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Approach to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*

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Abstract

This research will examine the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey in relation to Michel Foucault's discourses on *discipline* and *punish*. How people living in that period obeyed to exist in society will be shown to the reader through the people in the mental hospital in the novel. In this regard, Nurse Ratched's ability to establish authority over the patients to maintain order and her efforts to eliminate those who do not comply with this order will be elaborated within the framework of Foucauldian analysis. The study highlights this categorization by providing examples from the novel, differentiating between 'recoverable' and 'non-recoverable' patients, representing individuals who can adapt to society and those who cannot. The surveillance and power dynamics of the nurse in the novel, as they relate to the patients, will be examined in detail. The concepts of how those who disobey the rules are punished by authority and the resulting resistance and rebellion will be emphasized. The panopticon metaphor, which plays a crucial role in Foucault's analyses of *discipline* and *punish*, is exemplified in Kesey's novel, where the patients in the mental hospital are kept under constant surveillance by Ratched. The study will provide an in-depth understanding to the reader, supported by primary and secondary sources throughout the research phase. The novel aims to provide literary examples that reflect the realities of the period in which it was written by questioning social punishment through Foucault's concepts of *power* and *resistance*.

Keywords: Authority, Discipline, Panopticism, Resistance, Surveillance

1. Introduction

Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which was published in 1962, is one of the most well-known literary works. The novel, published in 1962, not only critiques psychiatric institutions but also highlights the inner world of individuals who defy authority and struggle against the system, social norms, and human rights. It is known that significant social and cultural changes were taking place in the USA at the time the novel was written. The Vietnam War and the civil rights movement in the 1960s are the most well-known events of the period. When examined from this perspective, the novel completely reflects the period when social order and authority were dominant. In this context, the novel's critical attitude can be read as a criticism of social norms, rules, and authority.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, considered one of the most important works of American literature, was later adapted for the theatre and cinema. McMurphy's character development significantly impacts the flow of the novel. Hence, he plays a vital role in it. McMurphy is known in the book as a figure of resistance against the system.

The novel, set in a mental hospital, has been evaluated in the context of many criticisms and theories. By and large, this novel, which prompts the reader to think critically about society, also conveys hidden and political messages about the period. The problem of patients in the mental hospital complying with the order and submitting shows the necessity of people in that period to conform to society. People who do not keep up with society are brought into order by smaller communities such as mental hospitals, schools, or factories, or they lose their sanity through various tortures such as electroshock, shaving and likewise. Chief Bromden, who is often portrayed as an Indian man, serves as the narrator in the novel. Bromden presents himself as deaf and dumb, yet he knows and observes every event in the mental hospital. At the beginning of the novel, his aim is not to escape from there. Like other patients, he knows that there is no escape and that he must adapt to this order.

This novel by Ken Kesey provides the reader with a deeper understanding of the Foucauldian discourse within the framework of *discipline* and *punish*, illustrating examples of group therapies, electroshock treatments, and various behavioral patterns applied to patients in the mental hospital to maintain the hospital's system through surveillance and power dynamics. In this regard, people who rebel and riot against the system are often punished and eliminated. Another pattern used to conceal the essence of being and atmosphere can be likened to fog. This element symbolizes escape and eliminates the potential components of the related issue. Foucault's discourse on *discipline* and *punish* is rich in content, featuring symbols, settings, characters, and more.

2. Literature Review

Examining *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* within the framework of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides a critical review that helps readers understand the novel's essential themes, including social control, normalization, and power dynamics. Focusing on discipline and power relations, Foucault's work, along with other works, addresses how institutions control individuals. In this context, it shares common ground with the novel. When reading the novel within the scope of discipline as outlined by Foucault, the reader gains a deeper understanding of the social events of society at that time, particularly regarding *discipline* and *punish*. This novel has previously been examined within the framework of Foucault's studies on the Panopticon; however, as the number of studies on the work of *Discipline and Punish* increases, the reader will have the opportunity to gain different perspectives on the novel. While examining this study, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* serves as the primary source, which is reconciled with the authority and rules in the novel. In addition, as primary sources, Foucault's works, such as *Madness and Civilization* and *Society Must Be Defended*, contributed to the social context of the novel and the events in the mental hospital. Moreover, David Garland's *Frameworks of Inquiry in the Sociology of Punishment*, Fred Madden's article on *Sanity And Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner*, Roger Paden's *Surveillance and Torture: Foucault and Orwell on the Methods of Discipline*, Ashley E. Reis's *The Wounds of Dispossession*, Janet R. Sutherland's *A Defence of Ken Kesey's "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest"*, Stephen L. Tanner's *Salvation through Laughter: Ken Kesey & the Cuckoo's Nest*, are the articles which contribute to this study as secondary sources. In light of this information, this research can serve as a valuable foundation for future researchers to build upon and enhance existing studies in this field.

3. Symbols Containing Text

Fog is known as a literary metaphor that carries different meanings in the novel. In this context, it is a critical symbol that needs to be examined to understand the context the narrator wants to convey in the book. The movie version of the book does not include fog details, as they cannot be visually represented to the audience. Hence, when a reader examines a literary work, it creates the opportunity to delve into the inner world of the characters in the novel. The audience cannot get the same opportunity. When it comes to *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, fog is a changing symbol. At the very beginning of the novel, Chief Bromden cannot figure out why the fog

machines in the hospital are switched on and systematically used for various purposes. Patients are given electroshocks for therapeutic purposes. They are convinced that it is a way of psychological treatment. When he is taken to shave or given electroshocks by force, the fog machines are on. From time to time, these machines make him invisible. In this way, doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff cannot see him using fog, and he somehow escapes from torture. Although Chief Bromden considers this as a symbol of escape, on the other hand, the hospital staff's purpose is to create a mind game. "You had a choice: you could either strain and look at things that appeared in front of you in the fog, painful as it might be, or you could relax and lose yourself" (Kesey, n.d., p.131). The concept of fog in this quote is considered a metaphor. While fog represents understanding difficulties and struggling in the face of a situation and not giving up, it can also be interpreted as escaping from reality. It is a system that they create to confuse patients' minds, exclude them from seeing the truth, and make it difficult for them to act. For this purpose, patients are prevented from revolting and are expected to comply with the systematic orders of the authority.

There is an excerpt related to self-care, such as shaving and showering, among others. The concept of shaving in the novel is crucial for readers to understand the society depicted. Forcing patients in a mental hospital to shave not only their physical appearance but also their inner world. Hence, the patient loses his self-identity in the small society he tries to exist in. It makes the person lose themselves because they cannot see their old physical appearance when they look in the mirror. They primarily apply this to patients who cannot recover, that is, those considered a burden to society. It is a method they use for treatment purposes so that they do not repeat the mistakes they made before. In this way, they encourage patients to alter their physical appearance to maintain social order. Throughout our daily routines, people often become accustomed to distancing themselves from reality by following established patterns. Although practices such as fog machines, showering and shaving are used as treatment, the primary purpose within the scope of psychological pressure is to establish authority and destroy people who rebel in society.

4. The Concept of Authority

There are recoverable or non-recoverable patients in the mental hospital. Patients categorized as recoverable are defined as those who adhere to the hospital's and nursing staff's rules. According to doctors, these patients can regain their health with treatment. Patients who are categorized as non-recoverable are kept in mental hospitals to be monitored because they do not abide by the rules of society and rebel against the system. They are collected from the streets and brought to the hospital so that they do not disrupt the order.

In particular, the concept of authority established by Nurse Ratched robotized the patients and dehumanized them from essential human emotions. The patients in the mental hospital do not laugh; the hospital is known as a ward where even laughing is forbidden. "There is no place for laughter in the Big Nurse's smooth-running machinery of manipulation, and the patients have been conditioned to the point where they are afraid of laughter" (Tanner, 1973, p.128). Even though all the patients obey this rule, the rebellious McMurphy never stops laughing since the day he arrives. "Man, when you lose your laugh, you lose your footing" (Kesey, n.d., p.70). In this regard, McMurphy suggests that when you lose your sense of humour, you struggle to cope with life's difficulties. The monotonous life of the patients in the mental hospital and their inability to enjoy life are also indicators of their situation. Their lack of reaction to every event they experience stems from forgetting to laugh.

Moreover, they are asked lots of questions by doctors or nurses. If someone accidentally blurts out an incident about themselves while talking among themselves, their friend sitting at the same table goes to the nurse and reports the incident to them. The nurse convinces the patients that this behavior is part of the treatment. Additionally, Nurse Ratched, who assumes authority, plans Fridays as therapy sessions. In these meetings, she explains the therapeutic community theory to the treatment community, supported by the doctor. Mc. Murphy is a new patient, and he is supposed to listen to the theory of the Therapeutic Community by the doctor. The narrator paraphrases the doctor's words in the following sentences:

How a guy has to learn to get along in a group before he can function in a normal society, how the group can help the guy by showing him where he is out of place, how society is what decides who is sane and who is not, so you got to measure up (Kesey, n.d., p.49).

According to the workers in the mental hospital, the theory aims to contribute to the formation of a democratic society. Although it seems to relieve patients when they share their problems, on the other hand, these secrets create danger since they are known to the nurse. The authority she establishes destroys patients' private lives, feelings, and ideas. Furthermore, the time they wake up in the morning, the medicine they take, and the time they listen to the radio are all decided by Nurse Ratched. By and large, as it is evident from the novel, it cannot be denied that if patients abide by the authority the nurse establishes, they do not have to deal with any problems. Since Nurse Ratched categorizes patients as recoverable and non-recoverable, the hospital crew restrains them, and they cannot be on the same page in terms of their ideas and attitudes towards authority. The reason they do not share the same idea is that the nurse often shows non-recoverable patients to the recoverable ones as a warning, implying that if they do something wrong, they may be forced to stay in the mental hospital indefinitely.

4.1 Nurse Ratched as a Panopticon Metaphor Who Represents Authority

In the novel, Nurse Ratched is described as a panopticon figure. The concept of the *panopticon* must be defined to help the reader better understand the story. The Panopticon is a prison design model created by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. It means observing the whole. Michel Foucault suggests that this concept can also be applied in small communities and specific parts of society. As for the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Nurse Ratched's room is located in the very center of the mental hospital, both as described in the book and as observed in the film adaptation of the novel. In this way, she monitors all patients simultaneously and maintains order. When she notices someone disrupting the order, she takes control of the situation. The room where she works is suitable for observation since it is covered with glass. In this way, she controls her patients and makes them docile. Nurse Ratched is a panopticon figure because she represents the surveillance and control mechanisms. Foucault argues that such arrangements are established to discipline and exert power over people. Constant surveillance of individuals aims to ensure that they comply with certain norms by self-regulation.

Another significant issue that needs to be discussed is Nurse Ratched's nickname. At specific points in the novel, Chief Bromden refers to Nurse Ratched as 'Big Nurse'. It sounds like Big Brother. As is known, there is a concept "Big Brother is watching you!" in George Orwell's novel 1984. Although it sounds scary and uncanny, this concept has been included in many novels and movies in literature. The idea of Big Brother implies that individuals are constantly monitored by a central authority, often associated with the theory of panopticism. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Nurse Ratched, who thoroughly monitors all around in the mental hospital, reflects Big Brother. In this regard, it is an undeniable fact that the surveillance Nurse Ratched creates over her patients is compatible with Foucault's theories of power and surveillance. At the same time, she embodies the panopticon metaphor perfectly. It is observed in the novel that such monitoring is carried out to ensure the continuation of the social order, which supports Foucault's theories.

4.2 Abiding by Rules

One of the most fundamental concepts in the novel is the importance of following the rules. In particular, the goal of Nurse Ratched and other nurses, doctors, and hospital staff is to socialize patients into the small community they have established, enabling them to conform to social norms. Even the daily routine of the patients is under the supervision of Nurse Ratched. Medicine time, radio listening time and sleeping hours are determined by the elderly nurse. She establishes authority over the patients in order to vegetate their souls and prevent them from becoming individuals. In addition to this, she conducts various studies to ensure that the patient's behaviour does not change and always plays the same music. By listening to the same music, she causes the patient to stay in the same process. The patient thus neither improves nor worsens. Stability means order for the nurse. The nurse prevents any behaviour that disrupts the order. Patients are so robotic and vegetated that they do not even hear the music playing in their ears. The nurse's goal is to prevent patients from seeing or hearing what is happening around them. In this way, she manipulates them better and achieves her goals.

According to Foucault, such institutions are used as tools to ensure that individuals comply with social norms and are controlled. “The great hospitals, houses of confinement, establishments of religion and public order, of assistance and punishment, of governmental charity and welfare measures, are a phenomenon of the classical period” (Foucault, 1988, p.43). The novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* can be shown as an example of Foucault’s analysis. The purpose of sending McMurphy to the mental hospital is because it is thought that he cannot exist in society, that he will not comply with the rules of society and that a rebellion will occur. In this context, according to Foucault’s analysis, the mental hospital can be shown as an example of disciplinary mechanisms. In light of this information, when the novel is examined from a Foucauldian perspective, it can offer the reader an in-depth understanding of how society controls and regulates individuals.

Punish is a concept associated with social order and the personal development of individuals. It is defined by Garland as follows. “Punishment is a serious and symbolic issue in any society because it lies directly at the roots of social order, as well as having a prominent place in the psychic formation and development of individual persons” (Garland, 1990, p.11). In this context, the effects of the concepts of *discipline* and *punish* on the spiritual development of individuals have been effectively observed in the people with mental health conditions in the novel. Even categorizing patients as recoverable or non-recoverable is considered within the scope of *discipline* and *punish*. Those who can adapt to the environment recover; the souls of those who cannot become irrecoverable.

