alignment between message type and response tone determines the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of institutional crisis responses, underscoring the need for flexible strategy selection. Meanwhile, Liu-Lastres, Guo, and Liu (2024) argue that appeals integrating emotional and rational elements such as empathy and evidence-based assurance can substantially enhance public acceptance during crises in the hospitality sector, reinforcing the importance of multidimensional message design.

Furthermore, MacKay et al. (2022) reveal that digital influencers' crisis messages on platforms like Instagram are most effective when they merge symbolic cues (such as authenticity and empathy) with behavioral indicators of responsibility (such as concrete actions or policy adjustments). This evidence supports the notion that symbolic and behavioral coherence is essential to sustain credibility in networked public spheres. Complementing these perspectives, Marsen (2020) conceptualizes crisis communication as an inherently navigational process one that requires continuous adaptation and strategic coordination between discourse and practice.

Together, these insights inform the Synergistic Image Repair model, which integrates message orientation, strategy type, and contextual responsiveness to offer a more adaptive and multi-dimensional framework than traditional image repair theory. This model forms the foundation for the following discussion, which examines its theoretical and practical implications within the evolving landscape of digital crisis communication (Kwok et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2025; Liu-Lastres et al., 2024; MacKay et al., 2022; Marsen, 2020).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest a strategic evolution in Pertamina's crisis communication approach during the 2025 Pertamax adulteration case, shifting from a reliance on singular image repair tactics particularly bolstering to the adoption of more dynamic, hybrid strategies. This transformation reflects not only a tactical response to a rapidly unfolding digital crisis but also a broader adaptation to the participatory nature of online public discourse, which demands speed, flexibility, and multi-layered messaging.

Drawing from Benoit's Image Repair Theory (IRT), the initial use of bolstering aligns with the organization's effort to reaffirm its positive track record and deflect reputational damage through reinforcement of prior goodwill and national contribution (Benoit & Zhang, 2004). However, as the crisis escalated, the integration of corrective action, mortification, and transcendence indicates a shift toward more responsive and emotionally resonant strategies. These combinations particularly bolstering + corrective action demonstrate Pertamina's attempt to balance reputation defense with visible problem-solving, a hybrid approach that extends beyond the traditional categories defined in IRT. In this sense, Pertamina's evolving communication strategy illustrates the adaptability and situational awareness that Benoit and Zhang (2004) identify as crucial to effective image restoration.

When examined through the lens of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this convergence of strategies also suggests that Pertamina implicitly assessed stakeholder attributions of responsibility and adjusted its responses accordingly. The progression from symbolic affirmation to concrete action reflects a growing recognition that credibility in digital crisis contexts requires more than narrative defense; it demands visible accountability and emotional intelligence in messaging.

Theoretically, these findings challenge the sufficiency of singular-strategy models like IRT when applied to complex, real-time crises in the digital age. This paper therefore proposes the concept of "synergistic image repair," describing an integrative and layered strategy model that merges symbolic and behavioral responses to address multiple stakeholder concerns simultaneously. Unlike IRT's original framework, which categorizes responses discretely, the synergistic model recognizes overlap, adaptation, and interplay as defining features of modern crisis communication (Benoit & Zhang, 2004).

Practically, this study offers key implications for public-sector communicators. Organizations must move beyond pre-scripted responses and instead develop an agile framework that enables strategic combinations based on real-time public sentiment, platform dynamics, and crisis progression. In an era where public trust can shift within hours and where organizational silence is often interpreted as guilt layered messaging rooted in transparency, empathy, and corrective action is no longer optional; it is a strategic necessity (Benoit & Zhang, 2004).

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A Dialectical Analysis of the Nepali Communist Movement: Historical, Ideological, Organizational, and Social Realities

Ram Prakash Puri¹

¹ Ph.D. scholar, Department of History, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Abstract

This article presents a dialectical–materialist analysis of the Nepali communist movement, examining its historical trajectory, ideological evolution, organizational dynamics, and socio-political impact. Through qualitative analysis of party documents, leadership accounts, and scholarly literature, the study identifies persistent factionalism not as an organizational aberration but as a constitutive feature arising from unresolved structural contradictions. The research highlights the core tension between revolutionary Marxist–Leninist–Maoist ideology and the pragmatic demands of parliamentary politics—a contradiction that manifests in the gap between the movement’s emancipatory promises and its frequently oligarchic, exclusionary practices. The article argues that factionalism serves a dual function: it is both a symptom of systemic weakness and a mechanism for ideological negotiation and strategic adaptation. Key findings reveal that formal adherence to “democratic centralism” often devolves into personalized leadership cults, while social inclusion rhetoric rarely translates into representative internal structures. The post-conflict integration into competitive multiparty democracy has further widened the parliamentarism-revolution divide, compelling communist parties to dilute class-based politics in favor of electoral and developmental agendas. Ultimately, the study concludes that the future of the Nepali communist movement hinges on its ability to reconcile these dialectical tensions. It faces a critical choice between renewal—through genuine internal democratization, ideological coherence, and meaningful social representation—and decline—through continued fragmentation, ideological ambiguity, and the erosion of its transformative legitimacy. The article contributes to broader debates on left politics in post-conflict societies, illustrating how revolutionary movements navigate the fraught transition from insurgency to institutional governance.

Keywords: Nepali Communist Movement, Factionalism, Democratic Centralism, Oligarchy, Parliamentarism–Revolution Contradiction, Dialectical Analysis, Social Inclusion, Post-Conflict Politics

1. Introduction

The Nepali communist movement has been one of the most decisive forces shaping the political, social, and ideological landscape of modern Nepal. From its early anti-Rana mobilizations in the mid-twentieth century to the Maoist insurgency and the republican transformation of the twenty-first century, communism in Nepal has served as both a source of radical challenge to the status quo and a deeply contested arena of internal ideological, organizational, and strategic struggle. While the movement is formally grounded in Marxism–Leninism and Maoist thought, the actual historical evolution of Nepal’s communist parties reveals a complex interplay of ideology, organizational structure, leadership behavior, socio-cultural context, and geopolitical pressures

(Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004). This interplay has produced both moments of revolutionary strength and long cycles of fragmentation, factionalism, and ideological dilution.

The movement's origins trace back to 1949 with the establishment of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), which articulated a bold transformative project aimed at dismantling entrenched hierarchies, relations of exploitation, and the concentration of political and economic power. This early vision of systemic transformation drew directly from Marxist-Leninist doctrine, imagining a future socialist order defined by collective ownership of productive forces, an egalitarian social structure, and ultimately, the withering away of the bourgeois state (Pokhrel, 2023; Gellner, 2007). Yet, from the outset, the movement was shaped as much by its commitment to revolutionary ideals as by the constraints of Nepal's shifting political regimes and deeply stratified social structure.

During the Panchayat period (1960–1990), the communist movement operated largely underground, oscillating between clandestine organization and episodic mass mobilization. These years helped cultivate both ideological militancy and organizational resilience. However, the same conditions also generated intense intra-party competition, as different factions interpreted Marxist-Leninist principles through divergent strategic lenses. The lack of open political space fostered factional tendencies, producing splits that revolved around questions of strategy, leadership, and the appropriate degree of engagement with the monarchy and parliamentary institutions (Hachhethu, 2002).

The decade-long Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) reconfigured the movement's trajectory. The People's War expanded the communists' influence dramatically through village-level organization, mass participation, and the politicization of marginalized groups (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). At the same time, the insurgency highlighted the inherent tensions between revolutionary ideology and pragmatic strategy. Disagreements over timing, tactics, organizational style, and negotiations with the state became recurrent sources of internal conflict. The insurgency was thus both an apex of communist mobilization and a period characterized by leadership disputes, strategic disagreements, and ideological recalibration.

Ideologically, Nepali communist parties have long navigated between orthodox revolutionary doctrine and the practical demands of political adaptation. The post-1990 democratic opening challenged the movement to integrate parliamentary participation with revolutionary values. For many factions, this integration produced ideological compromises that diluted the class-conscious project central to Marxist-Leninist and Maoist theory (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004). Generational divides compounded these tensions. Older cadres framed ideological purity as essential to revolutionary continuity, while younger leaders increasingly invoked pragmatism, electoral strategy, and organizational modernization. These frictions illustrate what may be termed the “dialectic of ideological reproduction”—the tension between maintaining doctrinal coherence and adapting to rapidly changing political conditions.

Organizationally, Nepal's communist parties have exhibited persistent contradictions between the Leninist principle of democratic centralism and the actual practice of leadership-dominated centralization. Although democratic centralism is designed to balance internal democracy with unified discipline, in practice it frequently devolves into oligarchic control wielded by dominant leaders, mirroring what Michels (1915) described as the “iron law of oligarchy.” This structural tendency not only restricts internal debate and accountability but also provides fertile ground for factionalism, as leaders build personal bases of support that compete with institutional authority. Factionalism in Nepali communist parties thus stems not only from ideological differences but also from organizational design, personal rivalries, contested legitimacy, and the pressures of political survival within a competitive multiparty environment.

The socio-cultural landscape further shapes the internal dynamics and public legitimacy of the movement. Nepal's deeply stratified society—characterized by entrenched caste hierarchies, regional inequalities, gender discrimination, and ethnic marginalization—presents a fundamental challenge to a movement that aspires to egalitarianism. Communist parties that fail to incorporate Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, women, and peasants into meaningful political leadership experience weakened mass mobilization and declining ideological credibility (Upadhyay, 2023; Adhikari, 2024; Khatri & Paudel, 2025). Conversely, periods of strong inclusion, particularly

during the early years of the Maoist insurgency, bolstered grassroots trust and expanded the movement's sociopolitical reach. This demonstrates that social representation is not a peripheral concern but a structural determinant of both organizational stability and revolutionary legitimacy.

External pressures also play a significant role in shaping the movement's trajectory. State repression during the Panchayat years, democratic openings after 1990, international ideological currents, India–China regional politics, donor influence, and the constraints of electoral competition have all intersected with internal dynamics to reshape strategic priorities (Sharma, 2004). These forces continually mediate the movement's ability to sustain ideological fidelity while negotiating the realities of governance, coalition politics, and geopolitical alignment. The persistent tension between parliamentary engagement and revolutionary ambition exemplifies these dialectical pressures. For many parties, attempting to balance state power with revolutionary identity has produced both political influence and internal contradiction.

Viewed historically and analytically, the contemporary reality of Nepal's communist movement is therefore profoundly dialectical. On one side lies the ideological aspiration toward class transformation, collective ownership, and social equality. On the other lies the organizational, structural, and strategic constraints that have repeatedly generated fragmentation, leadership conflict, and ideological drift. The movement's empirical trajectory reveals persistent gaps between doctrine and practice, between revolutionary ideals and political pragmatism, and between organizational principles and leadership behavior. These gaps have produced an internally heterogeneous movement marked by theoretical-practical contradictions, structural fragilities, economic limitations, and sociopolitical constraints.

Understanding these complexities is crucial for analyzing factionalism, strategic decision-making, ideological reinterpretation, and the long-term evolution of communist politics in Nepal. The present study is situated within this broader context and seeks to examine the historical, ideological, organizational, and socio-cultural foundations of internal disputes and recurrent splits within Nepali communist parties. It adopts a qualitative and interpretive-critical approach, drawing from primary and secondary sources and employing triangulation as the central method of analysis. Rather than merely describing organizational patterns or behavioral tendencies, the study situates internal conflict within a broader epistemological and socio-political framework.

The study pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it analyzes how historical, ideological, and organizational contradictions interact dialectically to shape the movement's evolution, transformation, and recurrent divisions. Second, it examines how organizational structures—particularly the adherence to and deviation from Leninist principles such as democratic centralism—produce structural tensions, leadership competition, and factional outcomes. Third, it explores how socio-cultural representation and internal knowledge-production processes—such as ideological interpretation, cadre education, and epistemic framing—affect legitimacy, cohesion, and the emergence or mitigation of splits. By integrating these dimensions, the study aims to provide a multidimensional understanding of fragmentation within the Nepali communist movement and to contribute to broader debates about ideology, organization, and political change in post-revolutionary contexts.

2. Research Questions

- How do historical, ideological, and organizational contradictions interact dialectically to shape the evolution, transformation, and recurrent factionalism of the Nepali communist movement?
- In what ways do Nepali communist parties' organizational practices—particularly their adherence to (or deviation from) Leninist organizational principles—produce structural tensions, leadership rivalries, and factional outcomes?
- How do social-cultural representation and internal epistemic processes (knowledge-making, ideological interpretation, cadre education) influence legitimacy, internal cohesion, and the emergence or resolution of factions within Nepali communist groups?

3. Research Objectives

The current research will:

- To analyze how historical, ideological, and organizational contradictions have interacted dialectically to shape the evolution, transformation, and recurrent factionalism of the Nepali communist movement.
- To examine how Nepali communist parties' organizational structures and their adherence to—or deviation from—Leninist organizational principles generate structural tensions, leadership conflicts, and factional outcomes.
- To explore how social-cultural representation and internal epistemic practices (knowledge-making, ideological interpretation, cadre education) shape internal legitimacy, party cohesion, and the emergence or resolution of factions within Nepali communist groups.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive-critical research design** to investigate the dynamics of factionalism within the Nepali communist movement. This methodological orientation is grounded in the premise that factionalism is not merely a behavioral or organizational phenomenon, but a *deeply epistemic, socio-historical, and ideological process* embedded in competing interpretations of Marxist–Leninist–Maoist doctrine, strategic orientations, and political identity. The interpretive-critical approach enables the study to examine *how communist actors construct, negotiate, and contest knowledge*, and how these epistemic struggles intersect with structural contradictions, organizational cultures, and historical legacies. Given the complexity, multidimensionality, and context-specific nature of factionalism, a purely quantitative approach would be insufficient for capturing the underlying **dialectical tensions**, interpretive disputes, and lived experiences that shape the internal dynamics of Nepal's communist parties. A qualitative-critical framework therefore provides the depth, flexibility, and analytical rigor required to illuminate factionalism as a socially constructed, ideologically mediated, and historically situated process.

3.1. Data Sources and Materials

The study draws on a diverse corpus of **primary and secondary sources**, allowing for a robust and triangulated understanding of factional processes. Primary sources include party constitutions, political reports, organizational resolutions, central committee decisions, theoretical treatises, and strategic documents. These materials provide insight into formal organizational structures, the official articulation of ideological lines, and the codification of internal norms and disciplinary mechanisms. They also reveal how party leaderships justify their claims to ideological correctness and organizational legitimacy during periods of internal conflict.

In addition, personal writings, memoirs, interviews, and speeches by key communist leaders are analyzed as critical epistemic sites. These sources uncover **subjective interpretations**, internal criticisms, and competing narratives that illuminate the contested terrain of knowledge production within the movement. Secondary sources—scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical accounts, and political analyses—complement the primary data by offering theoretical framing, contextual depth, and comparative insights into factionalism, party organization, ideological struggles, and political transitions in Nepal.

3.2. Analytical Strategy and Theoretical Orientation

Data analysis is guided by the principle of **methodological triangulation**, enabling the cross-verification of information across multiple types of sources and interpretive layers. Triangulation enhances the **credibility, reliability, and analytical validity** of the findings by mitigating biases inherent in individual documents, perspectives, or institutional narratives.

The analysis employs a combination of **thematic, structural, and epistemological coding**. Thematic coding identifies recurring patterns in factional alignments, leadership disputes, organizational tensions, and ideological debates. Structural coding highlights organizational mechanisms—such as democratic centralism, cadre deployment, and disciplinary procedures—that influence the emergence or suppression of factional tendencies. Epistemological coding foregrounds processes of knowledge creation, interpretation, and contestation, examining how actors invoke Marxist–Leninist–Maoist theory, historical memory, and political legitimacy to justify divergent ideological lines or organizational strategies.

The overall analytical lens is informed by **dialectical materialism**, which allows the study to examine how contradictions among historical experiences, productive relations, class compositions, leadership practices, and social structures produce shifting patterns of unity and division. This framework enables the identification of both long-term structural determinants and short-term contingencies that shape factional outcomes. It also illuminates how ideological interpretations evolve in relation to changing material conditions, political opportunities, and internal power relations.

Researcher reflexivity is explicitly integrated throughout the analytical process. The study critically reflects on how the researcher's theoretical orientation, positionality, and interpretive choices shape the framing of questions, selection of sources, and interpretation of evidence. This reflexive stance is particularly important in studying a movement that is itself deeply engaged in ideological interpretation, epistemic contestation, and debates over political truth.

3.3. Integrating Internal Dynamics with External Contexts

The methodological design recognizes that factionalism within Nepali communist parties cannot be understood solely through internal organizational dynamics. The analysis therefore incorporates key **external variables**—including democratic openings after 1990, state repression during different political regimes, electoral incentives, shifts in international communist thought, and regional geopolitical influences. These contextual factors are examined as part of the **broader dialectical environment** in which internal tensions escalate, stabilize, or transform. By integrating internal and external dimensions, the study avoids reductionist explanations and advances a holistic understanding of factionalism as a multi-layered, historically evolving, and contextually embedded phenomenon.

3.4. Methodological Contribution

This research methodology enables a nuanced and multidimensional examination of factionalism as an **N-dimensional process** shaped by ideology, history, organization, socio-cultural representation, leadership behavior, and external pressures. It contributes to scholarly debates by demonstrating how factionalism in communist parties is not merely an organizational pathology but a form of political knowledge-making, ideological negotiation, and strategic adaptation. Moreover, the methodology bridges the study of internal party dynamics with broader questions of political transformation, revolutionary identity, and democratic engagement in contemporary Nepal.

4. Literature Review

The scholarship on Nepal's communist movement, social inclusion, conflict transformation, and local governance reveals a complex interplay between ideological commitments, organizational structures, identity-based marginalization, and post-conflict political realignments. The body of literature ranging from classical theoretical texts (Lenin, 1902/1961; 1917/1970s; 1920/1975) to contemporary analyses of Nepal's Maoist insurgency (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013; Muni, 2010) and recent socio-political studies (Pokhrel, 2023; Adhikari, 2024; Kandel, 2023; Maharjan & Shrestha, 2025) collectively illustrates the multidimensional nature of political contestation and institutional transformation in the Nepali context.

4.1. Ideological Foundations and Revolutionary Doctrine

Marxist-Leninist thought remains central to understanding the ideological motivations underlying communist mobilization in Nepal. Lenin's classics—*What Is to Be Done?* (1902/1961), *The State and Revolution* (1917/1970s), and *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920/1975)—constitute the backbone of vanguardist organization, democratic centralism, and revolutionary discipline. Lenin argues that proletarian consciousness must be produced through systematic political education and that the revolutionary party must function as a disciplined, ideologically unified organization that directs mass struggle.

These theoretical formulations influenced both the CPN (UML) and the Maoists. As Eck (2010) illustrates in the context of Nepal's insurgency, Maoist cadre training deeply internalized Leninist imperatives of ideological education, political indoctrination, and disciplined organization. Maoist political pedagogy fostered the construction of revolutionary identity, enabling cadres to articulate class grievances and commit to long-term political struggle.

The ideological literature emphasizes that communism is not merely an economic program but a transformative project aimed at dismantling class hierarchies and creating egalitarian relations of power. However, as Michels (1915) famously posits in the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," even movements committed to radical equality tend to reproduce internal hierarchy and centralize authority. Subsequent Nepali scholarship confirms this paradox: party centralization, leadership dominance, and factional contestation repeatedly reappear within communist organizations (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004).

4.2. Party Organization, Leadership Patterns, and the Dynamics of Conflict

Organizational scholarship on Nepali parties foregrounds the interaction between leadership behavior, cadre structure, and political mobilization. Hachhethu's (2002) comparative study of the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) demonstrates that communist parties claim democratic centralism but often exhibit hierarchical decision-making and weak internal deliberation. Leadership consolidation, strategic factionalism, and personal rivalries emerge as defining features.

Baral (2004) further identifies parliamentary behavior, party cohesion, and inter-party bargaining as key determinants shaping Nepal's unstable political order. These works collectively reveal that the structural logic of party-building in Nepal tends toward oligarchic patterns resembling Michels's theoretical model.

In the Maoist case, organization takes on a more militarized form. Thapa and Sijapati (2003) provide a foundational account of the insurgency, showing how ideological clarity, grassroots mobilization, and decentralized command structures enabled the Maoists to expand from remote districts to national prominence. Pettigrew (2013), through ethnographic analysis, examines how revolutionary practices reconfigured everyday life during the People's War, highlighting dual processes of empowerment (especially among women and marginalized groups) and the reproduction of new hierarchical structures under wartime command.

Lawoti and Pahari's (2010) edited volume synthesizes interdisciplinary findings on the insurgency, showing that Maoist success derived from its ability to articulate grievances around exclusion, class oppression, and state neglect. This aligns with Coser's (1956) classical thesis that conflict, when properly institutionalized, can serve positive social functions by generating group solidarity, stimulating political awareness, and realigning power structures.