4.3 Surveillance and Power Dynamics

Surveillance and power dynamics are essential and significant themes in the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. The nurse is often seen as a symbol of oppressive authority in society. In novels, society’s disregard for individuals’ freedoms and their suppression of their rebellion is conveyed to the reader, usually through a small community. Ken Kesey uses the mental hospital as a setting to reflect this. The nurse manipulated the patients and established authority over them. She achieves this authority through surveillance and power dynamics. The nurse does this so convincingly that the patients believe that surveillance and power are methods of treatment for them. Ratched uses various techniques to do this. To illustrate, she has assistants working around her. When patients disclose something about themselves, the nurse’s assistants report this situation to the nurse. If the problem is not appropriate for the nurse, the patient may be penalized. This is one example of surveillance. In group therapy sessions, Nurse Ratched forces the patients to talk by creating chaos. Chaos breaks out between the patients, and they reveal all the secrets about each other. In this way, the nurse determines what they need to know about all their patients. Routine and order are distinct concepts that should be considered in the context of surveillance and power dynamics. She plans the daily routines of her patients to help organize their lives. The hospital decides patients’ meals, medication and sleeping hours. Even the dose of medication they take is determined by the nurse. In this way, she makes them docile. Those who do not follow the rules are also subject to punishment. Everything in the hospital is so stable and systematic that patients are expected to behave in a similar manner. The meaning of Ratched’s name is ‘controlling woman’. It is a combination of ratchet and wretched. As it is figured out from the meaning of the name, Nurse Ratched represents the oppressive society at the exact time mechanism and dehumanization. She symbolizes oppressive social forces, and she is not a woman to be underestimated. On the one hand, she pretends to care about her patients, and she is considered an ‘angel of mercy’.

On the other hand, she is uncanny in shaming her patients into compliance, as she seems to know exactly how to push her patients’ buttons. In the novel, the nurse enters a power struggle with her biggest rival, McMurphy. Sutherland describes the power dynamics between McMurphy, and the nurse as follows: “It is a battle of wills, and the patients watch to see who will win” (Sutherland, 1972, p. 31). The nurse is faced with such a patient for the first time, and the other patients are inquisitive about who will win this battle. For this reason, a conflict always arises between them, and the nurse constantly supervises McMurphy because she perceives him as a danger. This war between them led to the patients revolting and prompted efforts to undermine the nurse’s authority.

5. Resistance and Rebellion

Resistance and rebellion can be considered the climax of the novel. The novel's narrator, Chief Bromden, struggles to resist. McMurphy is a pioneer in rebellion by changing all the balances established by the nurse. The docility and respect for authority that initially appear in the novel are gradually replaced by resistance and rebellion. McMurphy is aware that other patients at the mental hospital are not recovering because of the behaviour of the nurses and other staff. He tries to explain this situation to them. However, other patients refuse to understand this. Belief systems oppose this perception. For example, when McMurphy first arrived at the mental hospital, he noticed that the patients were listening to music on the radio.

On the other hand, patients were not even aware that they were listening to music. Patients who are unaware of their surroundings are also unaware of the situation they are experiencing. That is why McMurphy has a hard time helping them discover themselves and ultimately succeed. Although the order the nurse tries to establish does not initially disturb the patients, it is noticed that they complain about the situation by creating chaos. A group of patients now opposes this order and is determined to create unrest within the mental hospital. The nurse internally reacts to the patient group's rebellion. In this regard, punishing them is inevitable. The cruelest way is to intervene and ban their card games. The nurse does not surprise the reader by stating that this is a sanction for therapeutic purposes and proceeds to say the following words:

We must take away a privilege. After careful consideration of the circumstances of this rebellion, we have decided that there would be a certain justice in taking away the privilege of the tub room that you men have been using for your card games during the day. Does this seem unfair? (Kesey, n.d., p.200)

The hospital management considers it a privilege for patients to play card games. This approach can be reconciled with the penal system in Foucault's works. On the other hand, when patients are punished with activities such as card games and watching football matches, they no longer remain unresponsive. To drive the nurse crazy, they start watching the football match by pretending the television is on. "By watching blank television, patients isolate themselves from the outside world without reacting to environmental stimuli, especially Nurse Ratched. Meanwhile, Nurse Ratched is yelling at the patients for discipline and order" (Kesey, n.d.). The patients' behaviour may seem mad from the outside. However, the nurse's ban on them watching the match is the patients' resistance and reaction to the nurse.

From Foucault's perspective, within the scope of *Discipline and Punish*, it is observed that the characters in the novel are severely punished when they do not comply with the rules set by the nurse. Roger Paden criticizes this situation as follows: "Although it was necessary to punish a criminal, such punishment had to be limited by those shared duties, or, in the language of the day, by the respect that must be shown to the criminal's soul" (Paden, 1984, p.263). By inference, the treatment method applied in the novel to protect social rules should respect human rights and the inner world of individuals.

5.1 McMurphy as a Figure of Resistance

As stated earlier, McMurphy is a figure of *resistance*, leading other patients. He challenges Nurse Ratched by doing what no other individual in the hospital has dared to do. The nurse, who is unsure of how to handle this situation but unwilling to admit she is at a loss, must deal with various problems created by McMurphy. He is aware from the very beginning of the novel that the patients are driven crazy by the system. Individuals who believe that they are sick regain their true selves thanks to him. In this manner, he is interpreted as a hero not only in the mental hospital but also in society. Although he is perceived as a rebellious figure, he is not considered an anti-hero. He attracts the attention of both the reader and the patients in the mental hospital with his quick wit and sense of humour. Even though his actions appear to be for his benefit, his self-sacrifice not only makes him a victim but also causes him to become a defender of freedom. In this context, it is inevitable to define him as a leader of the freedom struggle. Hereby, he has inspired other patients to find themselves. The nurse, who has never had to conflict with anyone in her hospital before, enters a power struggle with a patient for the first time. However, she has no idea what McMurphy is capable of. The dialogue and power struggle between them begin as follows:

“Ya know, ma’am,” he says, “ya know that is the exact thing somebody always tells me about the rules . . . He grins. They both smile back and forth at each other, sizing each other up” (Kesey, n.d., p. 26).

Fred Madden expresses the beginning of the power struggle between the nurse and McMurphy with the following words. “McMurphy limits his own choices. The interaction between McMurphy and Big Nurse, exchanging smiles and sizing each other up, is also noteworthy” (Madden, 1986). Upon examining this quote, it becomes apparent that the conflict between McMurphy and Nurse gradually develops. The nurse has already realized how strong and quick-witted her opponent is. First, he has a conflict with Nurse Ratched and opposes authority. He plays the game by his own rules. He does not avoid punishment; on the contrary, he enjoys annoying the nurse with his behaviour and mind games. Secondly, his purpose is to unite the group. By creating an organization within the group, he encourages other patients to rebel. In this way, he would destroy the order that the nurse is trying to establish in the mental hospital. Thirdly and most importantly, with this order, he creates not only physical power but also mental power, benefiting from both. For this reason, he engages in manipulative games. Ultimately, although the sacrifices he makes for freedom ultimately lead to his destruction at the novel’s end, his struggle for freedom is appreciated by the other patients, the novel’s narrator, and the reader. This man, a defender of personal identity, is a symbol of *resistance* in the novel, in addition to being a rebel.

McMurphy rebels against the rules imposed by the nurse, encouraging his friends to do the same. Hence, Sutherland states that McMurphy is a quest hero. “McMurphy assumes almost the stature of the typical quest hero at his death. The circumstances of his life have required him to rise above the ‘lowness’ of his original station to become a deliverer, to give up his life for his friend” (Sutherland, 1972, pp. 29-30). Quest heroes are characters who face numerous challenges throughout the novel and undergo significant personal growth and development. When the initial situation is considered, it is not thought that a character needs to be sacrificed. Even if it was believed, it was felt that the person who killed him could have been a nurse. However, the narrator, Chief Bromden, kills him at the end of the novel and declares him a savior hero.

5.2 Impact on Individual Behaviour

In Ken Kesey’s novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Electronic devices are implanted in some of the mentally ill patients to control and monitor their behaviour in the mental hospital. In this way, Ken Kesey sheds light on the social problems of the 17th and 18th centuries, reflecting the society, authority, control, and surveillance over people of that period, as well as their relevance to today’s literature. In Foucault’s work, *Society Must Be Defended*, he refers to disciplinary power through the devices used to control people in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The tools or devices which were used to regulate individuals’ bodies included separations, alignments, and surveillance. These tools and devices were also used for body control. This technology was increasingly internalized from the late 17th to the 18th century (Foucault, 1976).

As a narrator, Chief Bromden is familiar with the tools and devices in the mental hospital from the very beginning of the novel. Hence, he recognizes himself as deaf and dumb. In this way, he avoids being controlled through devices by presenting himself as harmless. These control devices in the novel are also shown as electroshock therapy, medications, punishments, and group therapy sessions to the readers. For instance, the men working in the mental hospital with Nurse Ratched force Chief Bromden to shave. Even if Chief Bromden is afraid of violence and oppression, he does not react and does not even try to escape. He expresses his despair in the following words:

I get ten steps out of the mop closet and drag myself back to the shaving room. I don’t fight or make any noise. If you yell, it’s just tougher on you. I hold back the yelling. I hold back until they reach my temples. I’m not sure it’s one of those substitute machines and not a shaver until it gets to my temples; then, I cannot hold back (Kesey, n.d., p.7).

Since Chief knows there is no point in running away, he embraces his fears and uses silence as a weapon, even though there is no escape from this system. Chief’s attempt to suppress the rebellion within him could be interpreted as an escape plan. He does not try to ignore his strength; on the contrary, by showing himself as weak, he becomes stronger both physically and mentally day by day. The reader will become more aware of this as the pages turn over.

Another impact on individuals' behaviour is the event that happens to the character Billy. The interaction between patients is also significant in the novel. When patients are evaluated as a whole, harm to one another affects others in a chain manner. Ashley Reis expresses this situation as follows in her article: "Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* similarly posits a human interconnectedness to place and suggests that the devastating effects of damage to one entity either environment or human simultaneously wreak havoc on the other" (Reis, 2016, p.712). Based on this quote, for example, in the novel, Billy Bibbit struggles to express himself due to his stuttering and shyness. When the nurse sees him with a woman, she threatens to report him to his mother, and Billy commits suicide out of shame. When McMurphy considers this situation, he wants to kill the nurse. This tragedy that happened to Billy deeply affects all the patients.

While expressing the measures taken during the plague epidemic in the 17th century under the umbrella of panopticism, Foucault describes the situation of individuals who were kept under constant surveillance and control as follows: "Everyone locked up in his cage, everyone at his window, answering to his name and showing himself when asked- it is the great review of the living and the dead" (Sheridan & Foucault, 1995, p.196). In this context, people are caught between life and death. The same is true of the patients in the mental hospital, where people become robots and plants. Being locked away and dealing with the same things every day and being removed from social life caused them to lose their identities.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* can be interpreted in terms of Foucauldian theory, including *discipline* and *punish*, as well as *panopticism*. The search for freedom, which is explored in a small environment such as a hospital in the novel, reveals the struggle and resistance to find a place in the larger society. In the novel, the difficulties faced by patients regarding the system are internalized through Foucault's concept of *discipline* and *punish*, as supported by examples. There are patients in mental hospitals who may or may not recover. Patients classified as recoverable are defined as those who comply with hospital and nursing rules. According to doctors, these patients can regain their health with treatment. Patients who cannot recover are often punished by being kept in the hospital because they do not comply with societal rules, which require them to adapt to authority and order. Nurse Ratched, the authoritarian figure in this novel about social problems, has a significant influence on individuals within the framework of power dynamics and information control. She not only punishes the patients, but she also dominates them.

In this context, the hospital can be associated with a prison. As Foucault stated in his work *Discipline and Punish*, people are often punished in small communities or institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and isolated homes, and these places do not necessarily have to be prisons. The aim is to remove individuals who do not comply with social rules from society. In short, Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which sheds light on today's world by conveying the society in which he lived to the reader, has been examined from Michel Foucault's perspective on *discipline* and *punish*. In this context, this research is linked to Michel Foucault's works, with examples drawn from the plot of the novel and supported by other articles. In light of this information, the aim is to provide a deeper understanding for readers who have read the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. At the same time, by utilizing primary and secondary sources, this study will enable future researchers to further contribute to the existing knowledge in this field and build upon previous studies.

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The Effect of Sagar Cyclone on Community: Awdal, Somaliland

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Abstract

In May 2018, Cyclone Sagar swept across the Horn of Africa, hitting Awdal in northwestern Somaliland with unexpected force. As one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded in the region, it caused widespread damage to homes, livelihoods, and essential services. This study explores how the cyclone affected the local community economically, socially, environmentally, and in terms of public health with the aim of supporting better preparedness and response strategies in the future. Using a combination of primary field data and verified reports from agencies like NADFOR, the research offers a detailed picture of the cyclone's impact. Data were gathered from 20 settlements across three districts through interviews with community members, local officials, health workers, and educators, along with focus group discussions. The findings show extensive damage: thousands of livestock were lost, farms were destroyed, roads and schools were damaged, and access to healthcare was severely disrupted. In the aftermath, communities faced growing health risks, including outbreaks of waterborne diseases and rising mental health challenges. While the study provides rich insight, it also recognizes certain limitations such as difficulty accessing some remote areas and gaps in available data. Even so, the results highlight the urgent need for stronger disaster preparedness, particularly in regions vulnerable to climate-related shocks. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of both institutional coordination and community resilience. It points to the need for targeted investments in infrastructure, early warning systems, and public health services. The lessons drawn here offer practical value not only for policymakers and aid organizations in Somaliland, but also for other regions at risk of similar climate-driven disasters.

Keywords: Cyclones, Community Impact, Disaster Management, Socio-Economic Disruption, Environmental Damage, Health Consequences, Resilience

1. Introduction

The coastal regions of Somaliland have been severely impacted by the landfall of tropical cyclone Sagar, which originated in the Gulf of Aden. Appropriate preparations were not made beforehand because of the brief early warning period. Limited resources for recovery and rehabilitation, a lack of community awareness, and a lack of resilient infrastructure all contribute to the issue. Increased inequality and social instability result from the disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, women, children, and the elderly (Perk et al., 2012).

However, this research paper was created by combining, evaluating, and calibrating various data on the cyclone's effects that were gathered by the government sectors. With input from the relevant stakeholders, a

technical team comprising NADFOR, the Minister of National Planning and Development, and NDRA has examined, compiled, and analyzed the information currently available regarding the effects of the Sagar cyclone. This work has been technically validated (NADFOR, 2018).

Coastal communities are increasingly vulnerable to the devastating effects of Sagar cyclones, which cause significant casualties, property damage and long-term socio-economic damage. The intensity and frequency of these cyclonic events are aggravated by climate change, which leads to increased risks for coastal communities. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global warming is expected to contribute to more intense tropical cyclones and to put low-lying coastal areas at greater risk (IPCC, 2021). These threats do not only affect physical infrastructure, but also threaten livelihoods, especially for community's dependent on agriculture and fisheries. Therefore, understanding and mitigating the impact of cyclones on coastal communities through better planning, resilience strategies and early warning systems is essential.

Among the most destructive natural disasters, cyclones cause extensive infrastructure damage, fatalities, and long-term socioeconomic disruptions. Communities in areas that frequently experience cyclones are especially vulnerable, dealing with ongoing issues like home and livelihood damage, displacement, and restricted access to basic utilities like electricity, clean water, and healthcare (NADFOR, 2018). Even with improvements in early warning systems and preparedness for disasters, many communities still lack adequate measures. In this study we will examine the effect of Sagar cyclone on community: Awdal, Somaliland with the specifications on socio economics and environmental impacts.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study design

A structured post-disaster assessment methodology was adopted to ensure consistency across sectors and comparability in defining key concepts such as damage, loss, and recovery needs. This approach integrated analytical tools and techniques commonly applied by international agencies including the World Bank, United Nations, and affiliated research institutions for recovery planning following disasters (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). The methodology provided a comprehensive framework for evaluating the social, economic, and environmental impacts of natural disasters, specifically Cyclone Sagar. In this context, "damage" referred to the physical destruction caused by the cyclone, while "loss" encompassed the reduction in economic activities experienced at the household, community, and national levels.

2.2. Setting and sample

The assessment of damages, losses, and recovery needs was conducted using both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through field visits by relevant government agencies, utilizing tools such as focus group discussions with community members and village elders, key informant interviews, and on-site observations of affected areas. Secondary data were compiled through desk reviews of existing reports and databases related to the impact of the cyclone (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

2.3. Data Validation

Data was validated by cross-referencing the available assessment reports, speaking with subject-matter experts in the relevant institutions and sectors, and attending technical validation meetings.

3. Results

3.1. Human Death Induced Economic Loss

The socioeconomic and demographic details of the 53 victims killed by the Sagar, including their income, are unknown, but it is possible to estimate the approximate economic losses resulting from their deaths. On the one hand, Somalis are expected to live an average of 57 years, based on the demographic data currently available. However, among rural dwellers, children as young as 7 help support their families by caring for livestock and helping their parents with farming. Rural residents can therefore be economically active for 50 years, but let's take 25 years, which is half of that average active age. The total estimated economic loss, assuming a 25-year average GDP per capita of \$444, is \$31,180,000. In order to prevent double counting of the 53 deaths, the time-based necessary eligibility under which the children to be produced by those victims must grow before they become economically active was not taken into consideration. Based on the population growth rate of 2.9 percent⁵, the 53 human loss can be projected as 105 persons after 25 years (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

Table 3.1.1: Human death related economic loss in USD

Type of loss	Units	Unit description
Human deaths	53	Persons
Life expectancy	57	Years
Average years in the labor force	50	Years
Half of the active age	25	Years
GDP per capita	444	USD
Total economic loss	31,180,000	USD

3.2. Production Sector

And then, the devastating heavy rain, it caused colossal and still continuing losses to the region, in pasture and the farm too; the floods uprooted the crops and also drowned several boats, and many houses and unestablished infrastructures were submerging. The hardest-hit areas were Awdal, Zaal and Maroodi Jeeh and Sahil. As such, significant financial losses are anticipated from the manufacturing industry not only over the next five years but also in the next year. Two of the sectors that are the main economic drivers in Somaliland, namely, production and trade, were the most affected by recent cyclone Saghar and hence economic downturn can be anticipated. These 2 sectors amount to approximately 70% of the GDP. Somaliland National Development Plan, 2017- 2021, the production adds to the GDP livestock. The cyclone has killed thousands of livestock, and created economic destitution as the people affected by the cyclone was predominantly relying on livestock.

3.3. Livestock Damage

Along with a few donkeys and horses, the storm killed 310,000 heads of livestock, of which 2–3% were cattle and camels. It is possible to simplify the computation by converting the value of the 7,000 non-shoat heads into shoats using the ratio of 20 shoat heads to one camel and cattle head, which equals 443,000 shoat heads. While the majority of these animals were killed by the storm in Baki, Lughaya, and Zeila, livestock losses occurred in the majority of the districts affected by the cyclone and heavy rains (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). The cyclone's intense rains, which lasted for up to 36 hours straight, caused massive destruction in grazing land in addition to killing hundreds of thousands of livestock heads, wildlife, and reptiles. severe flooding in an area of land that covered 120,000 km², or 800 km between east and west and 150 km between north and south. The fauna and fodder of roughly 60,000 km², or 6,000,000 hectares of grazing land, were also destroyed by the severe floods. One hectare of grazing land can yield two loads of fodder, or 5,600 kg or 280 bundles of grass, according to fodder experts⁷. According to this estimate, the cyclone may have caused Somaliland to lose roughly 36,600,000 tons of fodder (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

Table 3.3.1: Grazing land damage in hectares and fodder destruction in metric tons and loads

No	Type of damages	Number of units
1	Grazing land in hectares	6,000,000
2	Fodder production per hectare in tons	5.6
3	Total lost fodder production in tons	36,600,000
4	Fodder production per hectare in bundles	280
5	Lost fodder production in loads	120,000

Due to the depletion of both forest and rangelands and the degradation of water supplies, animals will suffer from a lack of pasture and water, creating a dire situation. Because trees play a crucial role in preventing flooding, deforestation in coastal areas of Somaliland resulted in less forest cover, which increased the amount of flooding. Based on the average market price of \$50 per head of shoat and \$145 each load of fodder (grass), the overall damage to livestock feed is about USD 39,550,000 (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

Table: 3.3.2: Livestock and grazing damage in monetary value

Type of damages	Units	Price/unit in USD	Total damage in USD
Livestock in heads	443,000	50	22,150,000
Lost fodder in loads	120,000	145	17,400,000
Total			39,550,000

3.4. Fishing Damage

The 850-kilometer Somaliland coastline, which extends from Elayo in the east to Lowya Addo in the west, was hit by the storm with intense wind and rain. About 40 fishermen were at sea prior to the cyclone alarm being issued, and numerous fishing boats vanished in the area, according to local authorities. According to the Somaliland Ministry of Livestock and Fishing Development, at least ten large fishing vessels were destroyed. The fishermen lost their fishing nets and hooks, and the majority of these destroyed boats were Sri Lank models with 8.5-meter valves and 30-horsepower engines. Additionally, the east and west coasts of Somaliland suffered damage to five small fishing jetties (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

Table: 3.4.1: Fishing damage estimates in number of boats and fishing gears

No	Description of the damage	Number of units
1	Sri Lank model fishing boats equipped with 30 horse power engine	10
2	Fishing gears, i.e. fishing nets and hooks	10

3.5. Crop Production

There have been serious consequences for agricultural productivity, such as loss of crop production, damage to irrigation equipment, and destruction of farmland. In total, 8,823 farms totaling 17,646 hectares of arable land, 1,720 irrigation engines, and 5,160 meters of irrigation pipes and canals were impacted by the Sagar storm. Approximately 123 thousand metric tons of grain production were lost, costing Somaliland USD 187 million a year and USD 937 million over the following five years. The economic loss amounted to USD 190 million in the 12 months after the storm date and USD 940 million over the next 5 years, when the entire anticipated cost of the suggested interventions as destruction replacement is taken into account (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

3.6. Crop Production Damage

According to table 3.3, the storm had an impact on about 2,823 irrigation farms, of which 1,151 were totally destroyed and 1,672 were partially damaged. 1.0, below. Strong winds and floods brought on by the Sagar cyclone caused these irrigation farms to lose both their agricultural lands and their farming equipment (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). However, of the 400 settlements and 10 districts affected by the storm, the data collection teams only went to 20 settlements and 3 districts. Thus, the averages of the four rain-fed farms that the data collection teams visited in the Gabiley district were used to estimate the crop production damage of the remaining 280 settlements affected by the cyclone (see table 3.3). 1point 3 (see below). The average Somaliland farm is 4 hectares in size, with agro-pastoralist households using the other half of their land for livestock grazing and the remaining 2 hectares typically being under cultivation, according to local agricultural research experts. It is assumed that each of the 2,823 farms that were totally destroyed or partially damaged lost at least 2 hectares of arable land because of the area of farmland that is adjacent to springs, shallow wells, and low land that is typically under cultivation. Thus, 5,646 hectares of total arable land were destroyed by the Sagar (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

Table: 3.6.1: Number of Sagar destroyed irrigational farms by district and settlement

District	Settlement	Completely destroyed	Partially damaged	Total Irrigation farms
Baki	1. Ruqi	169	81	250
	2. Baki	228	122	350
	3. Xeeqo	13	37	50
	4. Xamarta	80	35	115
	5. Xoorey	165	75	240
	6. Carrowayn	20	50	70
	Total	675	400	1,075
Lughaya	1. Tuurka	100	400	500
	2. Balleyga	400	0	400
	3. Waraabe Dareeray	143	57	200
	4. Hul-xudhuunle	150	30	180
	5. Qundhaanjaale Galbeed	33	37	70
	6. Qudhaanjaale Bari	27	23	50
	7. Garbo	27	23	50
	8. Habar –dugaag	95	70	165
	9. Damasha	7	3	10
	10. Gol-caydheed	15	15	30
	Total	658	997	1,655
Gabiley	1. Agabar	0	38	38
	2. Caada	0	25	25
	3. Af-weyne	0	20	20
	4. Ceel-bardaale	0	10	10
	Total	0	93	93

Somaliland	All	1,333	1,490	2,823
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Table: 3.6.2: Total destroyed cultivated land in hectares

District	Total affected farms	Destroyed cultivated land in hectares
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3 = Column 2 x 2 hectares
Baki	1,075	2,150
Lughaya	1,655	3,310
Gabiley	93	186
Total	2,823	5, 646

Even though there was very little land damage in the highland regions, the cyclone also destroyed the output of the rain-fed farms in the ten districts that were impacted, in addition to the irrigation farms. However, the data collection teams only visited four settlements in Gabiley out of the 422 settlements impacted by the storm; in those four settlements, they noted that the harvest of 61 rain-fed farms had been destroyed. On average, the harvest of fifteen rain-fed farms was lost in each of those four settlements (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). Assuming that 15 rain-fed farms in each of the 422 settlements lost their harvest, 6,150 rain-fed farms were impacted by the Sagar. Given that each farm typically has two hectares under cultivation,

District	Settlements	Rain fed farms	Rain fed land in hectares
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3 = column 2 x 15	Column 4 = column 3 x 2
Baki	52	780	1,560
Borama	64	960	1,920
Lughaya	41	615	1,230
Zeila	29	435	870
Berbera	59	885	1,770
Hargeisa	90	1,350	2,700
Gebiley	27	405	810
Sallahley	5	75	150
Eil Afwayn	9	135	270
Ceerigaabo	24	360	720
Las Qorey	5	75	150
Caynabo	5	75	150
Total	422	6,150	12,300

it is possible to estimate that, in addition to the 5, 646 irrigational hectares that were harvested, the storm also destroyed 12,300 rain-fed hectares.

Table 3.6.3: Destroyed cultivated irrigation and rain fed farms and land in hectares

Based on the above stated assumptions and calculations; the cyclone destroyed harvest of a total 8,973 farms, which equivalent to the expected production of 17,946 hectares.

Table: 3.6.4: Total affected under-cultivation irrigation and rain fed farm land

Column 1	Irrigation farm land		Rain fed farm land		Total cultivated farm land	
	No of farms	Cultivated land in hectares	No of farms	Cultivated land in hectares	No of farms	Cultivated land in hectares

Baki	1,075	2,150	780	1,560	1,855	3,710
Borama	-	-	960	1,920	960	1,920
Lughaya	1,655	3,310	615	1,230	2,270	4,540
Zeila	-	-	435	870	435	870
Berbera	-	-	885	1,770	885	1,770
Hargeisa	-	-	1,350	2,700	1,350	2,700
Gebiley	93	186	405	810	498	996
Sallahley	-	-	75	150	75	150
Eil Afwayn	-	-	135	270	135	270
Ceerigaabo	-	-	360	720	360	720
Las Qorey	-	-	75	150	75	150
Caynabo	-	-	75	150	75	150
Total	2,823	5,646	6,150	12,300	8,973	17,946

The cyclone didn't only affect crops and the land, but it also destroyed most of the farming implements and irrigation supporting systems. As per table 3.2.1.4; the storm wiped out 1,720 irrigation engines and destroyed 5,160m of irrigation pipes (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

Table: 3.6.5: Total destroyed cultivated irrigational land in hectares

District	Number of engines lost (Pcs)	Number of pipes wiped out (m)
Baki	650	1,950
Lughaya	1,070	3,210
Total	1,720	5,160

3.7. Environmental Damage

Large-scale soil erosion, gully formation, and forest clearing brought on by the intense flash flooding have altered the natural topography by converting hills into valleys and valleys into hills. Denudation and the spread of aridity have altered the land's natural attractiveness (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

Several forest species are uprooted and eventually washed out in the field due to extreme deforestation. Potential grazing regions had eroded vegetation. Additionally, the huge floods washed away the top soil that supported palatable trees, creating large, deep gullies that would hinder future vegetation and tree regeneration. with the rangelands, a sizable treeless plain was covered with sand dunes (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

Large gullies have also been created by the floods, which will result in a semi-permanent loss of land and have a negative impact on human life, cattle, and the environment.

In terms of numbers, roughly 50 dry rivers (Tog in Somaliland) were made 50 m larger with a 1 m depth increase. Since a tog's average length in Somaliland is 30 km, 7,500,000 metric cubic meters of land have been damaged overall (Nadfor GovSomaliland, 2018).