Yet, the shift to post-conflict politics created new contradictions. Kandel (2023) and Mallik (2024) show that the peace process institutionalized Maoist influence but simultaneously exposed strategic tensions between revolutionary ideology and pragmatic participation in a competitive multi-party environment. Their research suggests that while the Maoists achieved significant political power, their ideological coherence weakened during the transition from insurgency to parliamentary politics.

4.3. Social Exclusion, Inclusion Policies, and Structural Inequalities

A major strand of Nepali scholarship focuses on caste-, ethnicity-, gender-, and region-based inequalities and the role of political movements, including communists, in addressing them. Gurung (2010), Tamang (2011), and Maharjan & Shrestha (2025) articulate the structural and historical roots of exclusion, identifying entrenched caste hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and uneven state development as foundational causes.

Gurung (2010) argues that while “inclusive policy discourse” advanced significantly after 2006, practical implementation remains uneven due to bureaucratic inertia, elite capture, and incomplete institutional reform. He shows that social inclusion policies—affirmative action, representation quotas, and targeted programs—emerged largely because of political pressure from historically marginalized groups and the empowering effects of the Maoist movement.

Dalit studies demonstrate an especially persistent pattern. Adhikari (2024) highlights that Dalit representation in local governance has improved since federal restructuring, but meaningful participation is still constrained by entrenched caste norms, lack of political capital, and tokenistic representation. Upadhyay (2023) further shows that Dalit women face compounded marginalization due to gender, caste, and class intersecting, limiting their ability to influence local political decision-making.

These works collectively reveal that communist mobilization—especially during the People’s War—played an important role in raising political awareness among Dalits, women, Janajatis, and Madhesis. However, the institutional achievements of inclusion remain fragile and uneven.

4.4. Women’s Participation, Gendered Exclusion, and Local Governance

The literature increasingly emphasizes gendered dimensions of political power. Khatri and Paudel (2025) examine barriers to women’s participation in local governments, identifying structural constraints such as patriarchal household norms, party-level gatekeeping, limited mobility, and economic dependence. Their study shows that even with constitutional quotas, women’s effective political agency remains limited by the broader socio-cultural environment.

Pettigrew (2013) and Lecomte-Tilouine (2013) document the significant involvement of women during the insurgency—many of whom took up leadership roles in local committees, militias, and political organizations. Yet, as both argue, the post-conflict period witnessed a retreat from revolutionary gender gains, as parties reverted to male-dominated leadership structures and conservative social norms reasserted themselves.

The tension between insurgency-induced empowerment and post-conflict marginalization is a consistent theme: revolutionary movements temporarily disrupt gender hierarchies, but peacetime institutionalization often reinstates earlier forms of exclusion.

4.5. Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Post-War Political Transition

The Maoist conflict and peace process receive extensive scholarly attention. Muni (2010) outlines the insurgency’s origins in state failures, socio-economic inequality, and ideological disenchantment. His analysis emphasizes that the Maoists succeeded because they addressed grievances ignored by mainstream parties, particularly landlessness, caste oppression, and rural neglect.

Upreti (2010) examines the transition from war to peace, arguing that post-conflict Nepal remains constrained by deep-rooted structural inequalities, power struggles among elites, and uneven implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord. He highlights the persistence of impunity, weak state institutions, and slow transitional justice as factors impeding sustainable peace.

Kandel (2023) builds on this by examining contradictions within the peace process itself: ideological dilution, elite bargaining, factional splits, and the tension between revolutionary commitments and pragmatic governance. Mallik (2024) similarly documents that while the conflict empowered marginalized groups and helped dismantle monarchical authoritarianism, it also produced economic disruptions, displacement, and social fragmentation.

Together, these studies show that while conflict catalyzed profound political transformation, peacebuilding has been slow, contested, and incomplete.

4.6. Identity, Power, and the Changing Terrain of Nepali Politics

Pokhrel (2023) offers a contemporary theoretical contribution by conceptualizing the “social character” of Nepali communist parties. His analysis demonstrates that parties often articulate class politics while simultaneously reproducing caste, regional, and gender hierarchies within their internal structures. This duality reflects the broader contradictions of Nepali left politics: revolutionary rhetoric coexists with patronage networks and elite bargaining.

Hoftun, Raepur, and Whelpton (1999) provide essential historical context, showing how democratization, party competition, and global ideological currents shaped Nepal’s political transformations throughout the twentieth century. Their account situates the later Maoist insurgency within longer-term patterns of state–society tension and political contestation.

In the post-federal era, scholars note a gradual shift away from revolutionary politics toward developmental and identity-based agendas. The restructuring of local governance has created new institutional arenas where issues of class, caste, gender, and regional identity intersect. Yet, as multiple sources indicate, deep-rooted hierarchies persist underneath new political structures.

Existing literature on Nepal’s communist movement and social transformation reveals several interconnected themes that illuminate both theoretical and empirical dimensions. First, ideological–organizational contradictions persist, as communist parties that advocate equality and collective leadership often reproduce oligarchic and factional tendencies (Michels, 1915; Hachhethu, 2002). Second, conflict has functioned as a transformative force, with the Maoist insurgency disrupting entrenched structural inequalities and politicizing marginalized groups, consistent with Coser’s (1956) notion of conflict’s generative functions (Eck, 2010; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). Third, post-conflict regression is evident, as many revolutionary gains—particularly for women and Dalits—stagnated once parties transitioned into formal politics (Pettigrew, 2013; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013; Upadhyay, 2023). Fourth, enduring social exclusion remains a critical challenge, with structural inequalities deeply embedded despite policy reforms (Gurung, 2010; Maharjan & Shrestha, 2025). Fifth, local governance has emerged as a new site of contestation: Dalit and women’s participation has expanded but continues to face significant cultural and institutional barriers (Adhikari, 2024; Khatri & Paudel, 2025). Finally, the peace process, while institutionalizing significant political change, has been incomplete in addressing historical injustices and enduring power imbalances (Kandel, 2023; Upreti, 2010; Mallik, 2024). Collectively, these insights contribute to a theoretical understanding of the dialectical tensions between revolutionary ideals, organizational practices, and the social realities of post-conflict Nepal, highlighting both the transformative potential and the persistent constraints of communist-led political change.

In conclusion, the literature collectively portrays Nepal’s political transformation as a dialectical process shaped by ideological contestation, social inequality, revolutionary rupture, and post-conflict institutional restructuring. Communist politics have played a central role in articulating grievances, mobilizing marginalized groups, and transforming state structures. Yet the contradictions between revolutionary ideals and organizational realities, between inclusion policies and entrenched hierarchies, and between conflict-driven empowerment and post-conflict retrenchment continue to define Nepal’s contemporary political landscape.

5. Research Gap

The relationship between the theoretical corpus underpinning Nepal's communist movement and its empirical trajectory reveals not a linear application of doctrine, but a profound and persistent disjuncture. This analysis, situated at the intersection of political theory, organizational sociology, and critical historiography, argues that the movement's internal dynamics and external manifestations are best understood through the dialectical tensions between its foundational texts and its lived realities. Four primary chasms emerge from this interrogation, each constitutive of the movement's recurrent factionalism and adaptive, often contradictory, evolution.

Firstly, a fundamental rift exists between revolutionary ideological orthodoxy and parliamentary pragmatism. While the movement's intellectual moorings are anchored in the transformative visions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin—emphasizing class struggle, collective ownership, and the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state—its operational reality since the 1990 democratic opening has been characterized by electoral competition, coalition politics, and capitalist-friendly economic policies (Hachhethu, 2002). This schism manifests as a core contradiction: parties articulate socialist manifestos while engaging in governance models that perpetuate neoliberal economics and patron-clientelism (Pokhrel, 2023). The theoretical promise of a classless society stands in stark contrast to the practical imperatives of political survival in a pluralist democracy, leading to ideological dilution and a crisis of revolutionary legitimacy.

Secondly, the organizational principle of democratic centralism devolves, in practice, into oligarchic centralization, validating Robert Michels' "iron law." Although Leninist texts prescribe a balance between internal debate and disciplined action, the Nepali communist experience demonstrates a systemic tendency towards leader-dominated hierarchies, weak intra-party democracy, and the personalization of political authority (Baral, 2004). This gap between normative theory (collective, vanguardist leadership) and empirical reality (personalistic fiefdoms) is a primary engine of factionalism. Dissent, unable to find expression through formal democratic channels, catalyzes into splinter groups, transforming theoretical disagreements over "the correct line" into organizational fractures rooted in contests for power and resource control.

Thirdly, a glaring disparity persists between the emancipatory rhetoric of social inclusion and the reproduction of structural hierarchies within party apparatuses. Scholarly works on Nepal's social exclusion (Gurung, 2010; Tamang, 2011) provide a robust framework for understanding marginalization based on caste, ethnicity, gender, and region. The communist movement, particularly during the People's War, successfully mobilized these groups by championing their inclusion (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). However, post-conflict integration into mainstream politics has seen a regression, with party structures often reverting to dominant caste (Bahun-Chhetri) and male-centric leadership models (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013; Upadhyay, 2023). Thus, while the movement's *discourse* is informed by critical scholarship on inclusion, its *internal social composition and practice* frequently contradict these very principles, undermining its claim to be a vehicle for egalitarian transformation.

Finally, the imported frameworks of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism are incessantly reinterpreted, adapted, and sometimes diluted through the prism of Nepal's unique historical junctures—the Panchayat autocracy, the post-1990 multiparty system, the geopolitics of India and China, and a deeply heterogeneous social fabric. This study, therefore, posits that the most significant "gap" is not a failure to apply theory, but the inevitable and generative process of its *vernacularization*. The Nepali communist movement is a dialectical theater where universalist doctrines clash with particularist realities, producing neither pure ideological form nor mere opportunism, but a complex, often unstable, synthesis that continues to shape the nation's political landscape. Its future coherence hinges on consciously bridging these chasms through genuine internal democratization, accountable leadership, and a praxis that aligns its egalitarian promises with its institutional and social conduct.

6. Discussion and Finding Out

6.1. *The Reality of Communist Principles and Goals*

The fundamental principles of communism, as articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, revolve around class struggle, collective ownership of the means of production, the just role of the state, equality, and distribution of resources according to individual needs while considering individual capacities (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976). The ultimate objectives of communism include the creation of a society free from exploitation, the establishment of collective ownership over productive resources, the abolition of class distinctions, and the eventual realization of a stateless society. Marx and Engels conceptualized society as divided between exploiting and exploited classes, arguing that historical progress unfolds through class struggle, which serves as the engine of social transformation (Marx & Engels, 1848/1976).

Collective ownership of the means of production is central to communist theory, as it seeks to abolish private property and place land, industry, capital, and natural resources under communal control. Within this framework, the state functions as an instrument to eliminate exploitation and establish social equality, ultimately paving the way for its own dissolution. Communism envisions a social order based on equality, ensuring that all individuals enjoy equal opportunities, access to resources, and benefits. While contributions are recognized according to individual capacities, the distribution of benefits is determined by need, reflecting the principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

However, the legitimacy of communist principles hinges on their alignment with practical implementation. Historically, the gap between theory and practice has limited the sustained development of communist regimes. Even when revolutionary movements established communist states, many eventually collapsed due to this disconnect. Political critiques highlight the extreme centralization of power, the emergence of party or political elites instead of a genuinely classless society, and internal factionalism and personalistic leadership that distorted the original principles. Examples include the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea, where political realities diverged sharply from theoretical ideals (Deutscher, 1967; Service, 2009).

Economically, collective ownership often faced significant challenges. Centralized planning in the Soviet Union and China reduced efficiency, constrained innovation, and produced inequalities in agricultural and industrial output. In Nepal, communist-led reforms—such as land redistribution—improved awareness and participation among marginalized groups, but the practical involvement of workers and peasants remained limited (Pokhrel, 2023). These outcomes underscore the persistent tension between idealized economic principles and their implementation.

Socially and culturally, communist movements aimed to eradicate class distinctions and promote equality. While improvements in literacy, healthcare, and social inclusion were achieved, persistent inequalities remained. In Nepal, despite efforts to raise the status of Dalits, Indigenous Nationalities, Madhesis, and women, entrenched hierarchies and centralized party control limited the realization of full social equality (Gellner, 2007). Globally, ambitious social engineering projects, such as China’s Cultural Revolution, often led to social disruption rather than equitable transformation, illustrating the complexities of applying communist ideals in diverse societies.

From a contemporary perspective, while communist principles remain philosophically compelling, their practical realization is inherently challenging. Modern communist and leftist movements have largely abandoned revolutionary and disruptive strategies, favoring reformist approaches that pursue equality, social justice, labor rights, and economic reform within existing political frameworks. As a result, revolutionary pathways toward a fully classless society have been largely abandoned, rendering the realization of a stateless, egalitarian society a distant aspiration (Hobsbawm, 1994).

In summary, communist theory presents a coherent and aspirational framework, but political centralization, economic inefficiencies, social inequalities, and limitations on freedoms have constrained its practical application. Modern practice has only partially realized theoretical goals, emphasizing reformist over revolutionary strategies.

Consequently, the full implementation of communist principles continues to face significant theoretical and practical challenges, highlighting the need for nuanced analysis of both achievements and limitations in global and Nepali contexts.

This chapter synthesizes the findings of this study by examining the Nepali communist movement through interconnected historical, ideological, organizational, socio-cultural, and international dimensions. By applying a dialectical-materialist framework, the discussion interprets the development of the Nepali communist movement not as a linear progression, but as a dynamic process shaped by contradictions between ideology and practice, centralization and fragmentation, revolutionary goals and parliamentary realities, and structural constraints and political agency.

Together, these perspectives explain why the movement has simultaneously been a decisive force for social transformation and a site of persistent factionalism, internal conflict, and organizational instability.

6.2. Historical Reality: Struggle, Transformation, and Recurrent Fragmentation

The historical trajectory of the Nepali communist movement exhibits a pattern of significant political contributions alongside persistent internal splits. Since the establishment of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) in 1949, the movement has engaged in major struggles against the Rana regime, the Panchayat system, and monarchical authoritarianism, while simultaneously experiencing internal factionalism (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999). The movement's history can be broadly categorized into four phases:

Early Phase: Rana Regime (1949–1960). During this period, entrenched land and property inequalities, class oppression, and political exclusion provided an objective basis for the communist struggle. The early leadership prioritized raising political consciousness, organizing workers and peasants, and resisting foreign influence and imperialism. Between 1951 and 1956 (2008–2013 B.S.), the CPN was banned, primarily due to its alleged support for K.I. Singh's revolt (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).

During this phase, the 1959 parliamentary elections revealed the limited mass base of the party, as it won only four seats. Furthermore, King Mahendra's 1960 royal coup, supported by some party leaders, intensified deep ideological divisions, exacerbating internal conflicts (Hachhethu, 2002).

Panchayat Era: Repression and Underground Movement (1960–1990). Political bans and state repression forced the communist movement underground. This period fostered both organizational resilience and internal factionalism.

- The party adopted armed struggle, cultural and social mobilization, and peasant-labor organizing as primary strategies.
- During the 1980 national referendum, internal divisions became pronounced: some factions participated, while others boycotted.
- Ideological disagreements fueled leadership rivalries and strategic disagreements, laying the groundwork for later splits (Baral, 2004).

Maoist armed struggle: 1996–2006. The Maoist armed struggle represents the most radical phase of the Nepali communist movement. It:

- Challenged structural inequalities, caste hierarchies, and gender oppression. Built village-level organizational structures with broad participation from women, Dalits, and indigenous communities.
- Advanced concrete initiatives for land reform, social justice, and class equality (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

This phase demonstrates that armed struggle combined with mass-based organization can accelerate socio-political transformation.

Democratic Transition and Post-Conflict Era (2006–Present). After the People's War, communist parties participated in constitution-making, federalism, republicanism, and social justice initiatives. However, internal leadership conflicts, ideological ambiguity, and recurrent factionalism continued.

- While democratic participation strengthened the party's institutional presence, it weakened organizational cohesion.
- Historical experience both clarified ideological positions and institutionalized patterns of factional rivalry and strategic disagreement (Hachhethu, 2002).

These historical developments indicate that the Nepali communist movement has produced dual effects:

- Positive: raising political consciousness, fostering class awareness, and contributing to democracy and social transformation.
- Negative: creating enduring patterns of factionalism, ideological competition, and leadership-centered splits.

Thus, struggle, transformation, and recurrent fragmentation constitute the core of the historical reality of the Nepali communist movement.

6.3. Ideological Reality: Dialectics of Orthodoxy, Pragmatism, and Revolutionary Values

Ideology has been a central determinant shaping both the strategic orientation and factional dynamics of the Nepali communist movement. Since its inception, the movement has operated under the frameworks of Marxism, Leninism, Mao Thought/Maoism, and scientific socialism (Hachhethu, 2002; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). Ideological debates intensified during periods of political repression, particularly under the Panchayat regime (1960–1990), when the movement was forced underground. Such conditions generated competing interpretations of the “correct line,” resulting in recurrent factionalism and strategic divergence (Baral, 2004).

Several recurring tensions characterize the ideological reality of the movement:

- Armed Struggle versus Peaceful Political Transition – Disagreements over the appropriate means of achieving revolutionary goals frequently created schisms between radical and reformist factions (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).
- Revolutionary Praxis versus Reformism – Leaders and cadres debated the balance between class-based revolutionary action and gradual reforms within existing political structures, generating persistent internal ideological contestation (Hachhethu, 2002).
- Generational Shifts in Ideological Interpretation – Successive leaderships have reinterpreted Marxist–Leninist–Maoist principles to suit evolving socio-political conditions, often creating friction between older orthodox cadres and younger pragmatists (Baral, 2004).
- Orthodox Marxism versus Parliamentary Engagement – Post-1990 democratic openings introduced a fundamental tension between revolutionary objectives and participation in parliamentary politics, leading to contradictions between ideological purity and practical governance (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).

The tension between parliamentarism and revolutionary values is particularly significant. While democratic participation enabled communist parties to gain institutional legitimacy, it simultaneously diluted class consciousness and revolutionary commitment (Hachhethu, 2002). In contrast, the Maoist People's War (1996–2006) represented a radical ideological trajectory grounded in armed struggle, village-level mobilization, and inclusive political participation of women, Dalits, and indigenous groups, exemplifying the transformative potential of ideologically-driven praxis (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

Therefore, the ideological reality of the Nepali communist movement is inherently contradictory. It simultaneously fosters unity and fragmentation, produces revolutionary momentum, and generates organizational instability. Understanding these ideological contradictions is essential for interpreting both factionalism and strategic decision-making within the movement.

6.4. *Organizational Reality in the Nepali Communist Movement: Centralization, Hierarchy, and the Logic of Fragmentation*

The organizational dynamics of the Nepali communist movement reveal a persistent tension between formal ideological commitments and structural realities, which underpin recurrent factionalism and internal instability. Theoretical frameworks, particularly Robert Michels' *Iron Law of Oligarchy*, provide a compelling lens through which to understand these phenomena. Michels (1915) posits that all complex organizations inevitably concentrate authority within a small leadership elite, generating oligarchic tendencies irrespective of initial democratic intentions. In the Nepali context, this theoretical insight illuminates why parties committed to revolutionary democracy and Leninist organizational norms repeatedly evolve into highly centralized, leader-dominated entities (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004).

Centralized Leadership and Hierarchical Control. Nepali communist parties formally endorse democratic centralism, yet in practice, decision-making authority is concentrated in central committees and elite leadership circles (Hachhethu, 2002). This centralization constrains broader participation, reduces ideological diversity, and creates organizational rigidity. Mid-level cadres or dissenting leaders often face marginalization once leadership consensus is established, leading to disciplinary measures, demotions, or exclusion from deliberative forums (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). Such practices cultivate an environment in which dissatisfied actors either comply reluctantly or establish splinter factions, thereby institutionalizing fragmentation as a structural outcome.

Personal Rivalries and the Politicization of Leadership. Factionalism in Nepali communist parties is frequently less about doctrinal disagreement than about competition over power, status, and resources. Leadership succession remains opaque, creating intense rivalries among senior cadres (Baral, 2004; Pokhrel, 2023). Personal disputes often assume ideological coloration, even when the underlying conflict is organizational. This personalization of leadership authority contrasts sharply with Leninist ideals of collective decision-making and undermines internal cohesion (Lenin, 1920/1975). Leaders exemplify personalized factions, demonstrating the hybridization of Leninist structures with patrimonial and oligarchic patterns.

Weak Internal Democracy and Structural Overload. Internal democracy within Nepali communist parties remains limited. Mechanisms such as open elections, transparent deliberation, and decentralized leadership recruitment are often nominal (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999; Lawoti, 2007). Rapid organizational expansion after the 1990 democratic transition and the 2006 post-insurgency period exacerbated structural overload. Local committees frequently lacked autonomy, communication channels became congested, and leadership accountability weakened, further intensifying factional tendencies (Upreti, 2010).

Democratic Centralism in Practice: From Principle to Control. Although democratic centralism theoretically balances internal debate with unified action (Lenin, 1902/1961), in Nepali parties it often functions as a mechanism of leadership control. Rather than fostering ideological clarity, it legitimizes centralized authority and constrains internal deliberation. Consequently, the principle becomes a structural driver of splits, as dissenting factions perceive few avenues to influence decision-making. This dialectic—between centralization that strengthens coordinated action and suppressed participation that fuels fragmentation—recurs throughout Nepali communist history (Hachhethu, 2002; Michels, 1915).