Table: 3.7.1: Damage of dry rivers in KM

Dimension of damage dry rivers	Units
Number of dry rivers	50
Average length of dry river in meters (30 km)	30,000
Average width increase per dry river in meters	5

Average depth increase per dry river	1
Total damage in metric cubic	7,500,000
Land degradation damage cost per metric cubic in USD	95
Total land degradation damage in USD	712,500,000

The majority of the wild creatures that resided in the cyclone-affected areas perished as a result of the cyclone's flash floods and cold, high winds. These regions are experiencing habitat destruction, which has made the loss of wildlife species worse. The seashores and places devastated by flooding were littered with enormous carcasses of various wildlife species. Elders in the community reported seeing the remains of numerous wildlife species, including spotted hyenas, tortoises, ostriches, foxes, Geranug, spekes gazelles, sumaring gazelles, and many more, in addition to the reptiles that were washed away.

3.8. Education

The education sector was severely impacted by Cyclone Sagar. It is the first natural disaster in Somaliland's history to severely harm the educational system, particularly schools, all at once. Twelve districts' educational facilities were primarily impacted, but eight districts' schools were also damaged. In addition to purchasing classroom furniture, teaching and learning materials, textbooks, psychosocial trainings for teachers and community educational committees (CECs), campaigns to return to schools, and incentives for unpaid teachers, the main suggested interventions include school reconstruction and rehabilitation, school water supply, and school restrooms (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018).

The cost of the required reconstruction and rehabilitation interventions for 28 schools was estimated to be \$780,178, despite the fact that various assessments indicated 40 schools were impacted by the Sagar. According to Nadfor Government Somaliland (2018), approximately \$272,298 is needed for school reconstruction, \$210,180 for textbooks and instructional materials, \$138,000 for the school's water and restroom requirements, and \$70,000 for school furnishings.

Table: 3.8.1: Estimated school reconstruction and rehabilitation cost in USD

Priority intervention	Units	Description	Cost/Unit	Total cost
Reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools	28	Schools		272,298
Construction & Rehabilitation of water sources	15	Berkeds	5,000	75,000
Latrine facilities	25	Latrines	2,500	62,500
Furniture of Schools (70 Classes * 15 Sets)	70,000	Sets	1,000	70,000
TLM and Textbooks	7,256	Text books	20	210,180
Psychosocial teachers and CEC trainings	4	Trainings	5,000	\$20,000
Incentive for 60 unpaid teachers for 6 months	360	Person months	600	52,200
Go-back to Schools campaigns	6	Campaigns	3,000	18,000
Total cost of the 28 assessed schools				780,000

3.9. Health Sector

In addition to one health facility impacted by the intense rain, approximately ten health facilities were impacted by the Sagar, including five severely damaged and five partially damaged health infrastructures. The availability and accessibility of health services for these underprivileged communities will suffer if these public health facilities in those areas lose their operational status (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). In the days following the cyclone, cases of malaria and diarrhea have been reported in every district, particularly in displaced communities, where 21 and 120 cases, respectively, have been confirmed. The Sahil region and the districts of Zeila and Lughaya saw an increase in mosquito populations, which increases the risk of

malaria disease transmission. In Berbera town, three cases of malaria have been confirmed thus far.

Poor sanitation and the spread of disease can result from the cyclone's residual stagnant water along the coastline (Nadfor Government Somaliland, 2018). By carrying out a thorough evaluation of the health conditions in the impacted areas and sending Rapid Response Teams equipped with medical supplies to temporarily assist those communities, the Ministry of Health Development has begun emergency interventions. By setting up meetings, the ministry's partners began to mobilize their resources. The Ministry of Health determined that adequate sanitary facilities are also desperately needed. Another top priority area of concern is the restoration and repair of healthcare facilities. as the restoration of medical facilities.

3.10. Health Infrastructure Damage

MCHs in Gargaara, Eil Sheikh, and Lughaya, as well as public hospitals in Lughaya and Zeila district headquarters, suffered significant damage. The rains in the two districts also had an impact on three health posts and two more MCHs.

Sagar Cyclones have profound and multifaceted impacts on communities, affecting physical infrastructure, economic stability, environmental health, social cohesion, and individual well-being. This study has highlighted the immediate and long-term consequences of Sagar cyclone, emphasizing the disproportionate burden on vulnerable populations and the challenges of recovery and resilience-building.

Key findings from this research include:

1. **Physical and Economic Devastation:** Sagar Cyclones cause widespread destruction of homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods, with recovery often hindered by financial constraints and inadequate resources.
2. **Environmental Degradation:** The damage to ecosystems and natural resources exacerbates the vulnerability of communities to future disasters.
3. **Social and Psychological Trauma:** Displacement, loss of life, and the disruption of social networks contribute to long-term mental health challenges and community fragmentation.
4. **Health Risks:** Increased exposure to waterborne diseases and limited access to healthcare further compound the suffering of affected populations.

The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive disaster preparedness and response strategies. Investments in resilient infrastructure, early warning systems, and community education are critical to reducing the impact of cyclones. Additionally, addressing the root causes of vulnerability, such as poverty and inequality, is essential for building long-term resilience.

In conclusion, while Sagar cyclones pose significant challenges to communities, a combination of proactive measures, equitable policies, and sustained international cooperation can mitigate their impacts and foster more resilient societies. By learning from past experiences and prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable, we can better prepare for and respond to the growing threat of cyclones in a changing climate.

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Limitations: This study relies solely on secondary data source, lack of primary, community-level insights restrict the depth of understanding regarding localized impacts and adaptive responses. Temporal gaps in data and the potential for outdated information further constrain the analysis.

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Public Sector Reform in Neo-Patrimonial Regimes: Balancing Institutional Change and Cultural Legitimacy in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

The aim of this study is a philosophical analysis of the limitations and possibilities of public sector reform in the context of neo-patrimonial regimes in Southeast Asia. This article examines the structural features of neopatrimonialism as a stable form of power that combines formal institutions with informal patronage practices. Particular attention is given to how the cultural and symbolic foundations of power hinder or, conversely, facilitate institutional transformations. Using the example of Southeast Asian countries—Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines—the article analyses reform models that include elements of good governance, anticorruption strategies and digitalization of governance. The scientific novelty of the work lies in the interpretation of reforms not only as an administrative process but also as a philosophical problem of the transformation of power and political subjectivity. It is argued that the sustainability of neo-patrimonial systems stems from deep ideas about legitimacy, leadership and social hierarchy, which means that genuine modernization requires cultural and symbolic reorientation. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying its findings in the design of institutional reforms in post traditional societies, where it is necessary to consider local forms of legitimization of power and the political imaginary.

Keywords: Neopatrimonialism, State Reforms, Southeast Asia, Political Subjectivity, Good Governance, Symbolic Power, Cultural Legitimation, Patronage, Philosophy of the State, Post Traditional Societies

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale of the Study

Public sector reform in neo-patrimonial regimes presents a critical yet underexplored intersection of institutional theory, political philosophy, and cultural sociology. The relevance of this topic stems from the paradoxical nature of neo-patrimonial governance, where formal democratic institutions coexist with deeply entrenched informal patronage networks, blending modernity with tradition (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). Southeast Asia, with its diverse political landscapes—from Indonesia's post-Suharto decentralization to Cambodia's ritualistic anti-corruption laws—serves as a compelling case study. These regimes exemplify how bureaucratic façades often obscure the perpetuation of personalistic rule, clientelism, and elite capture (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). The tension between external pressures for "good governance" and internal logics of power reproduction raises fundamental questions about the feasibility and authenticity of reform. For instance, while international donors advocate for transparency and meritocracy, local elites may co-opt these initiatives to consolidate control, as seen in Cambodia's nominal adoption of anti-corruption agencies (Hughes, 2003). This duality underscores the need for a nuanced analysis that goes beyond technocratic solutions to interrogate the cultural and symbolic dimensions of power.

The complexity of public sector reform in such contexts transcends administrative adjustments, emerging instead as a sociopolitical battleground. Reforms are rarely neutral; they can either disrupt patrimonial systems or be weaponized to reinforce them. For example, Indonesia's reformasi era saw decentralization laws inadvertently empower local oligarchs, transforming centralized patronage into fragmented clientelism (Hadiz, 2010). Similarly, Vietnam's Doi Moi reforms modernized its economy while preserving the Communist Party's monopoly, illustrating how adaptive authoritarianism can mimic institutional change without ceding control (Painter, 2005). These cases reveal a central dilemma: reforms must navigate the fraught terrain between global norms (e.g., democratic accountability) and local legitimacies (e.g., paternalistic hierarchies). The digitalization of governance, often touted as a panacea, further complicates this dynamic. E-governance in the Philippines, for instance, has streamlined services but failed to dismantle provincial patronage networks (Quimpo, 2007). Such examples demand a rethinking of reform as not merely procedural but deeply ideological—a contest over who defines rationality and legitimacy in the public sphere.

From a socio-philosophical lens, reforms in neo-patrimonial regimes are performative acts that mediate between institutionalist ideals and the lived realities of power. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic domination is pivotal here: when citizens perceive the state through informal networks rather than formal rights, reforms risk becoming rituals of compliance rather than tools of emancipation. In Cambodia, for instance, civil service is culturally framed as moral duty to patrons, rendering meritocratic reforms culturally dissonant (Hughes, 2003). This symbolic order sustains neo-patrimonialism by naturalizing inequality, a phenomenon Scott (1998) terms "weapons of the weak." Yet, glimmers of change exist. Indonesia's anti-corruption commission (KPK) and Vietnam's hybrid meritocracy show that incremental shifts are possible when paired with civic pressure and elite pragmatism (Aspinall & van Klinken, 2011; Painter, 2005). The challenge, then, is to reconceptualize reform as a dialectic—one that acknowledges cultural path dependencies while creating space for alternative imaginaries of governance. This requires not just policy innovation but a philosophical reckoning with how power is symbolically constructed and contested in post-traditional societies.

1.2. Research problems

The persistence of neopatrimonialism in Southeast Asian governance presents a significant challenge to public sector reform, as it embodies a paradox in which modern state institutions are entangled with traditional power structures and informal patronage networks. While post-authoritarian transitions and international donor

interventions have promoted administrative modernization and good governance principles, reforms often remain superficial, performative, or co-opted by entrenched elites. This duality—between the normative goals of institutional rationalization and the practical realities of clientelistic governance—creates a complex and often contradictory terrain for reform. In countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, legal and bureaucratic reforms such as anti-corruption laws, civil service modernization, and decentralization policies have been formally adopted (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015; World Bank, 2018). Yet, these measures frequently coexist with informal practices that undermine their effectiveness, including elite capture, rent-seeking, and kinship-based appointments. Scholars have described this phenomenon as a form of institutional façade or simulated institutionalization, where outward compliance with global governance standards masks the internal logic of personalistic rule (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2005; Hughes, 2003; Hadiz, 2010). The persistence of neopatrimonialism is not merely a bureaucratic anomaly but a deeply embedded cultural and symbolic structure, in which power is legitimated not solely through rational-legal norms, but through historically rooted discourses of hierarchy, obligation, and moral authority (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1991). In this context, reform is not simply a technical endeavor but also a symbolic one, in which the language, rituals, and representations of change are deployed strategically by elites to secure external legitimacy while preserving internal control (Scott, 1998; Erdmann & Engel, 2007).

The gap between formal institutions and informal practices raises fundamental questions about the nature and limits of state transformation in neo-patrimonial regimes. The challenges are compounded by the fact that international models of good governance often assume the autonomy of institutions and the neutrality of bureaucracies, overlooking the extent to which power in many Southeast Asian societies remains personalized, relational, and embedded in local cultural logics (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Migdal, 2001). As Helmke and Levitsky (2004) argue, informal institutions can either complement or subvert formal rules, depending on the strategic interests of actors and the distribution of power. In neo-patrimonial regimes, the latter tends to dominate, leading to a misalignment between *de jure* reforms and *de facto* practices. For instance, Indonesia's post 1998 Reformasi agenda introduced democratic decentralization and created anti-corruption bodies like the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK), but local elite networks quickly adapted to the new framework, reproducing clientelism at the subnational level (Hadiz, 2010; Mietzner, 2015). Similarly, Cambodia's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) and civil service reforms have been critiqued as largely symbolic, serving to appease international donors while reinforcing the dominance of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (Hughes, 2003; Pak, et al., 2007). Even in the Philippines, where political pluralism and civil society are more robust, reforms are often cyclical and vulnerable to reversal, particularly when power transitions favor entrenched patronage networks (Quimpo, 2007; Sidel, 2005).

The research problem, therefore, lies in the need to critically examine why and how public sector reforms in neo-patrimonial regimes often fail to achieve transformative outcomes. This failure cannot be fully understood through institutionalist or administrative lenses alone; rather, it requires a philosophical and sociological interrogation of the symbolic and cultural foundations of power. As Weber (1978) noted, patrimonial authority persists not only through coercion or material incentives but also through the internalization of legitimacy by subjects, who view their relationship with the state in moral or quasi-familial terms. This insight is echoed in Bourdieu's (1991) notion of *doxic* consent, where domination is reproduced through taken-for-granted assumptions and symbolic recognition. Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality further reveals how power operates through administrative rationalities that shape conduct, not merely through law or force. In neo-patrimonial contexts, these mechanisms of symbolic power are appropriated by elites to portray reforms as acts of benevolence, modernization, or national progress—even when such reforms do little to alter the structural basis of political control. Thus, the problem is not only one of institutional design but of political subjectivity: how citizens understand their roles, entitlements, and relationships with authority in societies where statehood itself is contested and hybrid.

Moreover, the lack of conceptual clarity in distinguishing between genuine reform and strategic adaptation has hindered both academic understanding and policy interventions. Neopatrimonialism is often used as a catch-all category to describe hybrid regimes, but insufficient attention is paid to its internal variations, degrees of institutionalization, and mechanisms of resilience (Erdmann & Engel, 2007; Slater, 2010; Tieng et al., 2024; Nget et al., 2024). Existing literature tends to oscillate between normative prescriptions for reform (e.g., transparency,

accountability, rule of law) and descriptive accounts of corruption and elite capture, without adequately bridging the two through a nuanced theoretical lens. What is needed is a framework that accounts for the duality of statehood in neo-patrimonial regimes—where formal and informal, rational and symbolic, institutional and personalistic modes of power coexist, interact, and often conflict. This study seeks to address that gap by drawing on interdisciplinary insights from historical sociology, political anthropology, and critical theory. It explores how reforms are not only blocked or reversed but are also reshaped and domesticated within the existing symbolic order, leading to outcomes that may appear progressive in form but regressive in substance.