Deviations from Leninist Organizational Norms. Leninist doctrine emphasizes vanguardism, professional revolutionary cadres, collective leadership, and disciplined adherence to democratic centralism (Lenin, 1902/1961; 1917/1972; 1920/1975). Nepali communist groups partially adopt these principles, yet their practice diverges significantly:

- **Democratic centralism** is formally endorsed but weakly institutionalized (Pokhrel, 2023).
- **Vanguardism is weakened by electoral pragmatism, especially after 1990 and 2006, as parties focus on broad coalitions rather than strict ideological discipline (Eck, 2010; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010).**

- **Professional cadres** have been replaced, post-insurgency, by bureaucratized structures and opportunistic entry, weakening ideological training and collective discipline (Pettigrew, 2013; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).
- **Collective leadership is weakened by personalistic and factional authority, illustrating Michels' prediction of elite concentration and oligarchic control** (Michels, 1915/1999; Hachhethu, 2002; Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).

Structural factors explaining these deviations include electoral competition in a multiparty system (Lawoti, 2007), socio-cultural diversity complicating uniform discipline (Hachhethu, 2002), centralization of political culture fostering oligarchy (Pokhrel, 2023), and resource-based incentives encouraging opportunism (Upreti, 2010). These conditions produce a hybrid organizational logic that is formally Leninist but pragmatically fragmented, offering a structural explanation for the movement's persistent internal instability.

In conclusion, the organizational reality of Nepal's communist movement underscores that factionalism and leadership disputes are not merely products of individual ambition or ideological divergence but are structurally embedded within centralized, hierarchical, and oligarchic organizational frameworks. Understanding these dynamics requires moving beyond ideological rhetoric to examine institutional design, internal democracy, and leadership practices. Structural reform that decentralizes authority, strengthens participatory mechanisms, and institutionalizes collective decision-making is essential to mitigate recurrent fragmentation and align organizational practice more closely with Leninist principles.

6.5. Social–Cultural Reality: Representation, Identity, and Mass Support

The organizational stability of the Nepali communist movement is intricately linked to its ability to represent the diverse social groups of Nepal. The movement's inclusivity—or lack thereof—shapes its legitimacy, mass support, and internal cohesion. Historical evidence demonstrates that when communist parties fail to adequately integrate marginalized communities, including Dalits, Janajatis(Indigenous Nationalities), Madhesis (people of the Madhes/Terai region), women, peasants, and laborers, several negative outcomes typically arise:

- Decreased public trust, as communities perceive the party as unrepresentative of their interests (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004).
- Weakened mass participation, reducing the party's capacity to mobilize grassroots support (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).
- Internal dissatisfaction, as cadres and local leaders advocate for greater social inclusion and representation (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).
- Formation of new factions, seeking to rectify perceived imbalances in social representation and policy priorities (Hachhethu, 2002).

Conversely, periods of strong social inclusion, such as during the Maoist People's War (1996–2006), reinforced the movement's organizational resilience through:

- Mass legitimacy, achieved by mobilizing historically marginalized groups and providing them with political agency (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013).
- Ideological credibility, as the movement's commitment to social justice aligned with grassroots aspirations (Baral, 2004). Organizational cohesion, with integrated participation across multiple social strata, fosters unity and coordination (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

These patterns indicate that social–cultural dynamics are not peripheral but central to the Nepali communist movement's capacity to maintain organizational stability. Representation and identity politics mediate the interaction between ideology, leadership, and mass mobilization, determining whether the movement consolidates or fragments in response to socio-political challenges (Hachhethu, 2002; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013).

6.6. External and International Reality: State Pressure, Political Opportunity, and Global Ideological Currents

The trajectory and internal factionalism of the Nepali communist movement have been significantly influenced by external and international factors. State repression, political openings, global ideological trends, regional dynamics, and electoral incentives have all shaped the movement's strategic positioning and internal cohesion.

State repression—including bans, arrests, and suppression of party activities—has historically constrained the movement, often forcing clandestine operation and heightening internal ideological debates (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003; Baral, 2004). Conversely, democratic openings, such as the post-1990 transition and the 2006–07 people's movement, created political opportunities that intensified internal factional struggles, as groups competed to define the movement's strategic direction and ideological identity (Hachhethu, 2002).

International ideological influences have also played a formative role. The movement's early Marxist–Leninist foundations were shaped by the Soviet model, while Maoist thought and Chinese revolutionary strategies provided alternative templates for armed struggle and mass mobilization (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013). European socialist and communist currents further contributed to ideological debates, particularly regarding parliamentary participation versus revolutionary praxis.

Regional political developments — including cross-border influence of South Asian insurgent movements and post–Cold War changes — shaped the rise of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal (Muni, 2010; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010). At the same time, after peace and the return to multiparty democracy, electoral incentives and institutional openings compelled former insurgents to recalibrate strategy, sometimes diluting ideological purity in favor of pragmatic compromise (Kandel, 2023; Mallik, 2024)

Periods of heightened political opportunity—such as transitions to democracy, constitutional reforms, or state crises—tend to accelerate factional realignments. Competing factions reposition themselves to influence party strategy, ideological interpretation, and organizational leadership, demonstrating that factionalism emerges not solely from internal disputes but through the dialectical interaction between the party and its socio-political environment (Hachhethu, 2002; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

6.7. The Parliamentarism-Revolution Gap: A Central Contradiction

A critical insight emerging from this study is the persistent divide between parliamentary engagement and revolutionary values within the Nepali communist movement. This gap manifests in multiple dimensions: divergent strategic goals, weakened class struggle orientation, ideological ambiguity, organizational centralization around electoral competition, and reduced political radicalism (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2004).

From a dialectical–materialist perspective, this contradiction is not merely procedural but reflects the tension between objective structural conditions—such as class inequality, caste hierarchies, gendered social relations, and unequal land distribution—and subjective political agency, including leadership decisions, ideological interpretation, and strategic planning (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013). Parliamentary participation, while enabling communists to enter formal political institutions, often produces compromises that dilute revolutionary objectives and reduce the movement's capacity to mobilize marginalized groups effectively.

This gap also highlights the challenges of translating revolutionary ideals into institutional praxis. Electoral pragmatism tends to concentrate decision-making in the hands of leadership elites, reflecting Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy, which intensifies organizational centralization and constrains mass participation (Michels, 1915). Consequently, the movement faces an inherent tension between maintaining revolutionary legitimacy and engaging in pragmatic state politics, with factionalism often emerging as a strategy to reconcile or contest these competing imperatives.

Resolving the parliamentarism-revolution contradiction is crucial for the long-term coherence of Nepal's communist parties. It requires balancing structural constraints, strategic choices, and ideological fidelity to sustain both political relevance and revolutionary commitment in a rapidly evolving socio-political landscape.

6.8. Nepal's Mainstream Parliamentary Left: The Chasm Between Ideological Promise and Governing Practice

In Nepal's post-conflict democratic landscape, the principal Parliamentary Left parties—the CPN-UML, the CPN (Maoist Centre), and the CPN (Unified Socialist)—have anchored their electoral platforms in promises of fundamental transformation. The UML pledges to build a "socialist economy" (UML, 2022 Election Manifesto, p. 12), the Maoist Centre commits to ending "ethnic, gender, and class oppression" (Maoist Centre, 2022 Manifesto, p. 5), and the Unified Socialist champions "revolutionary change" (Unified Socialist, 2022 Manifesto, p. 4). However, a significant chasm persists between these high ideological pledges and their on-ground implementation. A sustained perception of high-level corruption (Transparency International, 2022), the stunted execution of federalism, and the continued embrace of privatization and capitalist-friendly economic models reveal a core contradiction between professed leftist ideology and practical governance, highlighting what scholars term a "pragmatist mode" of Nepali communism (Hachhethu, 2002).

This implementation gap manifests concretely across key policy domains. The UML's tenure has been marred by significant corruption scandals (Thapa, 2023) and a push for privatizing public enterprises (Adhikari, 2021), which directly undermine its socialist commitments. The Maoist Centre's stalled transitional justice process for conflict victims (Human Rights Watch, 2020 Nepal, 2020) and the persistent disparity between its rhetoric and the reality of women's representation in leadership (Sapkota, 2024) weaken its claims to social justice. Similarly, the Unified Socialists' call for "left unity" rings hollow against the backdrop of persistent internal factionalism and splits (Khabarhub 2021; The Kathmandu Post, 2025). Rajbanshi, 2022). These examples underscore how structural barriers—including a lack of intra-party democracy, leadership-centric political culture, and the imperative of electoral competition—consistently frustrate the translation of principle into practice.

The theoretical significance of this chasm is multifaceted. It exemplifies the adaptive yet contradictory nature of communist parties operating within a pluralist, democratic framework, where revolutionary manifestos serve electoral purposes but give way to pragmatic compromise in government. This is not merely a series of policy failures but a reflection of the complex interaction between leftist doctrine and political opportunism within a developing state. The future credibility and stability of Nepal's left will hinge on its capacity to reconcile this core contradiction and meaningfully bridge the persistent promise-performance gap, moving beyond electoral sloganeering to coherent and principled governance.

6.9. Dialectical Interpretation: Interconnected Realities Shaping the Movement

The various dimensions of the Nepali communist movement—historical, ideological, organizational, social-cultural, and strategic—do not operate in isolation. Rather, they constitute a dialectical whole, in which each reality both influences and is influenced by the others. This interconnectedness generates a dynamic process that continuously shapes the movement's strengths, weaknesses, and trajectories (Hachhethu, 2002).

Key dialectical interactions can be summarized as follows:

- Historical Reality \Leftarrow Ideological Reality

History provides the movement with experiential knowledge that strengthens ideological clarity; simultaneously, it deepens ideological splits when past strategic failures or successes are interpreted differently by competing factions (Baral, 2004; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013).

- Ideological Reality \Leftarrow Organizational Reality

Ideological disagreements often manifest as organizational fragmentation, while structural instability and centralized leadership exacerbate ideological confusion, constraining coherent party praxis (Michels, 1915).

- Organizational Reality \Leftarrow Social-Cultural Reality

Organizational cohesion is strengthened when the party actively integrates marginalized social groups—such as Dalits, Janajatis, women, and peasants—into decision-making and mobilization efforts. Conversely, exclusion of these groups fosters dissatisfaction and encourages factional splits (Hachhethu, 2002).

- Strategic Reality \Leftarrow Ideological and Organizational Realities

Political strategy is effective only when it aligns with both ideological commitments and organizational capacities. Misalignment among these dimensions frequently produces tactical failures and intra-party contestation (Baral, 2004).

- Representational Reality \Leftarrow Public Legitimacy

The extent to which the party achieves mass representation directly determines whether its ideological claims are socially validated. Strong public legitimacy reinforces both organizational stability and ideological credibility, while weak representation invites internal critique and factionalism (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2013).

These dialectical interactions illustrate that the future trajectory of Nepal's communist movement is shaped by the continuous interplay of multiple forces rather than any single determinant. Understanding factionalism, organizational adaptation, and revolutionary strategy requires attention to the complex, interdependent nature of these realities.

6.10. The Favorable and Unfavorable Aspects of Nepal's Communist Movement

The historical trajectory of Nepal's communist movement began with the establishment of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) in 1949. This movement aimed to eradicate class inequality, exploitation, caste discrimination, and gender discrimination from society. Among its favorable aspects, first, it has awakened the political consciousness of the poor, workers, peasants, Dalits, women, and other marginalized groups, creating an environment for their participation in socio-political processes (Gellner, 2007; Pokhrel, 2023). Second, the movement brought the debates on land reform, social justice, and equality into the public sphere, thereby creating opportunities for social transformation (Gellner, 2007).

However, the movement's unfavorable aspects are also evident. Factionalism within the party, the dominance of personalistic leadership, and opportunism have weakened organizational unity (Mishra, 2021). (Gautam, 2021). Second, in the economic sphere, difficulties have arisen in the practical implementation of collective ownership of the means of production and a planned economy, which has reduced the real participation of the peasant and working classes (Pokhrel, 2023). Third, within the socio-cultural reality, caste, regional, and gender-based discrimination persist, and new forms of social division have been created (Gellner, 2007). Fourth, political challenges—such as multiparty democracy, constitutional implementation, and external pressures—have obstructed the full realization of the party's revolutionary goals.

Thus, the favorable aspects of Nepal's communist movement include social awareness, the participation of marginalized groups, the promotion of equality and social justice, and the development of political consciousness. The unfavorable aspects encompass organizational weakness, failure in implementing economic planning, the persistence of social divisions, and political challenges. This contradiction has forced Nepal's communist movement to confront the tension between its theoretical goals and practical actions.

6.11. Foundations for Transforming the Realities of Nepal's Communist Movement

Nepal's communist movement has accumulated decades of social, political, and economic experience through its struggles and practices. Although a profound gap between theory and practice remains, certain foundational areas present possibilities for reform and transformation.

Organizational Reform and Democratic Leadership. Factionalism, personalized leadership, and opportunistic practices within Nepal's communist parties have impeded the full implementation of their principles (Pokhrel, 2023; Gautam, 2021). The basis for reform lies in organizational restructuring. Implementing transparent decision-making processes, internal democratic practices, and accountable leadership systems can reduce intra-party factionalism and personal dominance. This increases the possibility of bridging the gap between theory and praxis.

Collective Ownership of the Means of Production and Economic Reform. Initiatives related to land reform, cooperative movements, and workers' rights in Nepal have shown preliminary progress, yet genuine collective ownership of the means of production remains limited (Gellner, 2007; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010). Mottin, 2010). Innovations in the economic system, the promotion of local production, and the implementation of inclusive economic planning can help reduce economic inequality. Ensuring the genuine participation of the peasant and working classes can advance the movement closer to its theoretical goals of economic justice.

Social Equality and Inclusive Policy. There is potential for reform in empowering Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, women, and other marginalized groups. Historically, while Nepal's communist movement has advanced some social equality, structural inequalities have persisted (Gellner, 2007; Pokhrel, 2023). Inclusive policies, equal access to education and healthcare, and guaranteed political participation can help reduce social divisions and mitigate class distinctions.

Political Participation and Coordinative Reform. Nepal's communist movement has attempted reform by adopting peaceful and constitutional methods. Democratic practices, multiparty dialogue, and respect for constitutional rights can narrow the gap between the party and society (Gautam, 2021; Pettigrew, 2013). This approach may not achieve the complete revolutionary goal of a classless society but can contribute to substantial change through a reformist perspective.

International Experience and Learning. Global communist praxis (e.g., in China, Cuba, Vietnam) demonstrates that maintaining harmony between theory and practice requires democratic processes, economic innovation, and social participation (Hobsbawm, 1994; Service, 2009). By learning from these international experiences, Nepal can introduce theoretical and practical improvements into its own movement.

In summary, the foundations for reforming the realities of Nepal's communist movement are based on organizational restructuring, reform of the production system, social equality and inclusive policies, political participation, and lessons from international experience. If these foundations are implemented effectively, they can reduce the gap between theory and practice, promote economic and social justice, and guide Nepal's communist movement toward a modern and progressive path.

7. Overall Finding

7.1. Factionalism as the Dialectical Core of the Nepali Communist Movement

The comprehensive dialectical analysis conducted in this study culminates in a central, overarching finding: The persistent and recurrent factionalism that characterizes the Nepali communist movement is not a superficial organizational flaw, but rather the constitutive and logical expression of its fundamental internal contradictions. It is the primary mechanism through which the movement's unresolved tensions between revolutionary theory and political practice are negotiated, manifested, and temporarily resolved—only to re-emerge in new forms.

This finding dismantles the conventional view of factionalism as a mere pathology or a sign of weakness. Instead, the evidence demonstrates that factionalism serves a dual, dialectical function:

As a Symptom of Structural Contradiction: It is the visible outcome of deep-seated, systemic tensions:

- Between the universalist, emancipatory project of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and the particularist, hierarchical realities of Nepali society (caste, ethnicity, region).
- Between the formal organizational principle of democratic centralism and its practical devolution into personalized oligarchy (Michels' "iron law").
- Between the strategic imperative of revolutionary insurrection and the pragmatic necessity of parliamentary engagement.

As an Engine of Adaptation and Negotiation: Simultaneously, factionalism operates as a critical, if chaotic, process of:

- Ideological Clarification: Forcing debates on doctrine and "the correct line" during periods of strategic uncertainty.
- Organizational Re-alignment: Allowing for the expression of dissent and the formation of new strategic groupings when established channels are closed.
- Social Representation: Providing a voice (through splinter groups) for marginalized constituencies (Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, women) when mainstream party structures fail to integrate them meaningfully.

The movement's history, therefore, can be read as a dialectical sequence of unity-fragmentation-realignment. Each major political juncture—the fall of the Panchayat (1990), the escalation and conclusion of the People's War (1996-2006), the post-republican transitions—acted as a catalyst, exacerbating these underlying contradictions and triggering factional outbreaks as different segments of the movement proposed divergent paths forward.

Ultimately, the Nepali communist movement exists in a state of permanent dialectical tension. Its vitality and its instability spring from the same source: its enduring attempt to impose a totalizing, revolutionary ideological framework onto a complex, evolving, and resistant socio-political landscape. Factionalism is the price and the process of this attempt. Consequently, the movement's future trajectory will be determined not by the elimination of factionalism—an unrealistic goal given its structural roots—but by its ability to institutionalize these dialectics more productively. This would require transforming factional conflict from a destructive force of schism into a generative force for democratic debate, strategic innovation, and genuine social inclusion within a more flexible and accountable organizational model.

8. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a dialectical-materialist analysis of the Nepali communist movement, tracing its evolution from a clandestine revolutionary force to a central actor in parliamentary democracy. The investigation reveals that the movement's defining feature—its persistent and recurrent factionalism—is not an organizational anomaly but the logical manifestation of deep-seated, unresolved contradictions. These contradictions arise from the dynamic interplay between universalist revolutionary ideology (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) and the particularities of Nepal's historical trajectory, social stratification, and political economy.

The research confirms that factionalism operates on a dual register: it is both a **symptom of systemic weakness** and a **mechanism for adaptation**. As a symptom, it exposes the chasm between the movement's emancipatory promises and its oligarchic, often exclusionary, practices—a reality that aligns with Michels' thesis on the iron law of oligarchy. As a mechanism, it serves as the primary channel for ideological debate, strategic recalibration, and the expression of social grievances when formal democratic channels within the party are constrained. The parliamentarism-revolution contradiction remains the most potent of these tensions, consistently pulling the movement between the poles of transformative ambition and pragmatic statecraft.

The future trajectory of Nepal's communist movement is therefore contingent, not predetermined. It faces a critical juncture defined by two potential pathways:

- **Renewal through Syntheses:** This path requires consciously bridging the identified gaps. It necessitates democratizing internal structures to transform factional conflict into institutionalized debate, harmonizing ideological principles with a coherent and transparent governance praxis, and ensuring that social inclusion moves beyond electoral quotas to reshape the very culture and composition of party leadership. Such a renewal would leverage the movement's deep roots and organizational capacity to offer a credible, principled alternative within Nepal's federal republic.

- **Institutionalization of Contradiction and Decline:** The alternative is the continuation of current patterns: the subordination of ideology to short-term electoral gains, the persistence of personalized leadership cults over collective processes, and the treatment of social inclusion as a rhetorical tool rather than a structural imperative. This path leads to further ideological dilution, public disillusionment, and potentially more fragmentation, reducing the movement to just another patron-client network within the competitive party system, its revolutionary heritage rendered merely symbolic.

Ultimately, the Nepali communist movement stands as a profound case study in the dialectics of political adaptation. Its history is a testament to the power of radical ideology to mobilize and transform a society. Its present, however, illustrates the immense challenge of sustaining that ideological core while navigating the complexities of governance, identity politics, and global capitalism. The movement's resilience has been proven in struggle; its future will be determined by its ability to reconcile its internal contradictions. Whether it can transform its endemic factionalism from a source of perpetual instability into a dynamic engine for democratic renewal remains the central, unanswered question for Nepal's left politics.

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The Challenge of Cohesiveness of Mahayana Monastic Tradition Groups in Indonesia: Irving L. Janis's Groupthink Perspective

Duta Arya Sutrisno¹

¹ Maha Prajna Buddhist College, Buddhist Religious Education Study Program, Indonesia.
Email: dutaarya25@gmail.com

Abstract

The Mahayana monastic tradition group in Indonesia is unique, with Mahayana traditional ritual methods and practices involving every member of the Group. This study examined how the format of group cohesiveness in members of the Mahayana Tradition Monk Sangha developed in Indonesia. The theory used in this study is the Groupthink theory proposed by Irving L. J, emphasizing the first Groupthink tendency related to cohesiveness in a group. This study utilized a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through interviews with five people in the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Monk Group and participatory observation. The results of the study indicate that the formation of cohesiveness in the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Monk Group has high cohesiveness, known from four dimensions of cohesiveness: Group Integration, Cohesiveness in the Group, Togetherness in the Group, and Reciprocal Relations in the Group. Cohesiveness, Cohesiveness is present as a similar goal in the practice of Mahayana Buddhism, with the condition found that the cohesiveness that exists in the group of monks in the Mahayana tradition has a tendency to Groupthink within the group, which can lead to a lack of characteristic critical in groups and policies that do not accommodate the opinion of member in the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Group.

Keywords: Buddhism, Challenges, Cohesiveness, Groupthink, Groups Monks, Mahayana Tradition

1. Introduction

1.1. Development Group Mahayana monks in Indonesia

The development of Buddhism after the death of Gautama Buddha's *Parnibanna* spread throughout the world and had unique sects or traditions that emerged in the teachings and practices of Buddhism. After the death of Gautama Buddha (Kent, 1982a; Macqueen, 1981, 1982a), the Buddha's disciples who had obtained knowledge and teachings given directly by the Buddha had different understandings and interpretations of the teachings based on the expertise and understanding received by each of Gautama Buddha's disciples (Lancaster, 1974). This led to the emergence of sects and schools in Buddhism, such as the Theravada sect, Mahayana (Cheng, 2020; Shimizu, 2021; Wu et al., 2019a; Zheng, 2019), and Tantrayana or Vajrayana sects with unique characters and characteristics in the practice of Gautama Buddha's teachings (Macqueen, 1982b). The development of Buddhism is taught and

developed by Gautama Buddha's disciples today. This is based on different teachings, such as the Mahayana sect, which emphasizes the Bodhisattva Path at the level of attainment in training. In contrast, the Theravada sect emphasizes the attainment of Arhatship in training, the result, or ultimately, liberation that becomes the objective (Kent 1982).

The development of the Mahayana sect (CHEN, 2021; Shimizu & Noro, 2021a, 2023) currently covers mainland Asia, such as China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia (D'Amato, 2008). Related to the development of the Specialist Monks in the Mahayana practice (Charles et al., n.d.; CHEN, 2021; Joseph Walser, 2007; Silk, n.d.), this sect has rules that are characteristic of the Mahayana sect, thus giving rise to a group of Mahayana Practitioner Monks with special rules within it (Chappell, 1996).

The Mahayana Tradition Monks Group was formed in 1978 by 12 senior monks who wanted to form a group of monks. The Mahayana tradition in Indonesia has a deeper goal of serving the community struggling in the field. Service prayers also include educational, social, and cultural aspects in accordance with the Mahayana tradition, which is a characteristic of Mahayana monastic practice in Indonesia. The journey of establishing the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha was initiated by 12 monks and nuns of the Mahayana Sangha who, at that time, elected Bhikkhu Dharmasagaro Sthavira as the leader of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha. However, at that time, Bhikkhu Dharmasagaro Sthavira was the youngest among them. Two of the twelve monks and nuns were present at the founding of the Mahayana Sangha group in Indonesia. This was based on Bikshmood Dharmasagaro. Stavira, who spoke fluent Indonesian, so all attendees agreed to appoint Bikshmood Dharmasagaro Stavira as the chairman of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha and Bikshmood Dharmabatama Mahasthavira as the vice chairman.

The existing Mahayana Sangha group of monks, after holding ceremonies as a sacred part of the great rituals of the Mahayana tradition, has given birth to many generations who are eager to learn by applying the principles of Buddhism, monastic traditions, and Mahayana. At the ceremony, representatives of Trimandala Upasampada Indonesia came from several monasteries in Indonesia, such as Lalitavistara Temple, Avalokitesvara Temple, Vajra Bodhi Temple, and Dharmasagara Temple. The presence of new members in the Mahayana Sangha group brings hope for the development of the Mahayana Sangha group in Indonesia, with the readiness to continue spreading Buddhist teachings in accordance with the goals of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group.

With enthusiasm and togetherness, the group of Mahayana monks under his protection, with rules and Vinaya in accordance with the Mahayana tradition, brings togetherness and integration (Griffiths, n.d.). In the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Group (M. Author & Mcmah, 1998), the monks explain how the hierarchy of rules in monasticism and ritual activities has their own characteristics. The same special thing as the Mahayana tradition. (The Bones of A Buddha and the Business of A Monk: Conservative Monastic Values in an Early Mahayana Polemical Tract, n.d.) The Robes worn by monks in Mahayana Sangha groups also have a pattern, brown color, color harmony, and similarity of material. The languages used in religious rituals of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Group are Mandarin, Sanskrit, and Indonesian (Author & Coomaraswamy, 1909).

1.2. Formed Cohesiveness Group Monk

By observing the group tendencies within Mahayana, the Sangha monks who developed in Indonesia have good integration. This is not without paying attention to the rules. The Vinaya is carried out by monks associated with the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. This is an interview about group cohesion. These Indonesian Mahayana Sangha monks can be seen when performing religious rituals with the characteristics of the Mahayana tradition, specifically, where in ritual activities, the robes used, and the language used during the ritual have similarities.(Drewes, 2010; Philosophy & Ueda, 1964a) Related to this, it is naturally seen that there is cohesion within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha monk group. Cohesion refers to a state in which each group has a sense of togetherness, kinship, and relationship. Cohesion within the group between members motivates members to unite and maintain good relationships and their strong group spirit (Theories Of Human Communication Eleventh Edition n.d.).

Cohesiveness is beneficial because it unites members and enhances intergroup connections (Akhmad et al., 2021; Mnasri & Papakonstantinidis, 2021). While Janis does not deny the potential and signs of solidarity, he also

recognizes its dangers (Theories of Human Communication Eleventh Edition n.d.). One danger is that highly cohesive groups can expend too much energy maintaining intergroup friendships (Fox, 2019; Pol et al., 2022), which can impact detrimental decision-making. Members invest a great deal of energy in groups because of the potential rewards, such as friendship, prestige, and self-affirmation (Griffin 2012; Lipschutz n.d.) Because we have high self-esteem, we can expend too much energy building positive bonds, leading to negative groupthink (Fox, 2019; Mnasri & Papakonstantinidis, 2021). Groupthink is a possibility that occurs when high levels of cohesion are combined with structural weaknesses such as isolation, consultation, decision-making processes, poor decisions, and narrow thinking, as well as situations that cause significant stress on the group (Tsikerdeks, 2013; Turner et al., 1992a, 1992b).

Cohesion occurs when group members like each other, share common goals, and consistently support each other. Cohesiveness is often associated with group productivity (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). However, not all cohesive groups have positive effects, as members may experience ongoing stress in conforming to group norms (Caya, 2015; Russell et al., 2015; Whyte, n.d.-a). Cohesive groups tend to expend too much energy on maintaining goals. This is beneficial for groups to avoid interference in decision-making (Forsyth, 2020; Tarmo & Issa, 2022). This is important because members invest too much inherent energy in the group to gain rewards such as friendship and fame. Sometimes, we even devote too much energy to building connections, positivity, and loyalty to the group name and group leadership (Pautz & Forrer, 2013; Peterson et al., n.d.; Rosander et al., 1998)

Cohesion comes from the attitudes, characteristics, and behavioral patterns of a group in which each member is attracted to the attitude (Solomon, 2006; Whyte, n.d.-a). The characteristics and behavior of members tend to be cohesive (Introducing Communication Theory, N.D.). In this context, it is the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha monks who are in the tradition of Mahayana monk groups in Indonesia in religious ritual activities and Buddhist services (CHEN, 2021; Shimizu & Noro, 2021b, 2023) Specifically, the Mahayana Tradition often involves interactions with each other, such as holiday celebrations, which are also unique ceremonies in Buddhism (Chappell, 1996b) This shows a sense of togetherness at the same time, which indicates high cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha monk group (Turner et al., 1992c).

Cohesiveness is the highest quality available in a group. The monks of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha became the forerunners of Groupthink in a group. Janis's view (Janis 1972) states that three conditions encourage the emergence of Groupthink in groups: group cohesiveness, structural errors, and pressure or provocative conditions in the group, in accordance with Janis's view in his work (Janis, 1972). In groups that develop with a high level of cohesiveness, such as the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, Groupthink (Turner & Pratkanis, n.d.) shows a solid group thinking method for reaching consensus. The phenomenon of Groupthink, explained theoretically by Irving Janis, attempts to explain the group's desire to seek agreement and make decisions that often ignore minority thoughts and the views of dissenting members in favor of making decisions by the majority (McCauley, n.d.).

The presence of integration or what is often called cohesiveness (Russell et al., 2015; Sims, 1992; Turner & Pratkanis, n.d.-b) in various groups that are generally bound by background, goals, and interactions, which can be different when faced with the scope of the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha religious group where generally individuals come from different cultural and educational backgrounds (heterogeneous), it turns out that it can also be homogeneous with the existing system in the group. Especially, the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha religious group and forms cohesiveness or integration when they have to join together in the Sangha group, namely a group of monks and nuns whose task is to spread the teachings of Gautama Buddha (Chappell, 1996b; Drewes, 2010; Gudmunsen, n.d.; Philosophy & Ueda, 1964b).

This is an interesting thing to study. How cohesiveness in the context of Buddhist religious group thinking is actually processed, not formed early, and vulnerable to *Groupthink* (Janis, 1972; Leana, 1985; Whyte, 1985). Groupthink related to group dynamics will naturally not be separated from groupthink or thoughts that arise from good groups in general or groups that focus on religion (Baron, 2005; Burnette et al., 2011; Hogg & Hains, n.d.-b).

b). *Groupthink* is one of the communication theories associated with group communication dynamics (Kowert & Paul, n.d.). *Groupthink* theory tries to discuss group members who are less concerned about evaluating alternative ideas from other members, other than the majority's ideas (*Introducing Communication Theory*, n.d.). Highly cohesive groups usually maintain or invest energy in maintaining the intentions of both groups, so that it often compromises the good decision-making process (Turner & Pratkanis, n.d.-b). In other words, group members often ignore things they think they should avoid conflict and make all decisions based on the wishes of the majority, even if those desires are contrary (McCauley, n.d.).

In this study, the researcher used the theory of *Groupthink* (Packer, 2009; Turner et al., 1992b) with a focus on group cohesion as a trend that began to emerge in the *Groupthink* behavior of groups related to the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha monks. According to Janis, the stronger the cohesion, the higher the trend of *Groupthink* emergence (Janis, 1972). The dimensions of group cohesion are shared motivation, kinship, unity within the group, attraction of power, and cooperation within the same group (Russell et al., 2015)

2. Method Study

This study utilized a qualitative study method with a descriptive approach, where a constructivist-interpretive approach was employed to study a single case study, because it is directed at how to obtain accurate data with objective studies. This qualitative approach is aimed at describing or understanding how and why a symptom or communication of reality occurs and does not aim to explain, control the communication of symptoms, propose predictions, or test theories. In addition, qualitative methodology is a research procedure producing descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. The type of qualitative study used in this study is a single case study, where case studies allow researchers to maintain holistic and meaningful characteristics of various real-life events (Yin, 2004). Case studies, as an effort to collect, organize, and analyze data about cases related to the subject being studied, adhere to holistic, interpretative, and contextual principles, so it can be concluded that this strategy focuses on things that are considered unique and occur naturally, so that case studies can be said to be biological studies (*Case Study*, n.d.; *Stake, Case (Studies*, n.d.; Flyvbjerg, n.d.) Case studies are ideal if comprehensive (holistic), and in-depth research is needed (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991).

The main objective of this study is to describe the cohesiveness that occurs within the growing Mahayana Sangha Monk group in Indonesia, which is a group of monks in Indonesia with Mahayana characteristics. Regarding data collection techniques, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were used. The semi-structured structure is used; the interviewer usually has a written list of questions, which allows for free-form questions about the problem. Meanwhile, for the observation technique, this study conducted observations of the operational life of a monk in the Mahayana Sangha group in Indonesia in the passive category. This means that the researcher is not directly involved in daily life. The research object is observed, but the researcher is not directly involved in the activities. In this study, informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique carried out by selecting based on specific sample characteristics. The criteria used to determine informants or internal research subjects were 5 Mahayana Sangha Monks who were still active in the group.

Table 1: Informants Study

NO	INFORMANT	AGE	Type Sex	Work
1	LWD	51 Years Old	Woman	Monk
2	HRS	41 Years Old	Man	Monk
3	YPS	32 Years Old	Man	Monk
4	IWJ	24 Years Old	Man	Monk
5	YSY	50 Years Old	Man	Monk

3. Results

The results of this data analysis focused on result-related data findings. Cohesiveness is formed in a group of Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Monks. The data analysis that emerged shows how members of the Indonesian Sangha Mahayana group are cohesive within the group. The results of this group data analysis illustrate how the relationships between members of the Sangha Mahayana group are appropriate as individuals or administrators. Furthermore, the identified discussions are Group Integration and Uniformity, Group Cohesiveness, Togetherness within the Group, and Reciprocal Relations within the Group.

3.1. Integration and uniformity Group.

The sub-node that emerged in this analysis is about the description of relationships within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. In this member sub-node, the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group describes the relationships that exist between members and administrators, fellow members and fellow administrators, and between juniors and seniors. The focus directed at the relationships that exist within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group shows the level of cohesiveness and cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group has a high level of cohesiveness. As stated by the informant, every member of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group considers that each member is family or Kalyana Mitra. Based on interview quotes conveyed by the informant, Informant 3 said that kinship is an important thing in Kalyana Mitra. The interconnected kinship within the Indonesian Mahayana sangha group to this day is also supported by the results of the interviews with supporting informants. There was still a focus on less harmonious relationships within the Indonesian Mahayana sangha group, which has special characteristics related to the lives of monks and nuns in the Mahayana tradition.

Informant 4 emphasized the nature of the relationship as friends in practicing Buddhist teachings and supporting each other. The informant 4 stated that the relationship within the Indonesian Mahayana sangha group has the character of Kalyana Mitra, which has good family relationships. Similarly, the informant 4 expressed his views related to the relationships that exist within the Indonesian Mahayana sangha group, which is a place for monks and nuns to carry out duties and services in the field of Buddhism, especially the Mahayana tradition. Informant 5 said that the relationship within the Indonesian Mahayana sangha is also perfect.

Thus, all informants conveyed that the relationships built by members of the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha are based on connections. This is described through the keywords kinship and rare. There are problems, good cooperation, and a willingness to maintain harmony. All relationships aim to protect the existence of Buddhism and the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group alone. From these statements, the informants indicate that the level of cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group has a high level of unity and similar individual thinking related to the description of connections within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group.

3.2. Compactness In Group Mahayana monk

The data findings from the Cohesiveness sub-node indicate that the groups' perceptions of Cohesiveness vary. Informant 1 stated that cohesiveness is associated with various events held by the Indonesian Mahayana Buddha Sangha. Similarly, informant 3 linked cohesiveness to the willingness to undertake joint coordinated activities by the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha Group.

The cohesiveness of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, in accordance with the statements made by informants 1 and 2 related to the activities carried out by the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, is because the activities carried out have the same characteristics as the Mahayana tradition in Indonesia. The activities carried out by the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, such as the Vesak Day celebration has its own characteristics as a sign that the activity is a unique Mahayana tradition, by performing a three-step ritual, namely prostration as a form of devotion and respect to the great teacher Gautama Buddha and also as a form of respect to sacred places and has a history of the development of Buddhism.



Figure 1: Yi Fo at the Lalitavistara Vihara , Jakarta

Related to the celebration day, the big Vesak Mahayana tradition also has a ceremony called Yi Fo. Yi Fo is a celebration in the Vesak Mahayana tradition, where the ritual symbolizes the cleansing of the mind and body without pouring holy water on the Siddhartha statue. The Yi Fo Celebration is celebrated every day on the eighth month of the fifth Chinese New Year calendar as the day of the birth of Siddhartha, now known as Gautama Buddha, who taught Buddhism, or so-called Buddha Dharma, to the whole world.

Related to the cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, the same finding was identified. Informants 5 and 3 stated that cohesiveness is related to a willingness to support shared activities. Informant 5 also stated that cohesiveness depends on members resolving problems through deliberation within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group.

On the other hand, informant 4 and informant 3 stated that there is a lack of unity within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group. This is evident in the small size of the group. This unity is disrupted by personal interests. Unity within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group is built through sound religious activities and practices, which are characteristic of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that developed in Indonesia. The Indonesian Mahayana Sangha organizes celebratory activities. This large and prominent Mahayana religious tradition continues sustainably and receives support from its member groups. There is a slight difference of opinion between informants 4 and 3, indicating that there is still a mutually related unity. However, this is not yet fully visible in some Mahayana Buddhist activities or celebrations.

3.3. Togetherness In Group Mahayana monk

The findings of the togetherness sub-node indicate that perceptions of information about togetherness vary widely. Informants linked togetherness with understanding, which is the reason for the emergence of togetherness and its importance within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group.



Figure 2: Vesak Day at Borobudur Temple, Indonesia

All the informants stated that togetherness is an important aspect of the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha. However, the reasons for this varied. As informant 1 stated, togetherness is related to how humans are social beings. In other words, it is an effort to achieve a common goal. The Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Association, founded in 1978, has grown and changed with the addition of new members. In Indonesia, the Mahayana Sangha group continues to focus on religious rituals and the celebration of important Mahayana Buddhist traditions. Each ritual involves members of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, who share in the activity. This echoes the opinions expressed by the informants about the sense of togetherness in the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. Other findings are identified related to togetherness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, reinforcing the statement of Informant 2, conveying that common sense is very important because of the need for each other. Informant 3 said that togetherness aims for everyone to improve themselves. Informant 4 aims to establish communication in spreading the teachings of the Buddha Dharma. The togetherness associated with the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group is emphasized, with Informant 2 expressing the opinion of togetherness for cohesiveness. Meanwhile, Informant 3 said that objective togetherness strengthens the religion of the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha. They understand that a group, especially a group focused on the field of religious service, must have a strong foundation, so there must be togetherness within the group. Informants 4 and 5 also shared their opinions on how togetherness can bring goodness in accordance with the vision and mission of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. Just as the informants shared their opinions on the importance of togetherness, the informants' supporters also shared their opinions regarding the importance of togetherness in strengthening the group, how the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group maintains togetherness, and pays attention to the existence of a united sangha within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group.

3.4. Reciprocal relationship in Group Mahayana monk

The reciprocal relationship sub-node discusses how interactions occur between members and the entire Mahayana Buddhist Sangha of Indonesia. Informant 2 stated that one form of reciprocal relationship showed how members build relationships with others. Informant 3 stated that reciprocal relationships exist within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha; however, the form of reciprocity was not explained in detail.

Meanwhile, informant 2 provided a statement establishing a reciprocal relationship between the benefits received by members of the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist Sangha group. Among these is the receipt of educational scholarships. Based on the statement conveyed by informant 4, members feel that the group fulfills their interests independently while handling them comfortably and safely. Informant 5 added that the group serves as a forum for members to spread the teachings of the Buddha Dharma. These informants provided various opinions showing how members can personally fulfill their interests. Informant 2 stated that members whose interests are fulfilled are through training, while informant 4 stated that members receive scholarships.

4. Discussion

4.1. Cohesiveness Group Mahayana monk



Figure 3: Shape Cohesiveness Group Monk

Regarding data findings of the cohesion within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Group, Buddhist leaders demonstrated a high degree of integration. This includes solidarity, togetherness, and interdependence within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, which is in line with McCauley's opinion on the level of cohesiveness within the group (McCauley, n.d). Regarding the integration within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, the findings show that the members of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group uphold the Mahayana tradition as a way of life for Bhikhu and Bhikkuni. LWD, one of the informants, stated that the characteristics that explicitly indicate cohesiveness within the sangha group are the traditions or schools that form the basis of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. Other forms of integration were also expressed by the informants, emphasizing how the hierarchy and rules or internal Vinaya systems of Bhikhu and Bhikkuni groups share in the form of integration within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group.

Nevertheless, findings related to cohesion are formed within the Mahayana Sangha group, indicating togetherness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. Togetherness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group is at a high level of integration. Informants stated that the formed togetherness is dominant, and the relationship between members and administrators, fellow members, and between juniors and seniors runs well. This is described through the keywords kinship, rare problems, good cooperation, and a willingness to maintain harmony, as stated by YPS, who considers the relationship within the Mahayana Sangha group to be a family relationship and a well-established friendship relationship.

The picture of the relationship within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group is also described as a harmonious relationship and good awareness of group affairs. This naturally supports cohesion within the Mahayana Sangha group, which is well-formed. Other data findings are related to integration within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. The cohesiveness within the Mahayana Sangha group, unity within the group is demonstrated by activities carried out together in celebrating major Buddhist holidays such as Vesak. The in-depth Vesak activities carried out by the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha are characterized by Mahayana traditions, such as the ritual bathing of the Bodhisattva Sidharta Gautama (*Yi Fo*). (CHEN, 2021; Wu et al., 2019b)

They are carried out together and carried out in their respective monasteries with the same activities. In important events, as stated by research informants, in addition to the bathing activity, a joint Vesak activity is also carried out at the Sojiwan Temple in Central Java by performing the Three-Step Ritual of prostration as a characteristic of the Mahayana tradition in Indonesia. This was stated by informants YPS, WMB, and WDY. On the other hand, informants also observed the cohesiveness that exists despite experiencing ups and downs. This raises several problems, including individual attitudes, relationships, seniority, and communication within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. However, data findings show that the cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group is proven to be good.