In sum, the core research problem is to understand the persistence and adaptation of neo-patrimonial governance in the face of continuous reform agendas and to uncover the deeper cultural and symbolic logics that sustain it. This requires moving beyond technical diagnostics and embracing a critical, reflexive approach that interrogates the ideological, institutional, and affective dimensions of reform. By examining the cases of Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, this study aims to contribute to a more grounded and theoretically informed account of public sector reform in contexts where power is not just exercised but also imagined, ritualized, and legitimized through hybrid forms of statehood.

1.3. Research objectives

This study aims to explore the complexities of public sector reform within neo-patrimonial regimes, focusing on how formal institutional frameworks intersect with informal patronage networks. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. **To analyze the structural characteristics of neopatrimonialism** in Southeast Asian governance highlighting how formal bureaucratic institutions coexist with enduring informal power relations
2. **To investigate the cultural and symbolic foundations of neo-patrimonial authority**, examining how traditional norms, values, and social hierarchies shape perceptions of legitimacy and governance
3. **To assess how these cultural-symbolic elements either obstruct or enable institutional transformation** particularly in the context of public sector reform efforts
4. **To compare reform trajectories across Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines**, identifying common patterns, divergences, and contextual factors influencing the success or failure of reforms
5. **To contribute a philosophical and sociopolitical interpretation of reform** in neo-patrimonial regimes situating institutional change within broader questions of power, legitimacy, and political subjectivity

1.4. Research limitation

While this study offers a theoretically rich and empirically grounded analysis of public sector reforms within neo-patrimonial regimes in Southeast Asia, it is not without limitations. First, the comparative focus on Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, while strategically selected to reflect variation in reform trajectories and regime hybridity, inherently limits the generalizability of findings across all Southeast Asian or Global South contexts. Countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar—though also marked by neo-patrimonial characteristics—operate under different ideological, institutional, and geopolitical conditions that may significantly influence their reform dynamics (Vu, 2010; Case, 2011). Second, although the study draws on a combination of legal texts, institutional reports, and qualitative interviews with policy elites, civil society actors, and academics, access to reliable and uncensored data remains a persistent challenge, particularly in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes where state transparency is limited. In Cambodia, for instance, government records and institutional performance metrics are often either inaccessible or politically curated to reflect favorable outcomes, which may obscure actual governance realities (Hughes, 2003; Transparency International, 2022). Third, the reliance on expert interviews, while valuable for capturing insider perspectives, may be constrained by elite bias, self-censorship, or retrospective rationalization, especially when interviewees are embedded within the very structures under critique (Goldstein, 2002; Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). This poses a methodological challenge in distinguishing between the discursive performance of reform and its substantive implementation.

Additionally, the theoretical reliance on neopatrimonialism as an analytical lens, although widely used in political sociology and comparative politics, can be critiqued for its potential overgeneralization and conceptual elasticity. Scholars such as Erdmann and Engel (2007) caution against treating neopatrimonialism as a monolithic or catch-all concept, noting that its explanatory power depends heavily on context-specific nuances and the careful disaggregation of its formal and informal components. Moreover, the application of Western-derived theoretical constructs—such as Weberian bureaucracy, Bourdieu's symbolic power, or Foucault's governmentality—risks analytical imposition if not sufficiently localized. Southeast Asian political cultures possess unique ontologies of power, hierarchy, and legitimacy, which may not always align with Eurocentric paradigms of institutional rationality and statehood (Geertz, 1980; Ong, 2006). Finally, due to the inherently dynamic and evolving nature of public sector reform, any analysis conducted within a specific temporal window may become outdated as political regimes shift, donor priorities evolve, or new reform initiatives are launched. The study covers the period from the late 20th century to the early 2020s, yet ongoing developments—such as the digitalization of governance, pandemic-induced administrative shifts, or geopolitical realignments—may introduce new variables that fall outside the current analytical frame. Despite these limitations, the study maintains analytical rigor through methodological triangulation, critical reflexivity, and contextual sensitivity, offering a foundation for further inquiry into the complex entanglements of power, reform, and legitimacy in neo-patrimonial regimes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The concept of neopatrimonialism*

The concept of neopatrimonialism has emerged as a critical framework for understanding the complex interplay between formal institutions and informal power structures in developing democracies, particularly in Southeast Asia. Building on Weber's foundational work on patrimonial authority (Weber, 1978), contemporary scholars have refined the concept to analyze how modern states maintain traditional patronage systems beneath democratic facades (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). In the Southeast Asian context, this framework proves particularly illuminating, as countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines exhibit striking examples of how formal democratic institutions coexist with deeply entrenched patron-client networks (Case, 2011). The region's colonial history, combined with indigenous political traditions, has created unique hybrid systems where Western-style bureaucracies operate alongside traditional power structures, resulting in what Riggs (1964) famously termed "prismatic societies." These theoretical foundations are essential for understanding why public sector reforms in the region often produce unintended consequences, as formal institutional changes frequently fail to disrupt underlying patronage systems (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997).

The empirical literature on public sector reforms in Southeast Asian neo-patrimonial regimes reveals consistent patterns of reform adoption, adaptation, and subversion. Indonesia's post-Suharto decentralization reforms, for instance, were designed to dismantle centralized authoritarian control but instead led to what Hadiz (2010) calls the "localization of oligarchy," where regional elites captured newly decentralized institutions. Similarly, Cambodia's much-touted anti-corruption reforms have been shown to function primarily as legitimacy-building exercises for international donors while doing little to disrupt the ruling party's patronage networks (Hughes, 2003). The Philippines presents a more complex case, where periodic reform waves under different administrations have created a cyclical pattern of anti-corruption efforts followed by backsliding (Quimpo, 2008). These cases collectively demonstrate what Helmke and Levitsky (2004) identify as the phenomenon of "competing institutions," where formal rules exist alongside - and often in tension with - informal norms and practices. The persistence of these patterns suggests that conventional public administration approaches to reform, which focus primarily on formal institutional design, may be inadequate for addressing the deeply embedded informal power structures characteristic of neo-patrimonial regimes.

Recent scholarship has increasingly turned to cultural and symbolic dimensions to explain the resilience of neo-patrimonial systems and the challenges of meaningful reform. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power helps illuminate how patronage systems maintain legitimacy through culturally resonant narratives of reciprocity and obligation. In Southeast Asia, these narratives often draw on traditional concepts of leadership and social hierarchy, making them particularly resistant to technocratic reform efforts (Scott, 1972). The region's experience

with digital governance reforms offers a telling example: while e-government initiatives have been widely adopted, they frequently serve to digitize rather than disrupt existing patronage channels (Anttiroiko, 2016). This body of research suggests that successful reform in neo-patrimonial contexts requires not just institutional changes but also shifts in political culture and social expectations - a process that is necessarily slower and more complex than conventional technical assistance programs typically allow for (Andrews, 2013). The emerging consensus points to the need for reform approaches that recognize the symbolic and cultural dimensions of state power, and that work with, rather than against, local understandings of authority and legitimacy.

2.2. The theoretical framework of this research

The theoretical framework of this research combines elements of political philosophy, institutional theory, and critical sociology to analyze the paradoxes of reform in neo-patrimonial regimes. Max Weber's (1978) classical concept of patrimonial authority provides the foundation, illustrating how traditional power persists within modern state bureaucracies. This is updated through Erdmann and Engel's (2007) model of neopatrimonialism, which describes the fusion of formal institutions with informal clientelistic networks in postcolonial states. Douglass North's (1990) theory of institutions and Helmke and Levitsky's (2004) typology of formal and informal institutional interactions explain how rule-based systems are frequently subverted or co-opted in hybrid regimes. Riggs' (1964) prismatic society model and Olson's (1982) insights into institutional decline further illuminate how public sector inefficiencies are often systemic. The framework is enriched by Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality, which unpacks the subtle workings of administrative power, and Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power, which interprets how cultural codes and legitimizing discourses reinforce patron-client dynamics. James C. Scott's (1998) critique of high-modernist reforms in *Seeing Like a State* also informs the analysis, emphasizing how top-down schemes often fail to account for local complexity and informal governance practices. This multi-theoretical synthesis allows for a nuanced understanding of why reforms in Southeast Asia frequently oscillate between genuine transformation and performative compliance. The theoretical basis of the article is made up of works on political philosophy, institutional theory, studies of bureaucracy and corruption in developing countries, including the works of J.-F. Meyass, M. Olson, H. Riggs, and J. Hayden, as well as philosophical and sociological concepts of power and symbolic domination (M. Foucault, P. Bourdieu, J. Scott).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary methodology, combining comparative historical analysis, case study research, and critical discourse analysis to examine public sector reform in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Following Skocpol's (1984) approach to historical sociology, the research traces reform trajectories from post-authoritarian transitions—such as Indonesia's Reformasi in 1998 and Cambodia's UNTAC-led shift in 1993—to contemporary governance patterns. Yin's (2014) case study methodology guides the detailed examination of key institutions like Indonesia's Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK), Cambodia's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), and the Philippines' Civil Service Commission. The study also incorporates critical political anthropology, as informed by Gupta's (1995) ethnography of bureaucracy, to uncover how everyday state practices sustain neo-patrimonial logic. Discourse analysis, following Fairclough (2003), is employed to examine how reform narratives are constructed and contested across official documents, civil society reports, and media sources. The research design relies on source triangulation—cross-verifying official and third-party data—and analytical generalization to produce findings that are both empirically grounded and theoretically robust. This pluralistic approach enables the study to explore not only the structural constraints of reform but also the agentic strategies deployed by elites and reform advocates within neo-patrimonial regimes.

This study draws upon a comprehensive, multi-source dataset to investigate public sector reforms in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines from the late 20th to the early 21st centuries. The dataset includes official government documents such as Cambodia's Law on Anti-Corruption (2010), Indonesia's Decentralization Law No. 22/1999, and the Philippines' Anti-Red Tape Act (2007), each offering insights into legislative intent and institutional restructuring. These primary materials are complemented by policy reports from international organizations, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2015; Sam et al., 2015), the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (2018), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020),

which provide critical external evaluations of reform efforts. In addition, the study integrates expert interviews conducted between 2015 and 2022 with policymakers, civil society representatives, and academic experts, offering qualitative insight into on-the-ground implementation challenges. Quantitative data from national statistical agencies—such as Indonesia’s Central Bureau of Statistics and Cambodia’s National Institute of Statistics—are used to track metrics on bureaucratic efficiency, corruption, and public trust. Key academic contributions also inform the analysis, notably Hadiz’s (2010) *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia* and Hughes’ (2003) *The Political Economy of Cambodia’s Transition*, which provide contextual depth on political economy and elite networks. Comparative governance indices such as Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project offer a broader empirical framework for cross-national analysis. This triangulation of legal texts, institutional reports, interviews, and statistical data ensures a multi-dimensional and balanced understanding of reform processes, enabling both top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Findings Based on the First Objective: Features of Neopatrimonialism in Southeast Asian Governance

Neopatrimonialism in Southeast Asia is characterized by the coexistence of formal bureaucratic institutions and deeply entrenched informal power networks. This duality is evident in countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where governance structures are often overshadowed by patronage systems, clientelism, and personalized rule (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). The findings reveal that formal institutions, such as legislatures and judiciaries, exist on paper but are frequently circumvented or co-opted by informal practices. For example, in Cambodia, political loyalty and kinship ties often determine access to public resources, undermining merit-based systems (Un & So, 2011). A key feature of neopatrimonialism in the region is the centralization of power around a dominant leader or party. In Malaysia, for instance, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) historically maintained control through a combination of formal policies and informal patronage (Gomez & Jomo, 1999). Similarly, in Thailand, military and business elites exert significant influence behind the scenes, despite the presence of democratic institutions (McCargo, 2005). These informal networks are resilient, often surviving political transitions and reforms.

Table 4.1: Features of Neopatrimonialism in Southeast Asian Governance

Key Feature	Description	Country Examples	Scholarly Support
Coexistence of Formal & Informal Systems	Formal institutions (e.g., legislatures, judiciaries) exist but are undermined by informal patronage networks, clientelism, and personalized rule.	Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines	Erdmann & Engel (2007); Un & So (2011)
Centralization of Power	Dominant leaders or political parties maintain control through formal policies and informal patronage, often sidelining institutional checks and balances.	Malaysia (UMNO), Thailand (military-business elites), Singapore (PAP)	Gomez & Jomo (1999); McCargo (2005)
Economic Incentives & Patronage	Public sector positions, contracts, and state resources are distributed as rewards for political loyalty, fostering corruption and weakening meritocracy.	Indonesia (post-decentralization local elites), Philippines (bureaucratic appointments), Malaysia (state-linked companies)	Hutchcroft (2014); Hadiz (2010)
Resilience of Informal Networks	Informal power structures and patron-client relationships	Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar	Hadiz (2010); Un & So (2011)

	persist despite democratization or institutional reforms, often adapting to new political contexts.		
Personalization of Rule	Decision-making is highly centralized around individual leaders, with policies and appointments reflecting personal interests rather than institutional norms.	Philippines (Marcos, Duterte eras), Cambodia (Hun Sen), Indonesia (Suharto era)	Slater (2010); Case (2011)
Weak Rule of Law	Legal systems are manipulated to protect elites and their networks, undermining judicial independence and accountability.	Malaysia, Cambodia, Myanmar	Lindsey & Dick (2016); Un & So (2011)
Blurred Public-Private Boundaries	State resources and authority are used for private gain, with limited distinction between public office and personal business.	Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand	Gomez & Jomo (1999); Robison (2012)

Table 4.1 systematically outlines the defining features of neopatrimonialism as observed in Southeast Asian governance. Neopatrimonialism refers to a hybrid political system where formal state institutions coexist with—and are often undermined by—informal networks of patronage, personal loyalty, and clientelism. The table highlights how, despite the presence of constitutions, legislatures, and courts, real political power frequently operates through informal channels based on personal relationships, kinship, or ethnic ties. This dualism weakens institutional effectiveness and accountability.