The results of data analysis indicate findings related to the togetherness that exists within the Indonesian Mahayana Buddhist leader group. The togetherness formed within the Mahayana Sangha group may indicate the support contained within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group. The Indonesian Mahayana Sangha, which brings together Buddhist leaders with the Mahayana tradition of togetherness within the group, has become very important. This naturally shows how a group is formed with integrity and a shared determination to maintain the group in the same way.

Regarding the togetherness formed, the informants agreed that togetherness within the group is the most important thing that must be maintained within the group. Several fundamental things that the informants consider important about togetherness within the group are the group's motivation to practice the Mahayana tradition, group harmony, implementing the vision and mission of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group, maintaining the unity of Mahayana tradition followers, and also seeing that humans are social beings, with their basic thoughts and views as a whole. The informants themselves agree that with togetherness, the group's goals can be achieved more easily.

All of these relationships aim to maintain the existence of Buddhism and the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group alone. Other findings regarding optimism indicate a contradiction between the informants. One party stated that optimism within the group is declining because the colored group lacks sufficient opinions. On the other hand, another informant stated that optimism within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group grows. Similar findings can be conveyed in the analysis of cohesiveness, integration, and uniformity. The findings indicate that interest groups are the most important, as is obtaining legality from the government and prioritizing interest groups, which are more important than small interest groups or personal interests. The related cohesiveness is an early indication of the formation of groupthink, as proposed by Irving Janis (Janis, 1972).

The findings of this study add factors that are not included in the reasons for the emergence of groupthink trends in groups. In Janis's theory, this is related to cohesiveness within the group, not involving family factors and hierarchical systems within the group. The findings in this study add several factors that have significant similarities. For the Mahayana Sangha group, which is a group that accommodates Bhikhu and Bhikkuni in the Mahayana tradition in Indonesia, the first factor found in this study, and as an addition to Janis's theory, is the emergence of a strong sense of family within the group. The second factor is also found in this study. This is related to how the hierarchical system influences the group, which is also a supporting trend in the thinking of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha group.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the results of data analysis and discussion indicate that the cohesiveness within the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Monks Group has unique characteristics specific to this religious group. The cohesiveness formed within this group is influenced by several factors. The first factor is the coherence and uniformity within the group. This cohesiveness and uniformity are demonstrated when carrying out religious rituals such as the daily Vesak ritual and also the ritual of pouring holy water, Tirtha.

The second factor is the cohesiveness carried out within the group. Togetherness, like monks, is used when carrying out activities at the Borobudur temple located in Central Java, Indonesia. The third factor is togetherness and motivation to maintain the Mahayana Monks' tradition in Indonesia. The fourth factor is the establishment of a good reciprocal relationship between group members, administrators, and leaders of the Indonesian Mahayana Sangha Monk Group. High cohesiveness within a group is a good thing to support the sustainability of the group.

High cohesiveness is seen in the reasons for the occurrence of groupthink (Janis, 1972; McCauley, n.d.), which is a predisposing factor for groupthink, so it is necessary to be careful and consider options to prevent the occurrence of groupthink. Groupthink that occurs with high cohesiveness, according to Janis, can weaken the group and produce a group that is poor in ideas from group members.

High cohesiveness can cause isolation and self-censorship in group members when providing ideas to the group. The trend of groupthink that occurs in the Indonesian Sangha Mahayana monk group, with a level of uniformity, motivation, relationships with each other, and interdependence within the group are dominant factors that cause cohesiveness in groupthink that requires members to be aware of group boundaries, namely boundaries that can weaken the Indonesian Sangha Mahayana monk group.

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Management of Ethnic Minorities in China and Türkiye: A Comparative Study of Uyghur and Kurdish Issues Since 1991

Renas Karim¹, Hawkar Jalal², Kardo Rached³

¹ Sbey Research Center, Iraq

² Jilin University, China

³ University of Human Development, Iraq; Sbey Research Center, Iraq

Correspondence: Kardo Rached, University of Human Development, Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
E-mail: kardo.rached@uhd.edu.iq

Abstract

In this paper, we undertake a comparative case study of state policies toward ethnic minorities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Türkiye, focusing on China's Uyghur population and Türkiye's Kurdish population since 1991. We analyze the evolution of each country's minority-management strategies, the effects on minority communities, and the interplay of international factors, especially China's influence on Türkiye. We employ a constructivist view of point to examine how nationalism and identity shape policy, and note the securitization of ethnic dissent by both states. Our findings show that both China and Turkey pursued assimilationist, security-oriented strategies: China's "Strike Hard" counterterrorism campaigns and mass re-education of Uyghurs mirror Turkey's militarized response to Kurdish political demands. However, their external influences diverge; Türkiye's shift toward China in the 2010s led Ankara to less support for Uyghur activism, illustrating Beijing's leverage. We also find that in both cases, human rights concerns and diaspora activism persist. Overall, the paper advances understanding of how the spread of authoritarian norms shapes ethnic policies, indicating that China's influence goes beyond economics to affect the political and ideological dimensions of its Middle Eastern partners.

Keywords: China, Turkey, Minority, Uyghurs, Kurds, Assimilation, Securitization

1. Introduction

The management of ethnic minorities is a continuing challenge for nation-states, and comparing cases like China and Türkiye offers insights into how different regimes handle ethnic diversity under similar security pressures. Both China and Türkiye face large non-titular populations with distinct identities (Uyghurs and Kurds, respectively) and histories of resistance. Studying them side by side illuminates how the majority of nationalism and state security priorities shape policy outcomes. This comparison is timely given China's rising global influence and Türkiye's evolving foreign policy. In recent years, Ankara's growing economic ties with Beijing have coincided with a marked shift in Türkiye's stance on Uyghur rights (Sandal, 2023; Akyol, 2022). Understanding these dynamics has implications for international human rights advocacy and regional stability.

2. Background on Uyghurs and Kurds

The Uyghurs are a Turkic-speaking, predominantly Muslim people native to China's Xinjiang Region in northwestern China. Historical migrations and the Soviet collapse have made Xinjiang geopolitically sensitive to Beijing (Shichor, 2009). The Kurds are a distinct Indo-European ethnic group mainly inhabiting southeastern Türkiye, northeastern Syria, northern Iraq, and western Iran. In Turkey, an estimated 15–20% of the population is ethnically Kurdish (HRW, 1999). Both groups have sought varying degrees of cultural autonomy or political recognition. The Uyghurs once briefly established independent East Turkestan republics (1930s), and many fled to Turkey in the 1950s. Erdoğan's predecessors offered asylum (Akyol, 2022). Kurds, by contrast, have long pressed for recognition of their language and political rights within Türkiye, and some (like the PKK) turned to armed insurgency (HRW, 1999).

3. Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How have China and Türkiye managed their respective ethnic minorities since 1991?
- 2) What similarities and differences exist in their approaches, and what role does national identity play?
- 3) How has China influenced Türkiye's ethnic policy, particularly regarding Uyghur issues?
- 4) What are the effects of these policies on Uyghur and Kurdish societies and diasporas?

By addressing these questions through a comparative lens, we seek to identify both general principles of ethnic policy and context-specific dynamics. Our methodology is a qualitative comparative case study drawing on secondary sources (academic articles mostly, human rights reports, official documents). We employ constructivist theory to interpret how nationalist ideologies shape policy, and we note securitization theory's relevance in understanding the framing of ethnic groups as security threats.

4. Genesis and Early History

4.1. Pre-1991 Ethnic Policies in China

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, China has officially recognized 55 non-Han nationalities and promised regional autonomy under its socialist nationality policy. In practice, however, policies oscillated between accommodation and assimilation. The early Mao era (1950s) granted some cultural and language rights to minorities, even establishing the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955. But during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and other campaigns, minority cultures suffered harsh repression (Red Guards destroyed religious sites, etc.). After 1978, China again promoted minority development and bilingual education. Yet at the same time, Beijing maintained strict controls over minority self-expression. Maurer-Fazio and Hasmath (2015) note that China's official fixed ethnic identification system was a pragmatic state invention to manage diversity. Unlike Western countries that allow self-identification, China insists on officially classifying every citizen into one of 56 groups. In Xinjiang, this meant Uyghurs were legally defined as a distinct nationality, but subject to assimilationist pressures. Throughout the 1980s, China's public stance was one of official multiculturalism, but covertly it pursued assimilation. Dwyer (2005) observes that "official (overt) cultural policy is egalitarian and accommodationist. But its unofficial (covert) policy, since the 1980s, has focused on assimilating Xinjiang's major minorities, particularly the Uyghurs, to the dominant Chinese culture. In sum, pre-1991 China mixed assurances of autonomy with gradual encroachment on Uyghur language, religion, and education, laying a complex legacy for later policies.

4.2. Pre-1991 Ethnic Policies in Turkey

The Republic of Türkiye (founded 1923) pursued a staunchly unitary Türkiye nationalism, effectively treating Kurds as "Mountain Turks" and banning expressions of Kurdish identity. The 1924 and 1961 constitutions forbade non-Turkish names or languages in public life. Until 1991, Turkey's policy was assimilationist: laws explicitly banned the Kurdish language and any organization claiming Kurdish distinctiveness (HRW, 1999). For example,

Law 2932 (1983) criminalized all non-Turkish communication without naming Kurdish explicitly (HRW). Kurds who pressed for cultural rights were labeled traitors (HRW). The state occasionally made limited concessions, such as allowing the Kurdish New Year (Newroz) as a public festival, but heavy-handed enforcement nullified such gestures (New Year celebrations were often banned by police (HRW). Security forces conducted mass operations in the southeast; villages were evacuated or destroyed to root out insurgents (the village guard system and forced displacements during the 1990s were pervasive (HRW). By the late 1980s, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerrillas had launched an insurgency, to which Ankara responded with martial law and extraordinary counterterrorism measures. The result was deep mistrust: as HRW reports, "the denial of cultural and political rights has generated a long-standing sense of grievance" among Kurds, fueling the very violence the state aimed to suppress. In summary, pre-1991 Turkey's ethnic policy toward Kurds was rigidly assimilationist and repressive, in marked contrast to its treatment of recognized minorities (Greeks, Armenians, Jews) under the Treaty of Lausanne.

4.3. Uyghur-State Relations in China Since 1991: A Historical and Political Overview

The Uyghurs are a Turkic, Muslim people traditionally inhabiting Xinjiang (literally "New Frontier"), a strategically vital region along the Silk Road. In the early 20th century, Xinjiang saw intermittent Uyghur-led autonomy movements (the First East Turkestan Republic, 1933–1934), but Chinese Nationalist forces always regained control. After 1949, Mao's government initially extended minority rights to Uyghurs under a Soviet-inspired model of autonomous regions. However, Uyghur identity also overlaps with pan-Turkic sentiment and Islam, making it a potential rallying point. During the Cold War, Türkiye, sharing a Turkic heritage, expressed solidarity with Uyghurs, as many fled Chinese rule. In 1952, Turkey accepted thousands of Uyghur refugees (Akyol, 2022). Yet between 1954 and 1971, when Ankara first recognized the PRC diplomatically, Turkey was officially silent on Xinjiang issues under pressure. Only after the 1970s, with China's opening and the Soviet collapse, did Uyghur activism resurge.

4.4. Kurdish-State Relations in Turkey Since 1991: A Historical and Political Overview

Kurds have inhabited southeastern Anatolia for centuries, but the modern Kurdish question emerged after World War I, when new nation-states (Türkiye, Iraq, Syria, Iran) denied them a unified homeland. In Türkiye, Kurd-populated provinces saw state-led Turkification: schools and administration were in Turkish only. From the 1920s on, Kurdish revolts (1925 Sheikh Said, 1937 Dersim) were brutally suppressed. Through the 20th century, Kurdish intellectuals and political activists campaigned for recognition; some pursued armed struggle, but rarely gained mainstream acceptance. The rise of the PKK in the late 1970s introduced a violent phase, provoking increasingly severe Turkish crackdowns. By 1991 (the end of the Cold War), around one million Kurds had migrated from rural southeast to western cities or abroad, setting the stage for a powerful Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

4.5. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Economic relations, infrastructural investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China's strategic interest in natural resources are the main topics of the literature now available on China's participation in the Middle East. Exploring how China's domestic governance models—specifically, its strategies for managing ethnic minorities—affect international norms and practices, particularly among its strategic partners like Turkey, is conspicuously lacking. The majority of studies approach China's foreign policy stance in the Middle East and its domestic issues (such as the persecution of Uyghurs in Xinjiang) as distinct fields. This mismatch ignores the potential for diplomatic and economic alliances to legitimize or spread authoritarian governing paradigms internationally, particularly securitization and assimilationist programs. By arguing that China's influence in the Middle East is both economic and ideological, our study marks a significant turning point. China's approach to domestic stability, especially regarding ethnic minorities, is gradually influencing the strategic and normative behaviors of its allies as it deepens relationships with countries like Turkey. Türkiye's evolving stance on the Uyghur issue and its securitized Kurdish policy suggest a convergence with China's minority management

approach. This alignment is driven by both internal and external forces, as well as strategic cooperation with Beijing.

In this regard, our study adds to three neglected areas.

- Comparative Minority Management. Although China and Türkiye have been thoroughly examined for their respective domestic treatment of Uyghurs and Kurds, few studies have systematically compared these strategies after 1991, particularly when viewed through the prisms of cultural violence and securitization theory.
- The understudied phenomenon of authoritarian norm diffusion is examined in this paper, which shows how China's internal policies—such as surveillance, reeducation, and securitized ethnic identity may inspire or have an impact on comparable policies in partner nations, Diaspora politics, and transnational repression.
- Few studies have examined the effects of China-Türkiye bilateral ties on expatriate safety, activism, and political clout in host nations, despite the increased activity among Uyghur and Kurdish diasporas.

4.6. Prospective Research Paths

1. Scholars should look beyond China and Türkiye to investigate how other governments deal with disruptive minority populations, especially those that practice surveillance-led governance or have close relations to Beijing.
2. Quantitative Study of Policy Diffusion: Upcoming studies could map the connection between exposure to Chinese political, economic, and technological influence and modifications in minority policies across the Global South.
3. Diaspora-State Relations: In the age of worldwide authoritarianism, it is worthwhile to look into how diaspora communities handle double repression, which is when both host and home regimes exert pressure or monitor them.
4. Effect of International Norms: Studies should examine whether China's growing assertiveness on the global stage is altering or compromising international human rights norms, particularly concerning cultural rights and state sovereignty over minority affairs.

5.. Ethnic Policies Since 1991

5.1. China's Uyghur Policies: Key Policies and Strategies

After 1991, Beijing's approach to Xinjiang became increasingly security-driven. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of global Islamism prompted China to view Uyghur activism through an international lens (Shichor, 2009). The CCP implemented three overlapping campaigns: "Strike Hard" against separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism. In 1996-1999, Beijing initiated its "Go West" development program to economically integrate Xinjiang. The 9/11 attacks further framed Uyghur separatism as a terrorism issue, leading China to label the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as a terrorist group. Since the mid-1990s, the government has **sinicized** education and culture: Mandarin was made the primary language in schools, and Uyghur-medium classes were sharply reduced (Dwyer, 2005). In the 2000s, new laws targeted "illegal religious activities" (e.g., banning the wearing of beards, veils outside mosques). Security presence was massively increased: checkpoints, surveillance cameras, and neural networks track Uyghur movements. In 2008, before Beijing's Olympic Games, Xinjiang saw a crackdown after ethnic riots, tightening media censorship. The decisive turning point came post-2014: following a terror attack and the 2016 second Istanbul airport attack (somehow blamed on Uyghur militants), Xi Jinping personally prioritized Xinjiang stability. In 2017–2018, re-education camps began to detain an estimated 1–3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims under the guise of "poverty alleviation" or "de-radicalization." The new Xinjiang Security Regulations gave police sweeping powers to detain and surveil. State propaganda lauds these measures as counterterrorism, while leaked internal directives (e.g., "Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots") make clear the goal is cultural erasure. Throughout, the PRC has claimed an official policy of ethnic unity, but observers argue the effect is to systematically repress Uyghur identity (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Dwyer, 2005).

5.2. Impact on the Uyghur Community

The impact on Uyghurs has been severe and multifaceted. Culturally, the Uyghur language and religion have been marginalized: mosques have been demolished, Islamic practices banned outside state control (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Education in Mandarin is enforced, undermining Uyghur literacy and identity. Politically, Uyghurs have no meaningful local power: any expression of dissent is harshly punished. Socially, pervasive surveillance creates a climate of fear. Reports document family separations (parents detained, children sent to state boarding schools) and forced labor. Economically, while Xinjiang has benefited from infrastructure investment, many Uyghurs say they are excluded from decision-making and opportunities; a Western summary notes that “the Uyghur aim to be recognized as a distinct people remains unfulfilled” (U.S. Congress, 2019). Moreover, the re-education camps have had a chilling effect; activists and intellectuals fled abroad, human rights organizations say thousands have suffered torture and extrajudicial abuse (HRW). Internationally, the PRC’s treatment of Uyghurs has triggered sanctions by Western governments (some label it “genocide”), though China strongly denies wrongdoing.

6. Turkey’s Kurdish Policies

6.1. Key Policies and Strategies

Since 1991, Turkey’s Kurdish policy has fluctuated between limited liberalization and hardline repression, largely depending on its political climate. The early 1990s marked a turning point: in April 1991, amid international pressure after the Gulf War, Türkiye repealed the law banning non-Turkish languages in broadcast and education (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Kurdish-language private broadcasting (satellite) and cultural associations became legal. However, constitutional constraints remained (education and formal broadcasting in Kurdish were still restricted (HRW). In 1993-1996, Turgut Özal’s government offered limited reforms (broadcasts and private courses), but after his death, a resurgence of PKK violence led to a security-first approach. From 1996 to the early 2000s, tens of thousands of Kurds were forced from their villages, and the open use of Kurdish became prohibited (HRW). With the AKP government (from 2002), Turkey made cosmetic changes to improve EU accession prospects: a 2002 constitutional amendment recognized the existence of a “Kurdish problem,” and by 2009, private Kurdish courses were permitted. In 2010, the AKP lifted bans on Kurdish names and broadcasts and allowed Kurdish language state TV and university lectures. Simultaneously, however, the AKP’s anti-PKK campaign intensified in the southeast after 2007. By 2011-2015, a fragile ceasefire held, and Kurdish political parties (HDP/BDP) gained seats in parliament by framing their movement as democratic.

But from 2015 onward, a new crackdown took hold. Following the collapse of peace talks and the 2016 coup attempt, the government declared a state of emergency in Kurdish-majority provinces. Under emergency powers, it removed dozens of elected Kurdish mayors and replaced them with government trustees (HRW, 2017; O’Connor, 2017). Simultaneously, dozens of HDP leaders and MPs were arrested on terrorism charges for alleged PKK links. By early 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that “13 members of the pro-Kurdish democratic opposition” had been jailed and “the Turkish government has taken direct control of 82 municipalities in the Kurdish southeast”. In effect, the Turkish state dismantled much of the institutional Kurdish political movement. Security forces also cracked down on civilian resistance: pro-Kurdish newspaper offices were raided, and speaking about the Kurdish cause became risky even in the Turkish language (HRW, 1999; HRW, 2009). Thus, post-2015 Türkiye combined the suspension of Kurdish civil rights with an officially stated war on the PKK.

6.2. Impact on the Kurdish Community

The Kurdish community in Türkiye has felt the full force of these policies. Cultural life was both bolstered and then repressed: the lifting of some bans around 2010 allowed a brief renaissance of Kurdish music, media, and festivals, but after 2015, new restrictions reappeared. Politically, many Kurds are discouraged from peaceful dissent; those who do face criminal charges or police violence (O’Connor, 2017; HRW, 2017). The removal of local Kurdish leaders eroded community governance and fueled grievances. On the other hand, the years 2013–

2015 saw unprecedented Kurdish electoral success (the HDP won 13% in 2015), suggesting grassroots empowerment during the peace period. Economically, the southeast remained poorer than the national average, and military operations destroyed infrastructure and displaced civilians (especially in the 2016 siege of towns like Cizre). Socially, decades of conflict have left scars: thousands of Kurdish villages were depopulated in the 1990s, and Kurdish citizens have faced discrimination (e.g., in school curricula and media). In diaspora, Kurdish Turks have created vibrant communities across Europe, although these face pressure from Türkiye (e.g. lobbying for anti-PKK measures).

7. Theoretical Framework

Our comparative analysis is guided by theories of nationalism, securitization, and structural/cultural violence. We explicitly bring up these frameworks to explain why Türkiye and China adopted similar policies toward their Kurdish and Uyghur minorities. In particular, we draw on Copenhagen School securitization theory, which shows how political leaders frame minority claims as existential threats, and on Johan Galtung's theory of violence, which treats assimilation policies as forms of cultural violence or racism. We also note general theories of post-1991 ethnic nationalism. These theories were chosen because they capture the key processes in both cases: how a post-Cold War revival of identity triggered state fear, how elites converted that fear into security policy, and how underlying cultural bias enabled minority marginalization (Kanat, 2016).

7.1. Post-Soviet Nationalism and Identity Revival

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 unleashed a new wave of ethno-nationalist movements. Independent Turkic republics in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, etc.) inspired suppressed groups, and Kurdish separatism gained ground after the 1991 Gulf War. For example, China's leadership feared that the independence of its Turkic neighbors would embolden Uyghur separatists, and the growing Uyghur diaspora cultural activity in new Central Asian states was seen as separatist (Kanat, 2016). Likewise, Türkiye grew uneasy after the United States helped Iraqi Kurds establish a semi-autonomous region in 1992. These developments sparked a revival of national consciousness among Kurds and Uyghurs. In short, a new nationalist context (the domino effect of post-1991 statehoods) set the stage, and Ankara and Beijing perceived a shared threat that their own Kurds and Uyghurs might seek similar autonomy. This context explains why both governments began viewing these minorities not merely as cultural groups, but as security challenges (Kanat, 2016).

7.2. Securitization of Minority Identities

We apply securitization theory from the Copenhagen School to show how Türkiye and China framed Kurdish and Uyghur identity as existential threats. Securitization theory holds that a state actor labels an issue as a security problem through a speech act. By declaring a minority's demands or existence as a danger, leaders can justify extraordinary measures beyond ordinary politics. In our cases, political elites in both countries did just that. In Türkiye, hardline voices during EU-accession debates openly securitized Kurds: for instance, advisor Erol Manisali warned that EU-driven reforms (which would legitimize Kurdish rights) could "in 15 years, not even the Turkish Armed Forces would be able to lift a finger," implying a fatal weakening of state security. This demonstrates how Kurds were portrayed as a destabilizing force. In China, officials likewise adopted a war on terror frame in Xinjiang. After a 2013 attack in Beijing, the government launched a "people's war against terrorism" and explicitly linked it to Uyghur separatism (Grieger, 2014). Beijing's new policies aimed at "better assimilating Uyghurs into mainstream Chinese society" were justified by security rhetoric (Grieger). Both states thus moved minority affairs outside normal politics into the security domain, treating Kurds and Uyghurs as de facto enemies. This is precisely the Copenhagen School logic: an issue becomes a security issue only when elites label it as such. In sum, Türkiye and China used securitizing language (terrorism, separatism, threats to territorial integrity) to validate crackdowns on Kurds and Uyghurs, consistent with the literature.

7.3. Galtung's Framework: Cultural Violence and Assimilation

We interpret each state's assimilation policies through Johan Galtung's conflict theory, focusing on his concept of cultural violence. Galtung defines cultural violence as those cultural norms or ideologies that legitimize the other forms of violence (direct or structural) (Galtung, 1990). In his words, any aspect of culture (religion, language, education, ideology, etc.) that justifies oppression is "cultural violence. Put another way, when a dominant ideology is embedded in society's culture, it becomes a system of oppression or 'cultural violence'.

By this measure, state policies that impose the majority's culture on a minority, often called "cultural racism," are forms of cultural violence. For example, Türkiye long pursued assimilation of Kurds, from the 1920s until the end of the Cold War, Ankara even denied the existence of Kurds or their language. Public education and media enforced a singular Turkish identity. Similarly, in Xinjiang, Beijing has enforced assimilationist measures; for decades, it incentivized Han migration into Xinjiang and introduced Mandarin-only schooling at the expense of the Uyghur language. As one EU report notes, Xinjiang's education system has shifted to an increasingly monolingual, Mandarin-dominated model that gradually erodes Uyghur linguistic distinctiveness (Grieger, 2014). Under Galtung's lens, these policies are not benign; they constitute cultural violence because they normalize the majority's culture and justify suppressing minority identity. Indeed, critics warn that lasting stability cannot be achieved "through forcible assimilation or cultural destruction" of the Uyghurs (Grieger). Thus, according to Galtung, Türkiye's and China's practices of forced homogenization amount to structural/cultural violence, a "cultural racism" that legitimizes the marginalization of Kurds and Uyghurs.

In summary, our theoretical framework explicitly names and applies the chosen theories. We show that:

- 1- We chose to focus on the post-1991 era because the nationalist upsurge motivated both minorities' revival while the international system was unbalanced.
- 2- Each state securitized the minorities via Copenhagen School logic.
- 3- Each state's assimilation policies can be interpreted as Galtungian cultural violence or racism.
These lenses together provide a coherent basis for comparing Türkiye's and China's management of Kurds and Uyghurs as minorities.

7.4. Key Theoretical Lenses

Our analysis rests on

- securitization theory: the idea that states label Kurds/Uyghurs as existential threats (drawing on Buzan/Wæver).
- *Galtung's violence theory*: the idea that forced assimilation is "cultural violence" legitimized by the dominant ideology.

These frameworks, chosen for their relevance, underlie each step of our comparative reasoning.

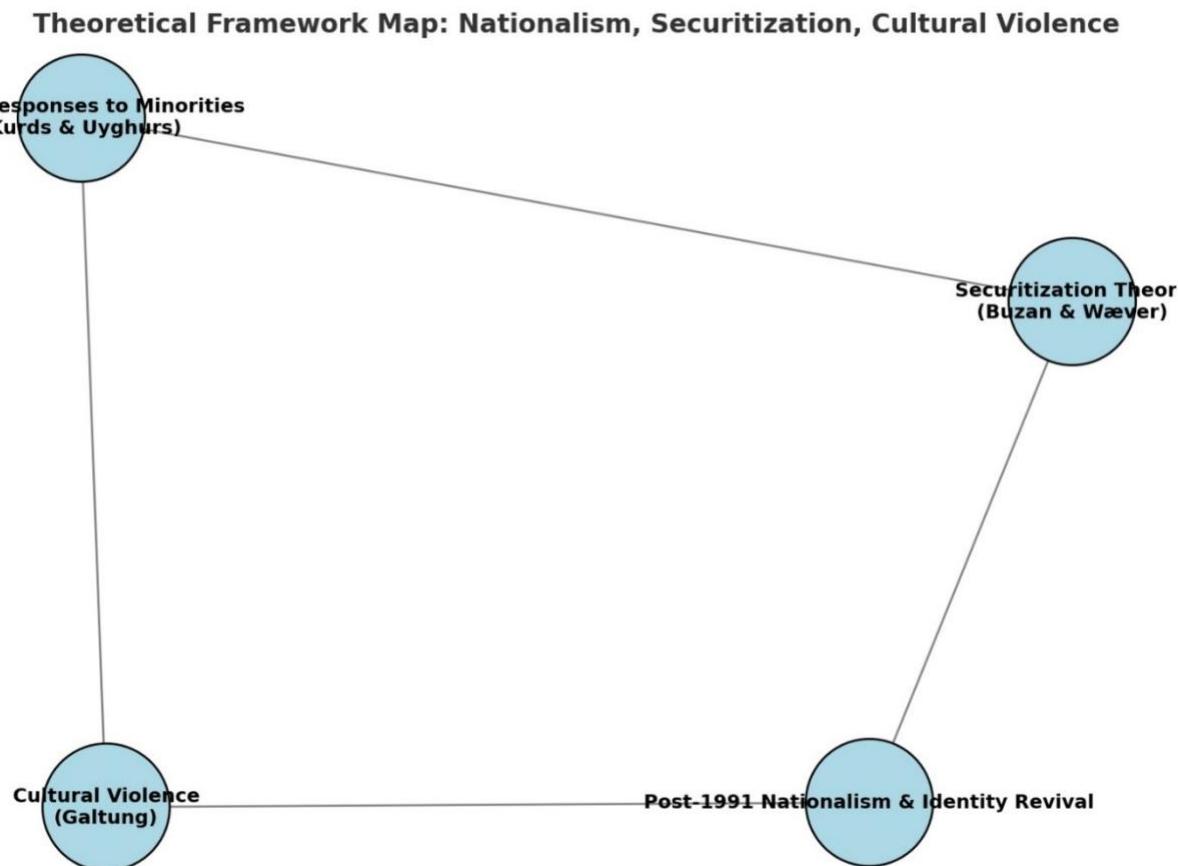


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework Map

This figure shows the analytical framework used in the study. The post-1991 revival of nationalism and minority identity provided the context for state responses in Türkiye and China. Through **securitization theory** (Buzan & Wæver), governments framed minority identities as existential threats, legitimizing extraordinary security measures. Through **Galtung's concept of cultural violence**, assimilation policies are interpreted as structural racism that normalizes majority dominance. Together, these lenses explain how Kurds and Uyghurs were reframed from cultural communities into perceived security challenges.

7.5. The Logic of Oneness: From Empire to Nation-State

Understanding the striking similarities in how China and Türkiye manage their ethnic minorities requires moving beyond the descriptive “what” of securitization to examine the deeper “why.” Both states’ approaches are rooted in their historical transitions from multiethnic empires to modern nation-states, a process that produced enduring anxieties about sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal unity. These anxieties crystallized into political doctrines of oneness: the One China principle in China and the Turkish motto of “one nation, one flag, and one language.” Although geographically distant and politically distinct, China and the Republic of Türkiye share a structural legacy; each emerged from imperial collapse with an urgent need to forge homogeneity out of diversity. This shared historical condition explains why both states continue to securitize their largest ethnic minorities. The Uyghurs and the Kurds, through discourses of national unity, territorial preservation, and anti-terrorism.

7.6. From Empire to Nation-State

The Qing and Ottoman Empires were both multiethnic, multi-religious political systems that governed diverse populations through flexible, hierarchical arrangements. The Qing’s rule over Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang relied on indirect administration and cultural autonomy, while the Ottoman millet system permitted religious

communities to manage their own affairs under imperial oversight. However, the collapse of these empires under the pressure of nationalism and modern statehood transformed plural imperial structures into exclusionary national ones.

In China, the fall of the Qing in 1911 and the subsequent Republican and Communist revolutions replaced imperial pluralism with a new model of the nation as (*minzu*) a single people unified under the Chinese state (Leibold, 2013). Ethnic diversity was reframed not as a natural component of empire but as a potential threat to national unity. Similarly, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Turkish Republic in 1923 marked the replacement of imperial cosmopolitanism with a national identity centered on Turkishness (*Türkliik*). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms sought to create a modern, secular, and linguistically unified citizenry, effectively marginalizing non-Turkish identities (Zürcher, 2017).

Both transformations produced a state ethos defined by defensive nationalism, a belief that internal pluralism could endanger the survival of the nation. The trauma of imperial disintegration fostered a persistent fear of territorial fragmentation, which continues to inform both states' policies toward minority regions. Xinjiang and southeastern Türkiye, where Uyghurs and Kurds constitute significant populations, are viewed not merely as homes of cultural minorities but as frontiers of national integrity.

7.7. *The Ethos of Oneness*

The modern Chinese and Turkish states sacralize unity through political doctrines that equate national survival with cultural and linguistic uniformity. The One China policy, officially codified in the 1950s, insists that all citizens belong to a single Chinese nation (*Zhonghua Minzu*), encompassing fifty-six recognized ethnic groups but subsuming their distinctiveness under Han cultural dominance (Hechter, 1975; Bulag, 2010). Similarly, the Turkish slogan “one nation, one flag, one language” encapsulates the Kemalist vision of indivisibility. Both states, though rhetorically inclusive, operate under what Michael Hechter (1975) termed “internal colonialism,” where peripheral ethnic groups are incorporated into the nation-state on unequal terms, their autonomy curtailed in the name of modernization and unity.

This ethos of oneness frames diversity as a potential source of instability. In China, the Party-state portrays ethnic distinctiveness as a challenge to socialist harmony, while in Türkiye, ethnic particularism is often equated with separatism. Consequently, state legitimacy is tied to the maintenance of territorial and cultural homogeneity. This ideological structure explains why both states engage in assimilationist and securitizing policies toward minorities who assert distinct collective identities.

7.8. *Why Securitization? The Role of Terrorism and Delegitimization*

The securitization of Uyghurs and Kurds cannot be understood solely as a pragmatic response to security threats; it functions as a political instrument to delegitimize identity-based claims. Both states have formally classified minority political movements as terrorist organizations: the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Türkiye and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in China. These designations, whether or not empirically justified, serve a discursive purpose to transform political grievances into existential threats. As Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory suggests, once an issue is framed as a matter of security, extraordinary measures become legitimate (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998).

Labeling these movements as terrorist enables both governments to deny the existence of legitimate causes, demands, or rights of self-determination. The Kurdish movement's struggle for autonomy and the Uyghurs' calls for cultural or religious rights are recast as violence for its own sake. In this way, the discourse of terrorism delegitimizes political participation and justifies repressive state practices. For example, China's “Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism” and Türkiye's post-2016 counterterrorism laws both blur the distinction between peaceful dissent and violent extremism, producing what scholars have called “security citizenship” (Hasmath & Ho, 2020), a conditional belonging based on political loyalty.

7.9. *The Territorial Imperative*

Beyond ideology, both states' minority policies are motivated by territorial imperatives. Xinjiang and southeastern Türkiye occupy geostrategic positions and possess significant natural and economic resources. Xinjiang is central to China's Belt and Road Initiative, serving as a gateway to Central Asia, while Türkiye's southeast borders volatile regions of Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Maintaining firm control over these territories is thus perceived as essential to national security and regional influence.

This material dimension reinforces the logic of oneness: territorial possession demands political assimilation. When the state's legitimacy depends on the unity of the homeland, ethnic pluralism becomes synonymous with vulnerability. Consequently, China's forced assimilation of Uyghurs through re-education programs and Türkiye's suppression of Kurdish political expression both emerge as means to secure not only loyalty but land. When a state "needs" territory, it faces three choices: assimilation, denial, or removal of the population that challenges its claim.

8. Comparative Analysis

8.1. *Similarities and Differences in Minority Management*

China and Türkiye exhibit both convergences and divergences in minority policy. Both states treat their Kurdish and Uyghur populations as national-security issues rather than ethnic groups with legitimate rights. Nationalist ideology in each country underpins this approach: the Chinese Communist Party stresses Han cultural unity, while Türkiye's secular-nationalist tradition emphasizes an indivisible Turkish identity. In practice, both governments have used militarized counterinsurgency as a key tool: China's Xinjiang Public Security Bureau resembles a police-state apparatus; Turkey's army and gendarmerie long dominated the Kurdish southeast (HRW, 1999). Both governments have also engaged in selective concessions. For example, in both Xinjiang and southeast Türkiye, authorities have established autonomous administrative structures (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Turkey's OHAL emergency region (Olağanüstü Hâl Bölge Valiliği, lit), albeit with limited real autonomy).

However, differences are stark as well. China has invested heavily in economic development in Xinjiang (e.g., High-Speed Rail, factories) as part of its strategy, whereas Türkiye's investments in the Kurdish southeast have been relatively meager, seeing the region primarily through a security lens until recently. Culturally, Turkey eventually permitted some Kurdish expression (private media, celebrations) as EU pressure mounted, whereas China has increasingly suppressed Uyghur language and culture despite initial constitutional promises. Another key difference is that Turkey is a democracy (with varying levels of freedom) and subject to some external pressure (EU, NATO allies), whereas China is an authoritarian state with fewer external constraints. This means Türkiye's Kurdish policy has oscillated with political cycles (liberalization under Özal, AKP reforms, then backsliding), while China's approach has become progressively more uniform and repressive since the 1990s (Maurer-Fazio & Hasmath, 2015).

8.2. *Influence of Nationalism and Identity*

Nationalist identity plays a central role in both cases. In Türkiye, the official ideology for much of the 20th century was Turkification; the state defined "Turkishness" in narrow ethnolinguistic terms. Any Kurdish assertion of being a distinct people was deemed illegal (HRW, 1999). Even today, the Turkish state often downplays Kurdish identity, favoring assimilation or forced integration. For instance, in 2012, the Turkish government famously defined Kurds as "one of the Turkish people" in its educational reforms. In China, national identity is constructed on civic-territorial lines (all citizens are Chinese), but with an assumption that minorities will adopt Han norms. Uyghur identity is often securitized as a potential separatist threat. Scholars note that China's ethnicity policy emphasizes loyalty to the socialist fatherland over ethnic distinctiveness (Dwyer, 2005). Both states thus exhibit forms of ethnonationalism, defining the nation in terms that privilege the majority culture. However, Türkiye's nationalism also has a civic component (at least historically in theory), whereas China's is tightly linked to

Communist Party control (with loyalty to the CCP being paramount). In short, nationalist ideology in both countries has justified limits on minority rights, but the content of that ideology (Atatürk's secular Turkishness vs. CCP-led pluralistic nationalism) differs.

8.3. Human Rights Considerations

From a human rights perspective, both countries' policies have raised concerns. International human rights organizations report widespread abuses of Uyghurs (arbitrary detention, torture, cultural erasure) that violate China's commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW. Similarly, Türkiye's long Kurdish conflict saw documented cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances (HRW, 1999), and, more recently, politically motivated prosecutions of Kurds and journalists (HRW, 2017). Both governments justify their policies as anti-terrorism measures, a trend noted in comparative studies: dissent by an ethnic minority is labeled "terrorist," thus justifying otherwise repressive laws. Human rights frameworks (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly, and cultural rights) have been persistently curtailed. An important difference is that Türkiye, as a member of the Council of Europe, has at times been pressured by the European Court of Human Rights; China, not a party to such bodies, is less exposed to multilateral legal scrutiny. Nevertheless, NGOs and foreign governments continue to raise Uyghur and Kurdish rights as international issues. The comparative view highlights a pattern, even as some legal reforms might signal progress (like Turkey's 2009 Kurdish broadcasting law), the overriding securitized narrative leads to recurring human rights setbacks (Freedom House, 2022).

9. China's Influence on Türkiye's Ethnic Policy

9.1. Diplomatic and Economic Interactions

Over the past two decades, China and Türkiye have deepened diplomatic and economic ties. Türkiye joined China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2015 and received tens of billions in Chinese loans for infrastructure projects (e.g., the 3.6 \$ billion Shanghai loan in 2019). High-level exchanges increased, Presidents Erdoğan and Xi have met frequently, and cooperation expanded to energy, technology, and defense (e.g., joint military exercises). This closer relationship has come amid Türkiye's frictions with the West, making China an attractive partner (Sandal, 2023). Diplomatically, Turkey has gradually aligned with China on sensitive issues: Ankara now opposes Western criticisms of Xinjiang and has even blocked some Uyghur-related motions at the UN Human Rights Council. In return, Türkiye secured Chinese support on its own issues (Beijing has been less outspoken on Kurdish demands when compared to Turkish requests). This evolving partnership creates a context for China to exert influence on Türkiye's handling of its Uyghur diaspora.

9.2. Evidence of China's Influence on Turkish Policies

There is compelling evidence that China has pressured Türkiye to rein in support for Uyghurs. Shichor (2009) chronicles how, by 1995, China used economic and military leverage to get Ankara to "eliminate any media reports targeting China" and curb Uyghur activism. Chinese state media openly warned Türkiye against "fueling the Xinjiang question" or helping Uyghur radicals. Subsequently, Türkiye indeed began to view Uyghur issues through a bilateral lens. In recent years, China's influence has become more pronounced. For example, Ankara signed an extradition treaty with Beijing in 2017 (ratified by China in 2020) that critics say could be used to hand over Uyghur refugees (Türkiye has not ratified it yet, amid concerns). Turkish officials have made statements assuring respect for China's security concerns. In 2017, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu declared Türkiye would consider "China's security as our own" and would stop media "targeting China". Domestic Turkish media, especially pro-government outlets, have run narratives labeling Uyghur human rights campaigns as foreign plots (e.g., claims of CIA involvement). Reports also indicate that Chinese intelligence even surveils Uyghurs in Turkey with tacit Turkish tolerance. In sum, China's economic carrots and political enticements have led Türkiye's government to moderate its previously vocal stance on Uyghurs (Akyol, 2022).

9.3. Turkey's Position on the Uyghur Issue

Türkiye's official position on the Uyghurs has shifted markedly over time. As Sandal (2023) notes, Erdoğan once thundered against China in 2009; he even called China's actions in Xinjiang "genocide" after unrest in Ürümqi. He welcomed Uyghur leaders in Ankara and aggressively condemned Beijing during that period. However, by the 2010s, Erdoğan toned down such rhetoric. During a 2019 visit to China, Turkish media reported Erdoğan praising Xinjiang's development, though the Turkish government later said his words were mistranslated. Currently, Türkiye's leadership treads carefully; it has made only cautious public statements about Uyghur human rights (e.g., a 2019 foreign ministry "expression of concern" and summoning the Chinese ambassador in 2021 when opposition politicians raised the Uyghur issue). These gestures occur amid growing domestic awareness and activism, partly driven by nationalist and Islamist opposition parties, but the ruling AKP remains committed to not alienating Beijing (Akyol, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). In effect, Turkey's official stance is now a careful balancing act that acknowledges Uyghur sensitivities enough to placate domestic opinion, but siding with China enough to preserve bilateral ties. As Akyol observes, today's Türkiye is reluctant to criticize China publicly on this matter, effectively "abandoning the Uyghurs" to avoid upsetting its powerful partner.