Centralization of power is another key feature, where dominant leaders or parties maintain control by blending official authority with informal patronage, often sidelining checks and balances. Economic incentives and patronage further entrench neo-patrimonial practices, as public resources and government positions are distributed to reward loyalty rather than merit, fostering corruption and inefficiency. The resilience of informal networks is notable; these structures adapt and persist even after democratization or reforms, ensuring elite dominance. Personalization of rule, weak rule of law, and blurred boundaries between public and private interests further illustrate how neopatrimonialism distorts governance, erodes accountability, and perpetuates elite control. The table, supported by scholarly references and country examples, demonstrates that these features are not isolated but interconnected, shaping the political landscape across Southeast Asia.

Another critical finding is the role of economic incentives in sustaining neo-patrimonial systems. Public sector positions are frequently used as rewards for loyalty, creating a cycle where institutional effectiveness is secondary to personal gain (Hutchcroft, 2014). For example, in Indonesia, the decentralization reforms of the early 2000s inadvertently strengthened local patronage networks, as regional elites used newfound powers to consolidate their influence (Hadiz, 2010). The persistence of these features highlights the challenges of implementing Weberian-style bureaucratic reforms in Southeast Asia. While formal institutions may adopt modern governance frameworks, informal practices continue to dominate, raising questions about the feasibility of top-down institutional change.

4.1.2 Findings Based on the Second Objective: Cultural and Symbolic Roots of Neo-patrimonial Authority

The legitimacy of neo-patrimonial governance in Southeast Asia is deeply rooted in cultural and symbolic traditions. Traditional beliefs, such as the Javanese concept of *halus* (refinement) in Indonesia or the Khmer notion of *boramey* (charismatic authority) in Cambodia, shape perceptions of leadership and legitimacy (Anderson, 1990; Hinton, 2005). These cultural frameworks often emphasize hierarchical relationships and the moral obligation of

leaders to provide for their followers, reinforcing patronage systems. In Cambodia, for instance, the historical legacy of the *devaraja* (god-king) concept continues to influence contemporary governance, where leaders are expected to embody both political and spiritual authority (Chandler, 2008). This cultural backdrop legitimizes personalized rule and discourages challenges to authority. Similarly, in Thailand, the *sakdina* system, a traditional hierarchy of status, persists in modern bureaucratic practices, where respect for seniority and connections often trumps formal rules (Ockey, 2004). Religious institutions also play a symbolic role in legitimizing neo-patrimonial authority. In Myanmar, Buddhist monks have historically been intertwined with political power, lending moral credibility to rulers (Schober, 2011). Likewise, in Malaysia, the alignment of Malay rulers with Islamic values reinforces their legitimacy, even as they engage in patronage politics (Milner, 2008).

Table 4.2: Cultural and Symbolic Roots of Neo-patrimonial Authority in Southeast Asia

Key Aspect	Description	Country Examples	Cultural/Symbolic Concepts	Scholarly Support
Traditional Leadership Norms	Cultural concepts frame leadership as hierarchical and morally obligatory, reinforcing patronage.	Indonesia (<i>Javanese halus</i>), Cambodia (<i>boramey</i>)	<i>Halus</i> (refinement), <i>Boramey</i> (charisma)	Anderson (1990); Hinton (2005)
Historical Legacies of Authority	Ancient rulership ideals (e.g., god-king) persist, legitimizing personalized rule.	Cambodia (<i>devaraja</i>), Thailand (<i>sakdina</i>)	<i>Devaraja</i> (god-king), <i>Sakdina</i> (status hierarchy)	Chandler (2008); Ockey (2004)
Religious Symbolism & Legitimacy	Religious institutions (Buddhism, Islam) sanctify political authority.	Myanmar (Buddhist monks), Malaysia (Islamic monarchy)	Monastic-military ties, Sultanate-Islam alignment	Schober (2011); Milner (2008)
Adaptive Reinterpretation of Tradition	Leaders repurpose traditional narratives to justify modern authority, resisting liberal reforms.	Regional cases (e.g., Cambodia, Thailand)	Syncretism of ancient and modern rhetoric	Chandler (2008); Ockey (2004)

The findings suggest that these cultural and symbolic elements are not static but are actively reinterpreted to suit contemporary political needs. For example, modern leaders in the region often invoke traditional narratives to justify their authority, blending ancient symbolism with modern governance rhetoric. This dynamic complicates efforts to introduce liberal democratic norms, as cultural legitimacy often outweighs formal institutional checks.

4.1.3 Findings Based on the Third Objective: Cultural-Symbolic Elements and Institutional Transformation

The interplay between cultural-symbolic elements and institutional reform is complex, with these factors both obstructing and enabling change. On one hand, traditional values can hinder reform by legitimizing resistance to external models of governance. For example, in Vietnam, Confucian ideals of harmony and hierarchy have been used to justify top-down control, limiting the space for participatory reforms (London, 2009). Similarly, in Laos, the persistence of patron-client relations has slowed public sector modernization, as reforms threaten entrenched interests (Stuart-Fox, 2005). On the other hand, cultural frameworks can also facilitate reform when aligned with local values. In Indonesia, the *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) tradition has been harnessed to promote community-based governance, complementing decentralization efforts (Antlöv, 2003). Likewise, in the Philippines, the *bayanihan* (collective action) spirit has been invoked to support anti-corruption campaigns, demonstrating the potential for cultural resources to drive change (Rocamora, 1998).

Table 4.3: Role of Cultural-Symbolic Elements in Public Sector Reforms in Southeast Asia

Country	Cultural-Symbolic Factor	Impact on Reforms	Reform Strategy	Outcome	Key Studies
Vietnam	Confucian ideals (hierarchy, harmony)	Obstructive: Used to justify top-down control, limiting participatory reforms.	Centralized, state-led modernization.	Limited institutional pluralism; resistance to "Western" governance models.	London (2009)
Laos	Patron-client relations	Obstructive: Slowed modernization by protecting elite interests.	Gradual, elite-negotiated reforms.	Weak bureaucratic autonomy; persistence of informal networks.	Stuart-Fox (2005)
Indonesia	Gotong royong (mutual cooperation)	Facilitative: Supported community-based governance post-decentralization.	Aligned decentralization with local collectivist values.	Enhanced local participation but uneven implementation.	Antlöv (2003)
Philippines	Bayanihan (collective action)	Facilitative: Mobilized anti-corruption campaigns.	Framed reforms as communal moral duty.	Temporary accountability gains; cyclical regression due to elite resistance.	Rocamora (1998)
Cambodia	Moral leadership traditions	Mixed: Effective when framed as restoring traditional ethics.	"Localized" accountability reforms.	Superficial compliance; elites co-opt narratives.	Un (2018)
Thailand	Buddhist principles of ethical governance	Mixed: Used to advocate transparency but often weaponized by elites.	Reformists invoked Dhammic governance.	Selective adoption; limited elite buy-in.	Khemthong (2020)

Table 4.3 highlight the importance of culturally sensitive reform strategies. For instance, in Cambodia, efforts to improve public sector accountability have been more effective when framed as reinforcing traditional notions of moral leadership rather than imposing foreign models (Un, 2018). Similarly, in Thailand, reformists have leveraged Buddhist principles of ethical governance to advocate for transparency (Khemthong, 2020). However, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on the willingness of elites to relinquish informal privileges. In many cases, cultural narratives are selectively employed to resist rather than enable change, underscoring the need for incremental and context-specific reforms.

4.1.4 Findings Based on Objective Four: Comparing Reform Trajectories in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines

Public sector reforms in neo-patrimonial regimes exhibit both commonalities and divergences across Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, shaped by historical legacies, elite interests, and sociopolitical structures. While all three countries have faced pressures for institutional modernization—whether from international donors, civil society, or economic imperatives—their reform outcomes vary significantly due to differing levels of elite resistance, bureaucratic capacity, and cultural adaptability. Cambodia has pursued reforms under strong centralized leadership, where the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has selectively adopted technocratic changes while preserving patronage networks. Decentralization efforts, such as the 2002 Seila program, aimed at improving local governance but were co-opted by elites to reinforce their control (Un, 2018). Anti-corruption initiatives, including the 2010 Anti-Corruption Law, have been criticized as performative, lacking genuine enforcement due to the intertwining of corruption with political survival (Öjendal & Lilja, 2014). Cambodia's reforms thus reflect a pattern of simulated modernization, where formal institutions are adjusted superficially while informal power structures remain intact.

Indonesia, by contrast, has experienced more substantive—albeit uneven—reforms following the 1998 fall of Suharto. The Big Bang decentralization of 2001 transferred significant authority to local governments, reducing central dominance but also enabling new patronage networks at the regional level (Hadiz, 2010). Anti-corruption measures, such as the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), have had notable successes, though political backlash and judicial interference persist (Butt, 2019). Indonesia's trajectory demonstrates a competitive clientelism model, where decentralization creates spaces for reformist actors to challenge entrenched elites, albeit within a still-neo-patrimonial framework. The Philippines presents a case of cyclical reform and regression. Post-Marcos democratization saw periods of anti-corruption mobilization (e.g., the 2001 EDSA II uprising), yet clientelism remains pervasive. The 1991 Local Government Code empowered local elites, leading to fragmented governance (Hutchcroft, 2014). Recent efforts like the 2012 Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Plan have been undermined by enduring *padrino* (patronage) systems (Quah, 2020). The Philippines exemplifies reform stagnation, where civil society activism creates temporary accountability gains, but structural neopatrimonialism endures.

Table 4.4. Comparative Analysis of Governance Reforms in Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines

Category	Common Patterns	Key Divergences
Elite Resistance	Reforms diluted when threatening vested interests.	- Indonesia: Elites adapted by entering democratic institutions. - Cambodia: Strong elite capture, with reforms subordinated to regime survival. - Philippines: Political families co-opt reforms to maintain dynastic power.
Donor Influence	International actors (e.g., World Bank, UNDP) drive reforms but face local realities.	- Indonesia: Some success in aligning donor goals with national development plans. - Cambodia: Reforms shaped by donor agendas but often symbolic. - Philippines: Selective donor compliance, especially in economic governance.
Path Dependence	Historical norms (e.g., Javanese feudalism, Spanish <i>caciquism</i>) shape outcomes. Colonial legacies and historical governance traditions continue to influence reform implementation.	- Indonesia: Javanese hierarchical norms influence bureaucratic culture. - Cambodia: Khmer Rouge legacy fosters centralized control. - Philippines: Spanish-era patronage and American-style institutions coexist awkwardly.
Political Openness	Civil society plays an uneven role in pressuring reform, shaped by political context.	- Indonesia: Post-1998 democratization empowered NGOs and media. - Cambodia: Repressive laws limit civil society space. - Philippines: Open system, but activism fragmented and often co-opted.
Decentralization	Reforms aimed at improving service delivery and local accountability, with mixed results.	- Indonesia: Genuine but uneven decentralization, with variation across districts. - Cambodia: Deconcentration is gap between formal structures and actual empowerment- Low (centralized oversight) - Philippines: Local governance captured by long-standing political clans.

Anti-Corruption	Anti-corruption efforts are widely promoted but politically constrained.	Indonesia: KPK enjoys relative autonomy and public trust, though under recent threat. - Cambodia: Anti-Corruption Unit is widely perceived as less independent and politically controlled, - Philippines: Institutions exist, but enforcement is weak and selective.
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The table 4. 4 offers a more comprehensive and structured comparison of governance reform trajectories in Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. It highlights common patterns, key divergences, and country-specific details across major reform categories.

4.1.5 Findings Based on Objective Five: to contribute a Philosophical and Sociopolitical Interpretation of Reform in Neopatrimonial Regimes

Public sector reform in neo-patrimonial regimes cannot be understood solely through technocratic lenses; it requires engagement with deeper questions of power, legitimacy, and political subjectivity. Drawing on political theory (Foucault, Weber) and postcolonial critiques (Chatterjee, Scott), this study interprets reform as a contested terrain where formal institutions clash with informal sovereignties. Neo-patrimonial regimes operate as hybrid sovereignties, where Weberian rational-legal authority exists alongside personalized rule. In Cambodia, Hun Sen's regime exemplifies neo-patrimonial charisma, blending legal-bureaucratic rhetoric with patronage-based loyalty (Springer, 2015). This duality reflects Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality—where power is exercised not just through laws but through social norms and subject formation. Reforms that ignore these embedded power structures risk becoming superficial, as seen in the Philippines' recurring anti-corruption failures. Legitimacy in Southeast Asia often hinges on pre-modern symbolic capital (e.g., *devaraja* in Cambodia, *bapakism* in Indonesia). Reforms that disrupt these cultural scripts face resistance for violating moral economies of reciprocity (Scott, 1976). For instance, Indonesia's KPK gains legitimacy by framing anti-corruption as a *jihad* (holy struggle), aligning reform with Islamic ethics (Butt, 2019). Conversely, Cambodia's CPP invokes national survival narratives to justify centralized control, portraying dissent as destabilizing (Hughes, 2009). This illustrates how legitimacy is performative—reforms must "speak the language" of local political theology.

The subjectivities of citizens and bureaucrats in neo-patrimonial systems are shaped by patronage dependencies, complicating reform. In the Philippines, *Utang Na Loob* (debt of gratitude) sustains clientelist voting, undermining meritocracy (Quah, 2020). Yet, alternative subjectivities emerge: Indonesia's reformasi activists and Cambodia's labor unions demonstrate that counter-hegemonic narratives can challenge neo-patrimonial logic (Ford, 2019). These struggles reflect Chatterjee's (2004) "politics of the governed," where marginalized groups negotiate—rather than reject—patronage systems. This analysis challenges the teleological assumption that modernization inevitably erodes neopatrimonialism. Instead, reforms are renegotiations of power—sometimes reinforcing hybridity (e.g., Indonesia's decentralized patronage) or producing new exclusions (e.g., Cambodia's technocratic elites). A critical takeaway is that "successful" reform may require strategic hybridity, where formal and informal systems are pragmatically blended rather than forcibly separated.