10. Effects on Ethnic Minority Populations

10.1. Social, Cultural, and Political Impacts on Uyghurs and Kurds

The long-term social and cultural impacts of these policies are profound for both groups. In Xinjiang, Uyghur culture is under existential threat, traditional religious education has been curtailed, and a new generation of Uyghur children often grow up in state-run boarding schools and orphanages with no family contact. Ethnoreligious markers (long beards, headscarves) have been stigmatized. According to Human Rights Watch, "as many as a million people" have been detained in camps, and millions more are subject to extreme surveillance. This pervasive repression has broken community ties and spread trauma. Conversely, Beijing touts poverty reduction among minorities, lifting rural Turkic families out of poverty, yet critics argue this comes at the price of erasing Uyghur identity (HRW, 2021).

Among Türkiye's Kurds, the cumulative impact of decades of conflict is equally significant. In rural areas, the village-guard system and forced displacements decimated traditional village life (HRW, 1999). In urban areas, cultural expression flourished somewhat during the lull of the peace process, Kurdish language media appeared, and local festivals revived. But since 2015, fears of arrests and stigmatization have mounted. Politically, many Kurds feel disenfranchised after witnessing their elected representatives arrested or deposed. Yet Kurdish political engagement remains high, as evidenced by strong electoral showings (HDP) and vibrant civil society organizations, albeit under pressure (O'Connor, 2017).

In both contexts, ethnic minority communities experience a tension between survival and resistance. Scholars note that the state's policies generate a strong sense of minority grievance, which can fuel further dissent. For example, Human Rights Watch observed in Türkiye that repressive measures "only serve to boost" support for insurgents. In China, numerous experts warn that heavy-handed assimilation could provoke backlash or deepen Uyghur alienation in the long run (Clarke, 2017). The political dimension is clear that neither group can freely advocate for its rights domestically, and both rely on diaspora networks to amplify their plight.

10.2. Diaspora and International Activism

Given domestic constraints, both Uyghurs and Kurds have turned to diaspora communities for support. Türkiye itself hosts one of the largest Uyghur diasporas, estimated at tens of thousands, second only to Kazakhstan among foreign Uyghur populations. For a time, Türkiye was a base for Uyghur exile groups (World Uyghur Congress affiliates) and human rights advocacy. Likewise, millions of Kurds live abroad (notably in Germany, France, and

the Netherlands), where they have established political organizations, media outlets, and cultural associations. These diasporas play a key role in lobbying foreign governments, raising awareness, and sustaining ethnic identity. For instance, the 2019 insurgent campaign by Turkish opposition parties (IYI and Saadet) on behalf of Uyghurs in China highlights how diaspora concerns can influence domestic politics (Akyol, 2022). Kurds in Europe have similarly lobbied the EU on EU-Türkiye relations and Kurdish rights.

However, recent trends show these diasporas are also subject to transnational pressures. As Freedom House documents, Türkiye has increasingly treated Uyghur expatriates as potential threats, warning them away from protests or even detaining some. Many Uyghur refugees in Türkiye report difficulties in obtaining permits and fear that China's extradition treaty could endanger them. Kurdish activists abroad face Turkish espionage or legal challenges as well. Despite these risks, diaspora activism continues. Diaspora networks have kept Uyghur and Kurdish issues on the international agenda. Western parliaments routinely debate Uyghur abuses, and Kurdish lobbying influenced EU-Turkey relations and US policy (e.g., US support for Syrian Kurds). In sum, while state policies constrain them, the Uyghur and Kurdish diasporas remain vital conduits for ethnic solidarity and international advocacy (Clarke, 2017).

11. Conclusion

This comparative study has examined how China and Türkiye manage the Uyghur and Kurdish minorities, respectively, and how China's rise has influenced Türkiye's posture on the Uyghur issue. We find that both countries have adopted assimilationist, securitized policies that prioritize state unity over minority rights. China's approach in Xinjiang has evolved from Soviet-style accommodation to harsh counterterrorism and cultural assimilation, culminating in mass detention of Uyghurs (HRW, 2021). Türkiye's Kurdish policy has oscillated from outright bans and armed conflict (1990s) to partial liberalization (2000s) and back to repression (post-2015). Both governments frame ethnic dissent as a threat and use legal and military tools to suppress it. We also find that Turkish nationalism and Chinese national security concerns play parallel roles in shaping policy; both leaders warn against "separatism, illustrating common dynamics of nation-building under stress.

Crucially, our analysis shows that China's growing leverage has led Türkiye to moderate its defense of Uyghurs. Economic ties and diplomatic alignment have produced tangible shifts. Türkiye signed an extradition treaty, stifled Uyghur activists, and now rarely criticizes Beijing (Akyol, 2022; Sandal, 2023). Türkiye's selective stance – voicing concern only when domestic pressures demand it – underscores China's influence. On the human side, the policies have inflicted pain on both minorities. Uyghurs face cultural destruction and surveillance; Kurds endure political disenfranchisement and the trauma of prolonged conflict (HRW, 2017). Both diasporas continue to fight for recognition, even as state repression follows them abroad (Freedom House, 2022).

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Devolved Governance Finances and Pastoralist Livelihood Diversification in Moyale, Marsabit County, Kenya

Rahma Aga¹, Namanya Daniel Naburi²

^{1,2} Department of Governance, Peace and Security, Africa Nazarene University, Kenya

Abstract

The pastoralist communities account for over 25 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa whose livelihood is based on livestock keeping as they move from one place to another. In the recent past, some of the pastoralists have shifted to doing other agricultural activities in combination with mobile livestock keeping. The choice of livelihood is influenced by the social, cultural, economic, political and psychological components. Devolved governments facilitate sustainable, equitable and high-quality services for all citizens. In Kenya, devolution gives political powers to the county governments which determines among others the livelihoods of communities including pastoralists. The objective of this study was to assess the effects of Devolved Governance on Pastoralist Livelihood in Moyale Sub- County, Marsabit County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive research design. The target population included 1771 household heads, stratified as per their role in the pastoralist communities. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were utilized to select a sample size of 315 respondents using the Kothari Formula. Questionnaires, key informant interview guides and focus group discussions were used to collect data. Financial analysis was done based on the Annual County Fiscal Strategy Papers. Results indicate that through devolution, between the financial years 2017/2018 to 2023/2024, the county received a total revenue of Ksh. 54,433,192,393.00. Out of these sum total, (Approx. 53.0%) were spent on recurrent expenditures while (Approx. 36.4%) were spent on development expenditures. Recurrent and development expenditures accounted for 89.4% while 10.6% were not absorbed. Key sectors aligned to powering pastoralist livelihood diversification such as agriculture, livestock, fisheries, water, environment and natural resources received less than 10% of the total annual revenue allocated in the county. Although devolved governance had initiated measures that could catalyse livelihood diversification, such as educating the locals on livelihood diversification measures and budgetary allocation on livelihoods diversification programmes, the impact made by these strategies were less than 20% (mean =1.96 SD=1.00). Pastoralists continued experiencing considerable challenges in an effort to embrace livelihood diversification that include livestock diseases, drought, lack of business skills, lack funds for capital to diversify into other economic activities, climatic variability, inter-tribal conflicts and degradation of land. The study concludes that devolved governance did not adequately, prioritize key pastoralist livelihood diversification sectors based on local priority needs and hence the pastoralist remained unsatisfied with devolved governance financing impact on their livelihoods. The study recommends the need to enhance pastoralist livelihood diversification through devolved governance adequately financing activities in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, water, environment and natural resources together with education and skill development as a counter measure of the climate change impacts, poverty and resource- based insecurity among other challenges.

Keywords: Devolved Governance, Finances, Pastoralist, Livelihood Diversification

1. Introduction

The pastoralist communities account for over 25 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa whose livelihood is based on livestock keeping as they move from one place to another. In the recent past, some of the pastoralists have shifted to doing other agricultural activities in combination with mobile livestock keeping (Asfir, 2016). The choice of livelihood is influenced by the social, cultural, economic, political and psychological components. The pastoralists living in arid and semi-arid regions experience difficulty in making use of their land for an economic purpose like agricultural activities due to unpredictable rainfall patterns and inadequate amount, harsh temperatures, and improbable soil texture (Liao & Fei, 2017). Climatic changes make the communities to adopt a nomadic lifestyle of moving from one place to another to find food and water for their animals like cattle, goats, sheep and camels. Some of the reasons for shifts in pastoralist lifestyle include environmental degradation, droughts, flooding, conflicts among the neighboring communities, lack of basic infrastructure and increased insecurity (Githinji, *et al.*, 2019). Pastoralists derive their subsistence needs from the consumption of animal products especially milk, meat and blood; in addition to purchased foodstuffs (Salih *et al.*, 2017). Small stocks are easily sold compared to large stocks, which are sold when there is no other alternative. Both animal products and purchased grains contribute to pastoral household food security. Food security is therefore defined as the availability of adequate food, accessibility and affordability by household members at all times for an active and comfortable life (Nyariki *et al.*, 2016). Over the years, Sub-Saharan African governments have been addressing national food self-sufficiency, yet it is evident that, from the outset, perennial hunger could coexist with adequate food supply at national, regional and international levels (Islam *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, there are several case studies where pastoral strategies were integrated into a wider livelihood system: prehistoric South African foragers at times kept some livestock, as did prehistoric hunter-gatherers in East Africa; impoverished herders in north-western Namibia and Kenya in the 19th Century resorted in a great number to non-pastoral risk-buffering strategies which allowed for survival and the protection of emaciated herds. Pastoralism in southern and eastern Africa has been heavily influenced by state-led national conservation policies (Berzborn & Solich, 2017). In general, pastoralism has been regarded as environmentally problematic and state policies have sought to control pastoral land use through restricting mobility and/or fixing carrying capacities. Adams and McShane (1996) considered African pastoralists to be detrimental to wildlife, even if the game had been severely reduced by European hunters.

Studies present that where mobility if not well managed along specific routes, can cause a definite effect on the natural resources. However, the use of these resources by pastoralists depends on property rights, regime and sustainable management to support their socioeconomic livelihood (McCabe, 2017). To cope with these uncertainties in pastoral livelihoods, diverse and flexible strategies through a number of social, economic, environmental and political mechanisms are necessary. These may include improving market outlets, livestock diversity, and monitoring the impact of mobility on natural resources, key site management and establishing small-scale businesses (Akabwai & Stites 2018). To complement these strategies, appropriate policies related to pastoral development including infrastructure and adequate social amenities are needed (de Bruijn & Van Dijk, 2017). In Ethiopia, Dinku (2018) revealed that for pastoralism to thrive there must be a symbiotic relationship between the pastoralist community members, the land and the livestock. Whenever the three aspects experience changes, then one aspect will suffer and it will affect the others, such that when land is unproductive, then the animals lack food and the people also suffer. With the changes in the climatic conditions, prolonged droughts and heavy rainfall causing floods, shifts in socio-economic demands as sustaining livelihoods need more resources, the pastoralist communities are shifting and adopting diversified measures to survive and thrive. According to Addisu (2017), some of the measures included settling down in and around urban centers to conduct training activities and some are seeking employment opportunities.

Devolved government paves the way for fair, high-quality, and sustainable services for all Kenyans, with monitoring and assessment that aligns county and national goals (Bache, Bartle & Flinders, 2016). The devolved governance views pastoral livelihood differently as shared by Bache, *et al.* (2016) further mention that most of those at the national governing level push for a sedentary lifestyle to enable them to offer social services like people registration, education, healthcare and other social amenities. According to Wangai, *et al.* (2017) the local

communities' greatest desire is to retain their cultural ecosystem and advocates for their pastoralist lifestyle, while the local governance level advocate for a mid-point where the cultural and social practice is not completely changed but also see a need for living quality livelihoods. At the same time, Demissie (2017) shares that is why there is a need for adopting agro-pastoralist livelihood and also to empower pastoralists in policy formulation on pastoral legislation that will be able to protect the pastoral land rights and offer alternatives that can sustain their livelihood. The transfer of finance/cash and the enactment of several laws have aided the delegated tasks under devolved governance as per the County Government Act (2012) Section 5. According to the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), Kenya has a unique devolved system where both national and county governments appropriate budgets for various projects on livelihoods including for the pastoralist at any given time. The procedures within the Act establish an institutional structure that outlines the new management and institutional structures that are expected under the devolved system, which is in line with Kenya's long-term development plan, The Vision 2030. The county level is where the devolved system governance takes place (Asrat & Anteneh, 2019).

Decentralization of the Kenyan governing system into the county government has helped in bringing government services closer to its people. The pastoralist communities have been able to slowly adapt and shift to other livelihood and economic activities as they try to survive the climatic changes and conserve the natural resources. The local governance structures have helped the communities to diversify, but challenges still linger due to weak communication systems, decisions made without consultation and participation of the locals and unequal power and authority sharing with biasness against the local communities. Recent studies, looked at measures to manage livelihood risks by adopting diversified income in pastoral settlements in Isiolo County (Achiba,2018). The study recommended for the pastoral communities and households to settle down in one specific area without mentioning needed governance reforms and livelihood diversification. Upon examination of the effectiveness of watershed governance for food security in the Sio River Basin, Naburi *et al.*, (2020) concluded that water resource management had yet to be implemented under devolved governance hence food insecurity was on the rise. The greatest challenge of devolved governance in the arid Northern Counties including the County of Marsabit is placing more emphasis on traditions as opposed to empowering pastoralists to diversify their livelihoods. This has increased the vulnerability of the pastoral local communities of County to shocks occasioned by drought and other unforeseen calamities. Lack of diversification has contributed to overreliance on livestock as a source of livelihoods among pastoral communities. It is against this background that the present study assessed the effectiveness of devolved governance on pastoralist livelihood diversification in Moyale, Marsabit County, Kenya.

2. Research Materials and Methods

2.1. The study area

The Moyale, Marsabit County covers an area of 9,390.3 km². It borders the Republic of Ethiopia to the north, Marsabit District to the southwest and Wajir District to the southeast. It lies between latitude 02° 11' North and 02° 4' North and longitude 38° 16' East and 39° 21' East. The study site in areas included administrative and political units for the wards within Moyale Sub-County, Marsabit County Kenya as per Marsabit County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) (2018-2020) namely: Butiye, Sololo, Manyatta/Heillu, Moyale Township, Uran, Golbo and Obbu. The majority of the local community members are pastoralists and this lifestyle is facing challenges like an increase in the human population that depends on the meagre earnings from animals, change in land ownership, community fights with neighbours and hence the need to explore livelihood diversification. The culture is also foreboding with practices like early marriages, nomadic lifestyle and warring communities. The area has experienced prolonged droughts and heavy rainfall seasons that cause havoc to the pastoral lifestyle as many animals die, making the people seek other means of survival.

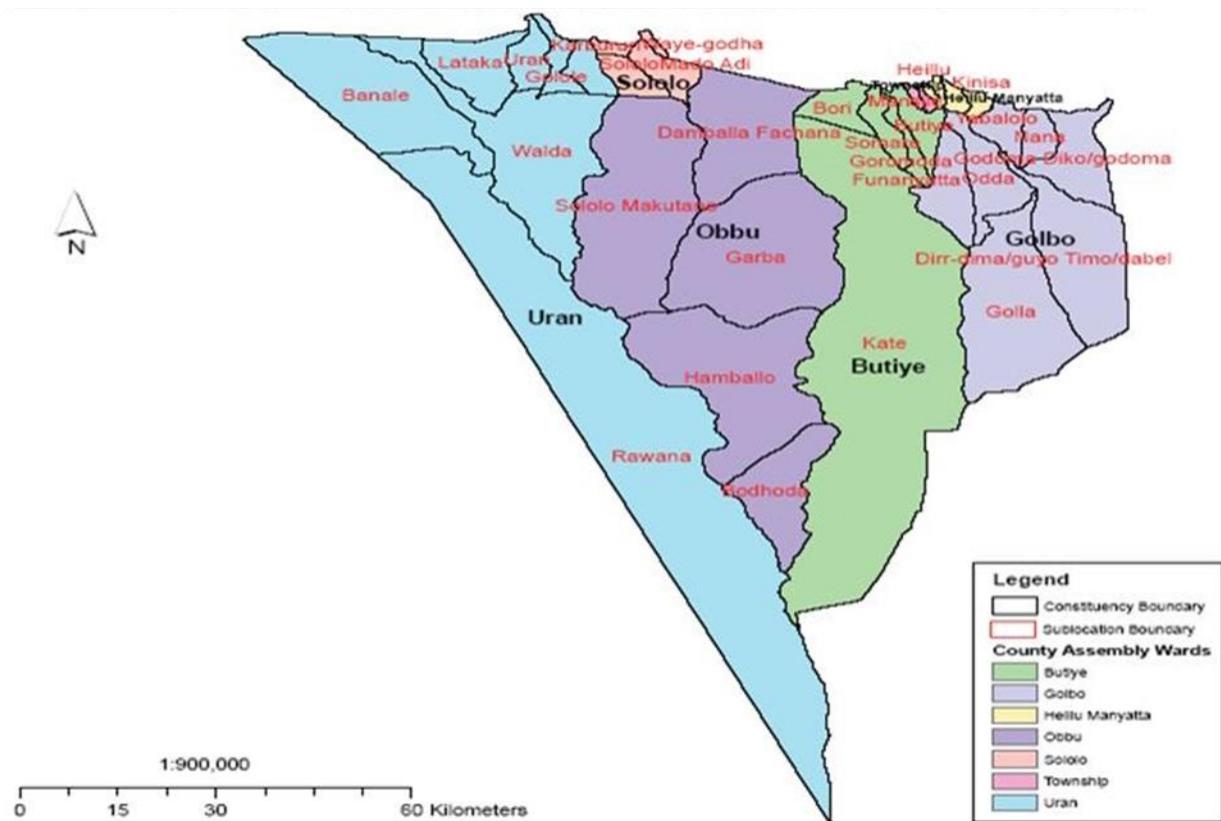


Figure 2.1: Map of Moyale Sub-county, Marisabit County, Kenya

Source: *Information Cradle 2017*

2.2 Research Design

This study employed a concurrent mixed methods approach. The organization of current data, collecting, and analytic circumstances in a way intended to provide relevance to the study goals is the research design (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). This section guides the researcher on how to plan the study coherently and logically through various research methods and techniques to integrate the two basic approaches applied to research, which are quantitative and qualitative methods Kothari (2004). The descriptive design applied both approaches to assess the effect of devolved governance finance on pastoralist livelihood diversification in Moyale Sub-County, Marsabit County Kenya. The design enabled to make efficient and effective ways to review and make inferences on the whole population.

2.3. Sampling Methods

The study appropriately applied stratified sampling techniques to simplify the assessment strategy which further facilitated the comparison strategy. Thereafter, sampling was carried out using simple random and purposive to select the respondents. Using Kothari's (2004) formula the study calculated the target population of 1771 with 95% confidence level and an error of 0.05 to arrive at a sample size of 315. The study used the 10% of the 17706 households to target 1771 male Pastoral Households including the elected leaders from national and county governments, religious and community leaders, the public and the head of sedentary pastoralists in the respective wards within the Sub-County. The study conducted interviews with elected leaders, focus ground discussion with the community elders and religious leaders applying stratified sampling while survey questionnaires used random sampling for the heads of households practicing pastoral sedentary livelihood. The elected leaders were 8 (1 Member of Parliament and 7 MCAs from each ward), the religious leaders were 14 two per ward, community elders were 21, three from each of the seven wards.

Simple random sampling was used to sample the community members while purposive sampling was used to select the key study informants. The primary source of data collection was the KNBS 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census since The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics is the principal agency of the Government of Kenya for collecting statistical data then analyzing, disseminating and custodian of official statistical information. The study used 10% of the 17706 households to target 1771 Pastoral Households. Thereafter, a sample group of people was selected from the target population who took part in the investigation. This was done by using Kothari's (2004) formula the study calculated the target population of 1771 with a 95% confidence level and an error of 0.05 to arrive at a sample size of 315 households.

2.4. Data collection

Primary data was collected using a questionnaire that was administered to the respondents. Financial analysis data was collected from published Marsabit County Fiscal Strategy Papers between 2017 and 2024 available at <https://repository.kipprra.or.ke>. The household questionnaires were both closed and open-ended questions that captured all the variables. Open-ended permitted the free response from the respondents without any suggestion of answers. A questionnaire was used because it allowed the researcher to collect a larger amount of data within a limited area. These questionnaires were self-administered, dropped and picked later. The questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale where; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree.

The quantitative data collection essentially necessitated semi structured questions, open and closed ended questions. The procedure for qualitative data collection was done using a focus group discussion guide administered in various community groups in the basin. Key informant interview guide was used to obtain data from national and county governments' departmental officers and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Focus group discussion checklist was also used to collected data from groups of community members. The primary data was collected from the respondents in the period between June to December, 2024, while secondary data presents was accessed from documents that existed between the same period. A pilot study was conducted to detect weakness in design and instrumentation and to provide proxy data for the selection of a sample. Etikan and Bala (2017) noted that a pilot study can be conducted using 1-10% of the respondents from the sample size. Therefore, the researcher selected a pilot group of 3 individuals (being 1% of the sample size) for pilot testing that was done in Moyale Township.