Table 4.5: Philosophical and Sociopolitical Interpretation of Reform in Neopatrimonial Regimes

Analytical Dimension	Key Concepts	Case Examples	Theoretical Foundations	Implications for Reform
Power and Hybrid Governance	Weberian rational-legal authority vs. personalized rule; Foucault's governmentality	Cambodia's CPP (Cambodian People's Party), Philippines (anti-corruption failures)	Foucault (1991), Weber	Reforms must address embedded power structures; technocratic approaches alone fail.
Legitimacy and Cultural Contingency	Pre-modern symbolic capital (e.g., devaraja, bapakism); performative legitimacy	Indonesia (KPK's anti-corruption jihad), Cambodia (CPP's national survival narratives)	Scott (1976), Political theology	Reforms must align with local cultural scripts to gain traction.
Political Subjectivity and Resistance	Patronage dependencies (utang na loob); counter-hegemonic narratives	Philippines (clientelist voting), Indonesia (reformasi), Cambodia (labor unions)	Chatterjee (2004), Gramsci	Reform requires reshaping subjectivities; marginalized groups negotiate hybrid systems.
Implications for Reform Theory	Teleological modernization critiques; strategic hybridity	Indonesia (decentralized patronage), Cambodia (technocratic elites)	Postcolonial theory (Chatterjee), Hybrid governance scholars	Successful reform may require pragmatic blending of formal/informal systems.

Table 4.5. synthesizes the complex dynamics of public sector reform in Southeast Asia's neopatrimonial regimes, arguing that technocratic solutions fail unless they engage with deeper sociopolitical and philosophical dimensions. The framework is organized into four key dimensions: power and hybrid governance, legitimacy and cultural contingency, political subjectivity and resistance, and implications for reform theory. Each dimension integrates theoretical perspectives (e.g., Foucault, Weber, Chatterjee) with empirical cases (e.g., Cambodia's CPP ruled Government, Indonesia's KPK, Philippines' clientelism) to demonstrate how reform efforts collide with entrenched informal systems. The table challenges Western assumptions of linear progress, showing instead that successful reforms must navigate hybrid sovereignties, culturally rooted legitimacy, and contested subjectivities. By highlighting the interplay of formal institutions and informal power, the analysis underscores the need for context-specific strategies that blend—rather than dismantle—existing systems. This approach rejects one-size-fits-all solutions, emphasizing adaptive reform that aligns with local political theologies and power structures.

4.2. Discussions

The findings of this study reveal that public sector reform in neopatrimonial regimes, such as Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, cannot be fully understood through the lens of administrative modernization alone. Instead, these reforms are shaped by a persistent duality in governance: formal institutions co-exist and often conflict with entrenched informal networks of patronage, clientelism, and personalized authority (Erdmann & Engel, 2007; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). While international donors and domestic elites often promote reform and good governance rhetoric, its implementation is typically limited by structural and cultural constraints that sustain neopatrimonial logics of power (Hughes, 2003; Hadiz, 2010). A critical contribution of this study lies in its cultural and symbolic interpretation of neopatrimonial authority. In these regimes, legitimacy is often rooted in traditional norms, such as the Khmer concept of boramey (charismatic authority), the Javanese ideal of halus (refinement), or the Philippine practice of utang na loob (debt of gratitude). These cultural scripts reinforce hierarchical relationships and moral obligations that blur the lines between public service and personal loyalty (Anderson, 1990; Hinton, 2005; Quimpo, 2007). Reform initiatives that ignore these symbolic dimensions are often perceived as alien, leading to passive resistance or surface-level compliance. This finding aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic power and Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality, wherein reforms function as administrative changes and ideological performances that align with or disrupt embedded modes of legitimacy.

The comparative analysis illustrates both the adaptability and the resilience of neopatrimonial systems. In Cambodia, for example, reforms have served mainly to maintain elite control while projecting a façade of modernization. Anti-corruption agencies and civil service reforms exist in name but lack the independence and capacity to challenge patronage networks (Pak, Horng, & Eng, 2007; Un, 2018). In contrast, Indonesia's post-Suharto reforms produced more substantial outcomes—such as the creation of the KPK and decentralized governance—but these too were co-opted by local elites, resulting in fragmented rather than dismantled patronage (Hadiz, 2010; Mietzner, 2015; Run et al., 2015). The Philippines demonstrates cyclical reformism, where periods of accountability are followed by regression, often due to the enduring power of political dynasties and the instrumental use of reforms for electoral gains (Sidel, 2005; Quah, 2020). Importantly, these cases show that vested interests do not simply block reforms; they are also selectively appropriated and adapted. This reflects the phenomenon of “simulated institutionalization,” where reforms mimic international best practices without altering the underlying structures of power (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2005). In such contexts, reform efforts become rituals of external compliance that mask internal continuity. The implication is that technocratic solutions—such as performance evaluations, anti-corruption laws, or digital governance—must be rethought as part of a broader sociopolitical process. As Scott (1998) cautioned in *Seeing Like a State*, top-down interventions often fail when disregarding the informal logics and everyday practices that sustain state legitimacy.

The study also underscores the importance of civil society, media, and reformist leadership in catalyzing genuine change. Indonesia's reformasi movement, bolstered by civic engagement and media scrutiny, created openings for institutional innovation, even if limited (Aspinall & van Klinken, 2011). Cambodia's constrained civil space and authoritarian consolidation limit bottom-up reform dynamics (Hughes, 2009). These differences point to the significance of political subjectivity—how citizens and bureaucrats perceive their roles in governance, which shapes the receptivity and sustainability of reform. In Chatterjee's (2004) terms, the politics of the governed in neopatrimonial regimes is not about rejecting the state but negotiating with it through familiar channels of moral economy and reciprocity. From a philosophical perspective, the persistence of neopatrimonialism demands a reevaluation of the ontological assumptions underlying public administration. Reform is not merely a matter of institutional design but a process of cultural transformation. As Weber (1978) and Bourdieu (1991) suggest, domination is sustained through coercion and internalized norms and symbolic structures. Hence, successful reform requires new rules and new imaginaries of authority, citizenship, and accountability. This entails rethinking the state not as a neutral apparatus but as a historically embedded field of power relations, rituals, and representations (Foucault, 1991; Scott, 1998). In conclusion, the study reinforces the idea that neopatrimonialism is not a static vestige of the past but a flexible and adaptive mode of governance. It thrives through hybridizing modern bureaucratic forms and traditional authority, making reform a deeply contested and culturally situated process. Moving beyond universalist models, effective reform strategies must account for power's symbolic and relational dimensions. This requires a paradigm shift—from institutional transplantation to culturally attuned, incremental transformation grounded in local histories, meanings, and social agency.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The analysis of attempts to reform the public sector in the neopatrimonial regimes of Southeast Asia allows us to draw a number of fundamental conclusions that are important both for theoretical understanding of the very nature of power in transitional societies and for developing applied strategies for institutional transformation. One of the key philosophical results of the study is the understanding of neopatrimonialism not as a static archaic form of power doomed to self-reproduction but as a flexible configuration capable of adapting and modifying depending on the context. Unlike idealized models of a rational-bureaucratic state, neopatrimonial structures incorporate elements of formal modernization while maintaining the deep cultural foundations of informal politics. Such duality is not a temporary deviation from the “norm” but reflects the stable logic of the sociocultural evolution of power in societies where personal loyalty, patronage and symbolic sacralization remain important channels of legitimation (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). In this sense, reforms do not eliminate neopatrimonial relations but transform them from closed and clannish to more institutionalized and “managed-hybrid” forms.

The comparative experience of Southeast Asian countries demonstrates that universal reform recipes oriented toward good governance standards often ignore the cultural and political specifics of the regions. Attempts to mechanically implant Western models of governance without taking into account existing power codes and practices lead either to the simulation of reforms or to their institutional deformation. The key problem is not the absence of institutions but their inconsistency with the local logic of political action. Consequently, the philosophical task of reform consists not only of changing the formal structure of the state but also of changing the symbolic foundations of power to transform the cultural matrix itself, in which a citizen begins to be thought of not as a client but also as a subject of law. This process requires the time, reflection and internal cultural work of society, without which no institutional reform will be sustainable. Reforming the public sector is only possible if there is a minimum level of political agency—both among reformers and society. Civil society, the media, educational institutions, and social movements shape the contours of a new political imaginary in which power is subject to discussion, criticism, and public scrutiny. In the context of neopatrimonialism, such processes often encounter resistance from elites, but they lay the foundation for long-term change.

Importantly, agency is not equal to democracy in the liberal sense. It can manifest itself even under authoritarian control if there is space for alternative interpretations of power, public expression of interests, and professionalization of management structures. The example of Indonesia, with its postauthoritarian development, shows that even limited political openness can give rise to profound transformations. Finally, the need for philosophical reflection in matters of state reform is important. Technical reforms—personnel rotation, anticorruption measures, and digitalization—will not have the desired effect without an ontological rethinking of the very nature of power and the social contract. It is necessary not only to manage institutions but also to understand them as a result of historically established symbolic structures that operate not as laws but also as archetypes, myths, and rituals. The philosophy of politics is capable of revealing the deep foundations of the stability of neopatrimonial forms, such as the concept of "paternal authority", the cult of the charismatic leader, and the rhetoric of national salvation. Only by exposing these structures can we develop strategies for their transformation without destroying the social order. Thus, public sector reforms in the neopatrimonial regimes of Southeast Asia are not a linear movement toward rationality but rather a complex process of rethinking power, cultural identity, and institutional logic. Successfully moving beyond patronage politics requires not only political will but also deep cultural transformation, where philosophy becomes not an abstract theory but a practice of critical thinking and social design. From this perspective, the lessons of Southeast Asia become relevant and universal—not as recipes but as invitations to complex and responsible reflections on the fate of the state in the 21st century.

5.2. Recommendations for Further Research

Given the complex and evolving nature of neopatrimonial regimes, future research should delve deeper into the micro-dynamics of informal governance, particularly how everyday interactions between citizens and state actors reproduce or contest patronage-based authority. Ethnographic and participatory research methods could illuminate how public officials interpret and implement reforms in practice, and how cultural scripts—such as filial obligation, religious values, or notions of loyalty—shape administrative behavior. Further inquiry is also needed into the role of mid-level bureaucrats and frontline service providers as potential reform brokers or gatekeepers, especially in hybrid governance systems where informal and formal rules coexist. Comparative subnational studies across regions and municipalities may offer new insights into why reform efforts succeed in some contexts while failing in others, despite similar institutional frameworks. Such localized analyses could help refine theories of institutional pluralism by capturing the adaptive strategies of elites and reformist actors operating within neopatrimonial constraints.

Another promising avenue for future research is the intersection of digital governance and neopatrimonial resilience. While many Southeast Asian governments have adopted e-government platforms to enhance transparency and service delivery, the extent to which these digital tools challenge or reinforce informal patronage networks remains underexplored. Studies should examine whether digitalization leads to real accountability or merely digitizes clientelist practices under the guise of modernization. Additionally, further research could focus on the symbolic dimensions of reform narratives—how state actors frame reforms in culturally resonant terms to

secure legitimacy, and how various publics receive these narratives. Discourse analysis, media studies, and digital ethnography could enrich our understanding of the performative aspects of governance in hybrid regimes. Finally, more attention should be paid to the role of civil society, youth movements, and transnational networks in shaping alternative imaginaries of governance. By integrating political theory, cultural anthropology, and policy analysis, future research can move beyond static models of institutional design and contribute to more context-sensitive strategies for meaningful reform.

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Indonesia's Smart City Diplomacy Through ASEAN Smart Cities Network Shepherdship (2023-2025)

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific's position as an epicenter of the global economy generates complex, multi-aspect challenges of urbanization for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. In this context, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) was launched as a multilateral, non-state effort to share knowledge on building sustainable technology-based urban areas. This article analyzes Indonesia's role as the ASCN 'Shepherd' for the 2023–2025 term, examining it as a case study of middle-power leadership and Smart City diplomacy. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with document analysis, this study investigates how Indonesia leveraged its dual roles as Chair (2023) and Shepherd (2023–2025) to pivot the ASCN's focus from conceptual discourse to the implementation of bankable projects. The findings indicate that Indonesia's shepherdship was not only incremental in making the ASCN more inclusive and practical, but also allowed Indonesia to employ smart city diplomacy to strengthen its position as a major power in the ASEAN and the broader Indo-Pacific. This leadership, which garnered commendations from the ASEAN Secretariat and active participation from member states, provided crucial continuity and solidified Indonesia's regional leadership through pragmatic, solution-oriented diplomacy. This study concludes that Indonesia's shepherdship has manifested as an effective exercise in smart city diplomacy, bridging the gap between planning and implementation and providing a critical institutional legacy for future urban development in ASEAN.

Keywords: ASEAN Smart Cities Network, Regional Leadership, Smart City Diplomacy, Indonesia, ASEAN

1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific's position as the epicenter of the global economy generates complex, multi-aspect challenges of urbanization for ASEAN countries, similar to those faced by China and Korea decades earlier. Projections indicate that an additional 90 million people will move to urban areas by 2030, with "middleweight" cities driving 40% of this expansion (ASEAN, 2018b). However, this rapid growth has precipitated profound challenges, including traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic disparities (The Jakarta Post, 2023). In response, the "smart city" paradigm has emerged as a promising solution, leveraging technology and innovation to enhance the quality of life, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability.

Therefore, anticipation of rapid urbanization should be prepared to support sustainable economic growth based on industrialization in ASEAN countries. In this regard, the percentage of the ASEAN population living in urban areas has consistently increased over the past decade. Starting at 47.6% in 2015, the region crossed the 50% threshold in 2020. This upward trajectory is not slowing, with recent data from 2023 showing an increase of more than 53%. Between 2019-2023, ASEAN's total population, urban rate percentage, and urban population steadily increased, as shown in **Table 1**. Projections indicate that this trend will continue, with the urban population share expected to reach 55.6% by 2030 (Seifcar, 2024). This relentless demographic shift towards cities is a primary driver of regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), as member states collaboratively seek sustainable solutions to manage the opportunities and challenges of urban transformation.

Table 1: ASEAN population, urbanization rate, and urban population (Asian Development Bank, n.d.)