2.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were entered into the Statistical Package for social sciences version 25.0 through coding of the questionnaires, numbering and coding their indices; later further analysis was conducted. Descriptive analysis was conducted where means, frequencies and standard deviation measures were obtained for the study. The qualitative data collected in the interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using content analysis and arranged in themes. There were no statistical measurements for qualitative data, however analysis was done based on each thematic area to provide for quantitative data triangulation for coherent results. Findings were presented in graphs, charts and tables which are easy reading, as compared to reading data in full content and presentations of data. This has enabled the analysis and reporting of response rate easy to analysis. Similarly, the study accurately illustrates the distribution of respondents by gender using tabulation.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Households' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic data of the study showed that out of the 315 targeted households, the majority (61.0%) of the respondents were females whereas 39.0% were male. The majority (56.0%) of the household heads were aged between 41-50 years. Further 32.0% were aged between 31-40 years, whereas only 12% were aged above 51 years. The age between 30-50 years contributed to 86% of the respondents from the pastoralists' households. The majority (54.0%) of the respondents had no formal education, 25.0% primary education, 14.0% secondary education and only 7% with a college education. Subsistence livestock keeping as the main source of income more

indicating approximately 47% livestock and peasant farmers, 21% salaried and the rest in some kind of business, small scale farming and charcoal burning. A large portion (80%) of interviewees reported, rearing of livestock which remains the backbone of their livelihood.

3.2. County Government Financial Allocations and Expenditures

A key pillar of devolution in Kenya is fiscal decentralization which is envisaged in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 to help facilitate the citizens to make decision on the local resource allocation on key priority areas for grassroots' development. In this study, financial allocation by the County Government of Marsabit formed the basis on which perception of citizens in Moyale sub-county on devolution and pastoral livelihood diversification was assessed. The study in Table 3.1 and further analyzed in Figure 3.1 presents the financial analysis obtained from the County Fiscal Strategy Papers (CFSP) between financial years 2017/2018 and 2023/2024. The county received a Total Revenue of Ksh. 54,433,192,393. Out of these sum total, Ksh. 28,879,560,208 (Approx. 53.0%) were spent on recurrent expenditures while Ksh. 19,810,832,977 (Approx. 36.4%) was spent on development expenditures. Recurrent and development expenditures accounted for 89.4%. 10.6% of the Total revenue allocated in the county was not utilized between the study period. Further analysis of CFSPs revealed that the gap of 10.6% accrued as a result of challenges of absorptive capacity of the county government departments to absorb the whole budget allocated to them. This was as a result of various factors beyond the county government capacity such as delayed in disbursement by the national government. Although, the unabsobered balance was carried forward to the next financial year, these affected timely and adequately on the services provided to the pastoralist communities in the county who were the primary beneficiaries.

Table 3.1: Financial Analysis of Marsabit County Revenue and Expenditure Allocations between 2017/18-2023/24

Financial Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Development Actuals	254,000,000	3,605,000,000	3,161,421,289	3,438,431,831	3,245,198,049	2,698,781,808	3,408,000,000
Recurrent Actuals	4,040,000,000	3,862,700,000	4,004,926,369	3,764,875,624	4,514,000,000	4,928,058,215	3,765,000,000
Total Revenue Available	7,595,700,000	7,564,300,000	7,745,161,707	8,373,103,193	6,938,000,000	8,416,927,493	7,800,000,000

Source: Financial Analysis from Marsabit County Fiscal Strategy Papers Financial Years 2017/18-2023/24

On the other hand, the analysis shows development actuals lagging behind the recurrent actuals, 36.4% and 53.0% respectively within the analysis period. This implied that a large portion of county financial resources is spent on salaries and administrative functions and very little financial resources are spent on key areas considered as development for the pastoralist communities in the county. Development areas form key priority sectors for pastoralist livelihood diversification.

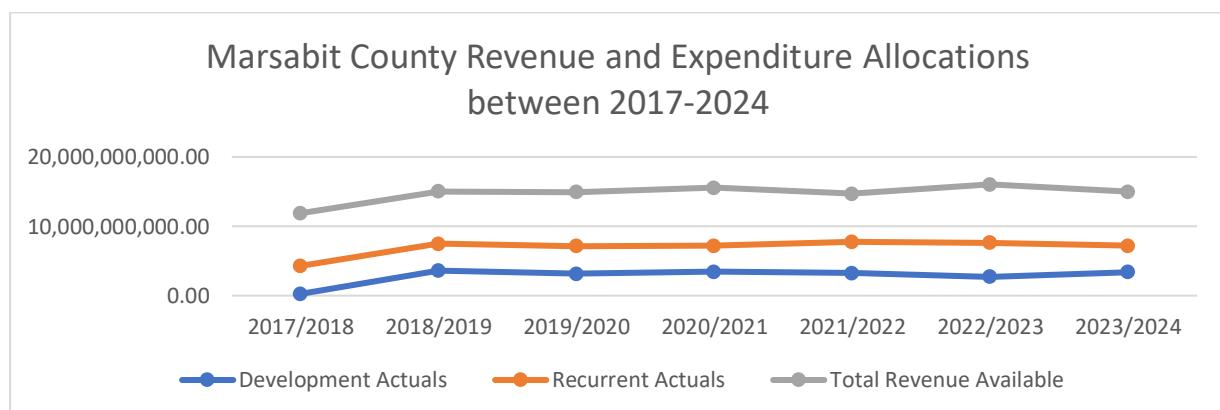


Figure 3.1: Financial Analysis of Marsabit County Revenue and Expenditure Allocations between 2017/18-2023/24

Source: Financial Analysis from Marsabit County Fiscal Strategy Papers Financial Years 2017/18-2023/24

Further analysis for example, from CFSP for the year 2024 indicates that Agriculture, Livestock & Fisheries sector was allocated a ceiling of 10% of annual total allocation to development; Water, Environment & Natural Resources a ceiling of 4%; Education, Skills Development, Youth & Sports a ceiling of 2%; and Health Services 5%. These figures compared to recurrent expenditures in the sectors recorded to low allocation compared to historical development challenges facing the county, such as increasing need for water, pasture, transformation to agro-pastoralism livelihood practices, resource conflicts among others. Being an arid county, with majority of the citizens being pastoralists, it is expected that agriculture, livestock and fisheries together with water, environment and natural resources would be allocated more financial resources with the aim of enhancing community resilience through pastoralist livelihood diversification investments for perennial climate change impacts such as droughts. Although, increased recurrent expenditure is expected to arise due to employment of specialists in various sectors to help the transformation of the pastoralist livelihoods through education, awareness creation for skill transfer and knowledge development, the case perception was difference during field interviews.

3.3. Effectiveness of Devolved Governance System Structures on Pastoralism

Results as shown in Table 3.2 indicate that majority of the respondents agreed that there was devolved governance system budgets for livelihood diversification among the pastoralist communities (mean =4.16 SD=0.68) and that the Marsabit County Integrated Development Plan 2023-2027 (CIPD) had set aside resources for livelihood diversification activities (mean =3.88 SD=0.99). Results also revealed that local initiatives like the training of pastoralists have not helped youth to shift to other sources of livelihood and that the elected leaders both at national and county level have no initiatives that support livelihood diversification efforts (mean = 1.64 SD=0.63). According to Nyangena (2018), education is essential for livelihood diversification because it provides pastoralists with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in alternative livelihoods. Mobile schools should be encouraged to provide primary education, particularly to pastoral communities, in order to achieve this, pastoralists have also attempted to get access to educational programs that would help them learn the specific skills required to engage in the political processes. The above findings concur with the study conclusion by the GoK (2019) reported that diversification opportunities, such as value addition to livestock products through rural-based processing industries, irrigated crop farming, fishing, and more, must be encouraged among the pastoralist communities through training among other forms of capacity building.

Table 3.2: Effectiveness of the devolved governance system on pastoralist livelihood diversification

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev
The County ensures that the locals are educated on how they can maintain their livelihoods	201	2.16	0.93
The devolved governance system budgets for livelihood diversification among the pastoralist communities	201	4.16	0.68
The CIPD has set aside resources for livelihood diversification activities	201	3.88	0.99
Community members are consulted in developing livelihood diversification policies	201	1.72	0.60
The elected leaders (national and county level) support livelihood diversification efforts	201	1.64	0.63
The area Member of Parliament (MP) uses Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for development of livelihood diversification activities	201	1.68	0.68
The government works to conserve the natural resources by training locals on diversification activities they can engage in	201	1.76	0.71
The national government has established conservancy in regard to climate change, run in collaboration with pastoral Community	201	1.68	0.68
The communities are engaged in the decision making on climate change adaptation mechanisms	201	1.72	0.72
Local initiatives like training help youth to shift to other sources of livelihood	201	1.64	0.63
Local leaders advocate for resilience measures to survive the	201	1.76	0.82

changing tide

Valid N (listwise)

Further, descriptive results show that the national government has inadequately established conservancy in regard pastoral ecosystem management in response to climate change, managing in collaboration with the pastoral community. Further, the study revealed that the area Member of Parliament (MP) as a patron does not use National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) another form of decentralized fund, for the development of livelihood diversification activities (mean =1.68 SD=0.68). During the focus group discussion, this was reported to be attributed to the NG-CDF Act 2023 which regulates areas where NG-CDF should be allocated in community development. The Act was reported to restrictive on enhancing key areas of pastoralist livelihood diversification because of its generality. Failure to initiate such measures escalates livelihood risk. According to empirical evidence by Kaye-Zwiebel and King (2014), climate change could have serious consequences, including the loss of livestock due to heat stress.

Furthermore, results show that community members are not consulted in developing livelihood diversification policies (mean = 1.72, SD=0.60), and that the communities are not engaged in the decision-making on climate change adaptation mechanisms (mean =1.72 SD=0.72). The above findings concur with the study conclusion by Nyangena (2018) that for decades, pastoralists have been side-lined in decision making on issues concerning their livelihoods. Further, the study established that local leaders are reluctant in advocating for resilience measures to survive the changing tide (mean =1.76 SD=0.82) at the same time, government has no measures in place that seek to conserve the pastoralists natural resources by training locals on diversification activities they can engage in (mean =1.76 SD=0.71). Reluctance by the government in the implementation of environmental conservation measures dispels the study results and recommendation by Mengistu (2015) that education is essential for livelihood diversification because it provides pastoralists with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue alternative sources of income. The findings by Little (2018) found out that most African governments' policies and practices have failed to provide alternative livelihoods for pastoralists. This legitimizes the practice of stocking large herds in order to ensure that at least some animals survive drought deaths while also protecting people from starvation. Nature and government neglect fuel the pastoralists' tragedy of the commons. Devolved governance in Kenya has also failed to enhance local government livestock institutions such as Pastoral Associations and facilitate decentralized planning and accountability procedures, according to focus groups discussions. Furthermore, the Marsabit county administration failed to put in place sufficient systems to manage conflict between pastoral groups and others (allowing effective early warning, anticipatory drought management strategies and methods) by allocating necessary and timely budget and resources. In a verbatim reporting one respondent stated following;

'The County Government should be committed to developing of response policies and livelihoods framework that emphasizes the overall livelihood of pastoral people depending on both access to assets, such as pasture, water, animal health services, markets, credit and education, and the environment' (Community Member A. 1/09/2021).

From the key informant's interviews, it was suggested that the government should enhance the development and growth of infrastructures such as electricity, roads, business expansion like providing low-cost tractors to plough where land resources allow and funds for pastoralist women empowerment. A verbatim:

'Rural employment through Kazi Mtaani can source the creation of youths and self-employment in our region. Further, the community members have been empowered through awarding contracts and drilling of boreholes both by the county and the national government. The county government should also improve health facilities, provide water tanks and tractors during rainy season, train and supply seedling to farmers in areas where agro-pastoralism can be practised'. (Member of County Assembly B. 5/09/2021)

In enhancing diversification by the county government, respondents suggested the following: support and motivation by elected leaders MCAs and Elders of the community in order to encourage investment, conduct seminars /workshops, create positions of village administration, sensitization through community Baraza's and

handling pasture and water related conflicts in the community by helping coping with stressful situations and pressure tactics.

3.4. Challenges Pastoralist Communities Experience

Focused group discussions revealed that the major challenge affecting pastoralist communities in Moyale Sub-county was drought and livestock, pasture and water resources insecurity. Drought affected the area vegetation leading to livestock losses and increased incidences of resource conflicts. Areas cited with insecurity challenges included; Uran, Obbu and Golbo area. On the other hand, the study sought to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statements assessing on challenges pastoralist communities experience and the impact on pastoralist livelihood. Results in Table 3.3 show that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that pastoralists communities encounter changing land and land-use policies (mean=4.56 SD=0.50), other agreed that livelihood diversification efforts is slowed by the pastoralists' lack of awareness of modern technologies (mean =4.40 SD=0.57) and that poor attitudes and cultural barriers by pastoralists has hindered livelihood diversification efforts (mean =4.36 SD=0.56).

Table 3.3: Challenges pastoralist experience and the impact on pastoralist livelihood diversification

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Pastoral communities lack funds for capital to diversify into other economic activities	201	4.28	0.72
Pastoralists communities encounter changing land and land-use policies	201	4.56	0.50
Changes in land tenure hinders the diversification efforts of the pastoralist communities	201	4.32	0.68
Pastoral communities suffer from climatic variability even during livelihood diversification efforts	201	4.24	0.59
Pastoralists communities face regular loss of fertile grazing land	201	4.20	0.49
Poor attitudes by pastoralists have hindered livelihood diversification efforts	201	4.36	0.56
Livelihood diversification efforts are slowed by the pastoralists' lack of awareness of modern technologies and cultural barriers	201	4.40	0.57
High poverty levels hinder adoption of livelihood diversification among the pastoralist communities	201	4.32	0.68

These results support the findings by Yona and Mathewos (2017), who found that strengthening policies aimed at pastoralists livelihood diversification provides them more life options by improving access to education and training, as well as encouraging the establishment of jobs for Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) residents. The study established that changes in land tenure hinder the diversification efforts of the pastoralist communities. Further, high poverty levels hinder the adoption of livelihood diversification among the pastoralist communities (mean = 4.32SD=0.68). The results of the study by Teka, *et al.*, (2019) support the conclusion that pastoralists must be empowered to influence policy and execution at the national and sub-national levels, and that the government should actively incorporate them in development programs, such as livelihood diversification.

The results are also in accord with those of Gufu (2017), who discovered that pastoralists must begin to think about transforming themselves. The fact is that, nomadic existence is becoming more difficult as land fragmentation and private land ownership gain traction. Only a tiny number of animals may be maintained, barely enough to meet daily demands. Pastoralists can plan to diversify their livelihoods rather than waiting for circumstances to force change on them. The first step is to concentrate on education, which will provide new opportunities for the younger generation. Pastoralists' decades- long "we" vs "them" mentality, which has alienated them from other national groups, must shift if they are to get the support they need from other communities. The study also established that pastoral communities lack funds for capital to diversify into other economic activities (mean =4.28 SD=0.72), pastoral communities suffer from climatic variability even during livelihood diversification efforts (mean =4.24 SD=0.59) and that pastoralists communities face regular loss of fertile grazing land (mean =4.20 SD=0.49). The

data above support Little et al. (2001) conclusions that many livelihood diversification alternatives in town, such as lodging, retail, and processing enterprises, need considerable sums of capital for start-up. From the focus group discussions, it was reported that pastoral areas are prone to climate change challenges and insecurity due to inter-tribal conflicts resulting from cattle raids and theft. On how to solve such challenges, one respondent stated the following;

'Pastoral communities should be given chances and business skills to help them become more self-sufficient and participate in entrepreneurial enterprises. Dairy cooperatives, tanneries, and leather-working businesses are examples of such skills and opportunities. Pastoralists should also be given information on animal pricing, as well as assistance in stabilizing grain costs via increased local storage'. (Religious leaders A. 2/09/2021).

3.5. Pastoralist Livelihood Diversification

The study sought to determine the extent to which participants agreed with the following statements relating to pastoralist livelihood diversification. Results in Table 3.4 show that majority of the respondents agreed that they conducted trade with their neighbors in the local markets (mean =3.64 SD=0.63). The findings agree with the evidence provided by Martin, et al. (2018) that due to their livestock-dominated livelihood, pastoralists depend on cross-border trade as a source of wealth. Descriptive results also show that only a few of the Marsabit residents had opted for crop farming (mean =1.68 SD=0.73). Marsabit residents were also not keeping high breeds of animals (mean =1.76 SD=0.76) and community members were not shifting to fishery activities (mean =1.84 SD=0.79).

Table 3.4: Pastoralist Livelihood Diversification

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Community members are seeking employment opportunities	201	1.84	0.79
We have taken to crop farming	201	1.68	0.73
We conducting trade with our neighbors in the local markets	201	3.64	0.63
We are keeping high breeds of animals	201	1.76	0.76
Community members are shifting to fishery activities	201	1.84	0.73
Valid N (listwise)	201		

The findings fail to concur with those of Morton & Meadows (2018) who observed that various pastoral communities have been exploring a broad variety of income-earning alternatives for decades, and they are being pursued more aggressively in response to drought impacts. Additional sources of revenue such as fishing, fuel wood, and charcoal sales are highly encouraged. This also contradicts the results by Belsky & Barton (2018), who found that, despite limited options, some pastoralists in Kenya's northwestern region diversify their income-generating activities by collecting firewood and burning charcoal. The findings support Rass (2016), who stated that pastoralists have been diversifying their livestock species in their herd for decades, taking into account that some species are better suited to arid environments and are more drought-resistant. Pastoralists investigated prefer goats, donkeys, and camels over cattle because these animal kinds adapt well to hard desert conditions and can resist drought events, according to their experience.

3.6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that devolved governance financing through county government did not adequately, prioritize key pastoralist livelihood diversification sectors based on local priority needs and hence the pastoralist remained unsatisfied with developed governance impact on their livelihoods. Based on the study results, pastoral communities in Moyale, Marsabit County mostly relies of livestock keeping with some on small-scale farming and business activities. This long-term reliance on livestock-based livelihoods of pastoral and agro- pastoral communities in Moyale, Marsabit County are increasingly becoming unsustainable and highly vulnerable for natural disasters and thus the need to conserve climate and diversify into alternative sources of livelihood so as to better quality of life.

The study also concludes that the pastoralists perceive that devolved governance had performed poorly in strengthening local government livestock institutions such as Pastoral Associations and facilitating decentralized planning and accountability mechanisms. Further county government had not put in place appropriate mechanisms in place to manage conflict between pastoral groups and others by providing adequate funding and resources. To address frequent natural-drought disaster, both national and county governments have established various mitigation programmes, policies, initiatives which are contained in the fourth schedule of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The study concludes that despite the existence of devolved governance, pastoralists in Moyale, continue to experience considerable challenges in their efforts to embrace livelihood diversification. These challenges include livestock diseases, droughts, such as high poverty levels, lack of empowerment, lack of business skill, lack funds for capital to diversify into other economic activities, climatic variability, degradation of land, inter-tribal conflicts resulting from cattle raids and theft, lack of business skills, lack of markets, price fluctuations and lack of modern storage facilities.

The study recommends that there was need enhance pastoralist livelihood diversification through devolved governance adequately financing activities in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, water, environment and natural resources together with education and skill development as a counter measure of the climate change impacts, poverty and resource- based insecurity. Given that poor climatic conditions were increasing affecting the over-relied pastoralism activities in Moyale, there is, therefore, the need for the residents in this area to embrace alternative sources of livelihood. Such may include activities like, poultry and bee keeping, trading, basket weaving, fishing, aquaculture, dairy products, processing milk, hides and skins, fat processing, bones and blood processing, manure, horns and modern-day farming technologies. There is an urgent need to address tree planting and water harvesting at the household level. The Elders and the pastoralists have not harnessed the strength of the joining hands to form groups to source capital to start ranches for pasture and agro farming. Therefore, Members of the County Assemblies (MCAs) need to mobilize groups to source seeds, fertilizers, plowing equipment for farming crops like maize, beans, and green grams during the annual rainy season to support agro-pastoralism activities in favorable agro-ecological areas. The County Government need to facilitate the provision of necessary agro-pastoralism support infrastructure and resources and provide capacity development for livelihood diversification change to occur. The list is to educate the people to save and let them understand in-depth the basic diversification approach, for example, to start garden farming, orchards, keeping poultry, also close collaboration is required between the County Government and National Government addressing challenges such as the insecurity policies to promote peace and safety. In mitigating the challenges, all the stakeholders including the local communities, the County Government, National Government, donors and other interested parties must meet frequently and get thoroughly involved in development initiatives. This partnership will accord each individual an opportunity to be heard especially on how challenges impeding livelihoods changes can be mitigated at an earlier stage before being faced by the mentioned challenges.

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