Year	Total population (in million)	Urbanization rate (percentage)	Urban population (In million)
2023	680,800	51.8	352,654
2022	674,200	51.2	345,190
2021	668,100	50.7	338,726
2020	662,800	50.2	332,725
2019	655,600	49.5	324,522

In this regard, ASEAN recognized this urgency and launched the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) initiative in 2018 as a multilateral, non-state effort to share the vision and knowledge of building sustainable, high-technology-based urban areas (ASEAN, 2018a). The ASCN was conceived as a collaborative platform to harmonize smart city development efforts, catalyze bankable projects, and secure funding from external partners (ASEAN, 2018b). However, the network's early years revealed a persistent gap between the formulation of Smart City Action Plans (SCAPs) and the capacity to access the financing required for their realization, as 50% of Southeast Asian cities struggled to identify suitable suppliers, partners, and consultants (ASEAN Secretariat & Australian Government, 2022; Clark & HSBC BrandConnect, 2019).

The ASCN's governance structure represents a unique institutional innovation designed to address the inherent discontinuity of ASEAN's annual rotating chairmanship. This dual-leadership model comprises a yearly 'Chair' and a multi-year 'Shepherd' (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The Shepherd role, first held by Singapore (2019–2023) and subsequently by Indonesia (2023–2025), was instituted to provide strategic stability and institutional memory, ensuring that long-term initiatives are not derailed by annual leadership transitions (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019; Feisal, 2024). The role of the shepherd is different from the ordinary chairmanship position in the ASEAN nomenclature; it acts as a facilitator that empowers and allows smart city projects across ASEAN to collaborate on developing aspects of smart cities by providing models of various related aspects (PACIS Unpar, 2024).

For Indonesia, a nation often regarded as the natural leader of ASEAN, the 2023-2025 ASCN shepherdship presented a strategic opportunity. This allowed Indonesia to employ smart city diplomacy to address these practical, shared challenges, thereby translating its latent leadership into tangible influence and strengthening its position in the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific regions (Aung, 2023; Hutagalung, 2025). Indonesia's tenure as a shepherd commenced at a critical juncture when the ASCN needed to transition from a conceptual framework to tangible, funded implementation.

This context provides a compelling case for examining Indonesia's regional leadership. Regional leadership is not merely a function of a state's material power but is also contingent on its ability to mobilize consensus, provide regional public goods, and shape the regional agenda (Pempel, 1999). Owing to its size and strategic location, Indonesia is often regarded as a "natural leader" within ASEAN (Anwar, 2023; Heiduk, 2016). However, this status must be actively performed and legitimized by the government. Middle power theory offers a useful lens, suggesting that states like Indonesia pursue influence not through coercion but through coalition building, norm entrepreneurship, and niche diplomacy (Cooper et al., 1993). An essential function of a middle power is the provision of regional public goods—tangible resources or frameworks that benefit the entire region and might otherwise be undersupplied. Indonesia's foreign policy has been characterized as a "hedging-plus" strategy that seeks to persuade and accommodate multiple great powers by appealing to their pre-existing interests and beliefs

(Anwar, 2023). Within ASEAN, this translates into a commitment to upholding ASEAN Centrality and institutional processes as a means of managing great power rivalry and advancing collective interests (Choiruzzad, 2022; Indraswari, 2022).

Therefore, Indonesia's shepherd position in ASCN 2023-2025 has a wider spectrum and is not only limited to technical aspects of advancing the development of smart cities in ASEAN but also as an arena for Indonesia to apply its smart power to navigate the common issues of ASEAN in the aspects of smart cities. In this regard, this research perceives that an investigation of how Indonesia managed to transform the opportunity of being a shepherd of the ASCN into an actual smart cities diplomacy strategy is required to broaden the understanding of smart city diplomacy in ASEAN. For instance, Indonesia must develop a strategy of pilot cities to tackle the problem of population diversity and funding issues to transform the shepherd position of the ASCN into actual smart city diplomacy (ASEAN Secretariat & Australian Government, 2022). Nevertheless, this issue has not been widely discussed, considering its importance and recency.

Furthermore, this study uses the concept of paradiplomacy, which is defined as the involvement of non-central governments in international relations (Duchacek, 1990; Soldatos, 1990). This phenomenon challenges the traditional state-centric view of diplomacy by recognizing that subnational units, such as cities, engage in cross-border cooperation to promote trade, investment, and cultural exchange (Kuznetsov, 2015). Smart city diplomacy is a specific modality of paradiplomacy that leverages urban innovation and technological advancement as foreign policy tools (Mursitama & Lee, 2018). It operates at multiple levels of abstraction.

1. International Branding and Investment: Cities market themselves as innovative, technology-driven hubs to attract foreign investment, global talent, and tourism (Urban Technology Alliance, 2024).
2. Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building: Through transnational networks, cities exchange best practices, policy models, and technical expertise, accelerating learning and avoiding common pitfalls (Urban Technology Alliance, 2024).
3. Norm setting and agenda shaping: By showcasing successful local solutions to global problems (e.g., climate change and public health), cities can influence international norms and policy agendas, often acting with greater agility than national governments (Marchetti, 2021; Pluijm, 2007).

Indonesia's shepherdship of the ASCN can thus be analyzed as a strategic deployment of smart city diplomacy, where the actions of its pilot cities and its leadership within the network serve as instruments of its broader regional leadership ambitions. Therefore, this study poses the following research question: How does Indonesia's shepherding of the ASCN from 2023 to 2025 manifest as an exercise in smart city diplomacy, and how does this performance reflect and shape Indonesia's broader regional leadership strategy within ASEAN? Considering the data availability, most of which are qualitative data in the form of official releases and documents, news articles, and academic articles, this research uses a qualitative approach to investigate the research question.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design to facilitate an in-depth examination of Indonesia's role, actions, and impact on the ASCN's development. This approach is optimal for interpreting Indonesia's performance through the theoretical lens of regional leadership and smart city diplomacy. This research relies on document analysis, drawing on primary and secondary data sources. Primary data include official documents from the ASEAN Secretariat, such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework and ASCN Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Reports, and official press releases from ASCN annual meetings. The secondary data comprise scholarly articles on middle power diplomacy and smart cities (e.g., Anwar, 2023; Mursitama & Lee, 2018), reports from partner institutions, and credible regional news sources. Data triangulation was performed by cross-verifying information across these diverse sources, for instance, by corroborating government statements with official ASEAN reports and independent media coverage to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 Strategic Continuity and Evolution: A Comparative Analysis of Shepherdship

Indonesia's shepherdship is best understood in comparison to its predecessors, particularly the inaugural Shepherd, Singapore, and the immediate past Chair, Cambodia. Each leader shaped the ASCN's trajectory, creating conditions for Indonesia's strategic pivot. Singapore's tenure as the first Chair (2018) and Shepherd (2019-2023) was foundational. Its primary focus was architectural, establishing a conceptual blueprint for networks. Key achievements include the creation of the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework (ASCF) and the formulation of initial Smart City Action Plans (SCAPs) for 26 pilot cities (Kong & Woods, 2021; Somasundram et al., 2018). Singapore has leveraged its global reputation as an innovation hub to attract high-level partners and legitimize the network, acting as a resource provider and facilitator of knowledge exchange (Kong & Woods, 2021). Its focus was on defining the what and why of smart cities in the ASEAN context.

Following this, Cambodia's chairmanship in 2022 introduced strong thematic ambivalence towards environmental sustainability. By championing an "ASEAN Green Deal," Cambodia steered the network's discourse towards building "smart and green cities" with more efficient resource use (Khmer Times, 2022). This has created a demand for tangible green projects, inadvertently highlighting the persistent challenge of the network: the gap between planning and financing. As the ASCN Chair for 2023-2025, Indonesia is responsible for transforming the technical foundation from the shepherding of Singapore and the new focus of the ASCN Chair of Cambodia on smart and green city concepts into an effective guideline not only for smart cities in Indonesia but also in all ASEAN countries. Cambodia's notion of the development of ASEAN's smart cities added a new complexity to its implementation, as Thailand's chair in 2019 focused on building external partnerships and economic catalysts for smart cities. Brunei Darussalam's chairmanship in 2020 provided a more nuanced focus on smart cities to adapt to the new environment during Covid-19 and digital resilience, which became the main tools during the pandemic (ASEAN Secretariat 2024).

Indonesia's shepherdship (2023-2025) represented a deliberate strategic pivot from framework and theme to pragmatic implementation and investment. While Singapore built the architecture, Cambodia set a green theme, Thailand focused on external partnerships, Brunei Darussalam on digital resilience, and Indonesia focused on building the engine. The core difference was a shift in priority from conceptualization to capitalization. Indonesia's agenda, centered on "Industry and Innovation," was designed to directly address the implementation gap by focusing on creating bankable projects and mobilizing investments (Kementerian Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2023). This was a crucial evolution, ensuring that the network did not stagnate but moved decisively towards tangible urban development. In addition, Indonesia proposed inclusive smart city development that not only opens multi-channel funding but also facilitates local elements in smart city development in ASEAN. The focus has shifted from creating ideal smart cities to how the idea can work.

Regardless of the shifting focus of each ASCN shepherd, the ASCN maintains continuity by incorporating the focus of the previous shepherd into a new framework. In this regard, Indonesia focuses on a more pragmatic approach to implementation that can balance local cultures, the technical guidelines of the ASCN as a legacy of Singapore's shepherdess, instructions from the chairs of the ASCN, such as Cambodia's Green Deal, and the unique characteristics of each ASEAN smart city. In this regard, I perceive that Indonesia realizes that effective smart city development in ASEAN cannot be based on a single, fit-for-all guideline but should be based on the cities' unique characteristics and local values to ensure its effectiveness and relevance in tackling diverse complex urbanization-related issues.

In this regard, Indonesia has enacted a strategic pivot from a framework to functions. Recognizing that the primary obstacle was no longer a lack of plans but a lack of implementation and funding, Indonesia's leadership focused on pragmatism. This represents a critical evolution that ensures that the network does not stagnate at the conceptual stage. Instead of imposing a single model, Indonesia practiced a form of leadership rooted in diversity, actively showcasing its four pilot cities—DKI Jakarta, Makassar, Banyuwangi, and Sumedang—as a portfolio of replicable solutions. This approach, which presents diverse models for metropolitan management (Jakarta), public security

(Makassar), circular economy (Banyuwangi), and data-driven social services (Sumedang), is intrinsically aligned with ASEAN's principle of unity in diversity and is highly relevant to the varied developmental contexts of member states (Feisal, 2024).

3.2 Key Achievements and Regional Reception

Indonesia's most transformative achievement was the operationalization and delivery of the ASEAN Smart City Investment Toolkit (ASCT). While the idea was conceived during Brunei's 2021 chairmanship and noted in the 2022 M&E report (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022; ASEANAccess, 2021), it was under Indonesia's leadership during its 2023 chairmanship meeting in Bali that its development was accelerated and finalized for launch (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023; ASEAN Secretariat & Australian Government, 2022; The Jakarta Post, 2023). This toolkit is a quintessential regional public good that directly addresses the shared challenge of securing funding for Smart City projects. By equipping cities with the knowledge to develop bankable proposals, the toolkit fundamentally enhances the network's capacity and relevance to both municipal governments and private investors (ASEAN Secretariat & Australian Government, 2022).

Indonesia's shepherdesses are distinguished by their proactive engagement with academic and research institutions. Collaboration with entities such as the Parahyangan Center for International Studies (PACIS) and ASECH (Center of Excellence on Smart City) represents an innovative approach to evidence-based policy development in regional governance. Furthermore, the idea was translated into several pilot cities with different areas of focus as a compromise to the existing conditions of each city. The Indonesian approach is inclusive, combining the previous ASCN focus with a more practical and adaptive implementation. In this regard, the approach has departed from the centralized model of Singapore to be based on a network model that maintains its coordination but still accepts diverse implementation to ensure the sustainability and people's characteristics of the smart city (PACIS Unpar, 2024).

This leadership was positively received in the region and the country as a whole. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, explicitly commended Indonesia's "unwavering commitment to the development of smart and sustainable cities" during the 2023 Bali meeting (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). This high-level endorsement is a key success indicator for the project. Furthermore, the strong attendance at the Bali meeting by representatives from nine ASEAN member states and key external partners such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia signaled broad regional and international buy-in to Indonesia's agenda (The Jakarta Post, 2023). The consistent growth in the number of ASCN projects, from 77 in 2022 to 108 by September 2024, with a high implementation rate, further attests to the momentum sustained under Indonesia's guidance (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022, 2024).

3.3 Indonesia's Shepherdship as Smart City Diplomacy and Regional Leadership Assertion

Indonesia's shepherding of the ASCN is a sophisticated exercise in smart city diplomacy strategically deployed to assert its regional leadership. This is not merely a passive chairmanship but an active campaign to shape the network's trajectory in a manner that serves both regional needs and Indonesia's foreign policy objectives. This leadership assertion manifests through three interconnected diplomatic strategies: the projection of a unique, human-centric smart city model; deft management of great power interests to reinforce ASEAN Centrality; and the delivery of tangible regional public goods that translate leadership from rhetoric into reality.

First, Indonesia engaged in international branding and norm-setting by showcasing its pilot cities. The case of Sumedang, which successfully reduced stunting rates from 32.2% to 7.89% through a data-driven governance framework, is a powerful example (Mastete, 2024; Yunus, 2024). This was not merely a technical presentation but a diplomatic act that projected an alternative vision of a smart city—one where technology serves tangible human development goals—a narrative that resonates strongly within the developing world. This aligns with the function of city diplomacy in offering practical, ground-level solutions to pressing issues that citizens are passionate about (Hachigian, 2019; Marchetti, 2021). Furthermore, Indonesia appointed other pilot cities with different

development focuses, such as Makassar's advancements in public security infrastructure and Banyuwangi's focus on the circular economy (Kementerian Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2023).

Diverse pilot cities also represent diversity in ASEAN, allowing city governments to choose the most suitable pilot models based on existing conditions and characteristics. This is essential because every city has different circumstances in many aspects, such as funding, technical, cultural values, demographic, and geography. Rather than presenting a monolithic, top-down vision, Indonesia showcases a portfolio of diverse, context-specific solutions, effectively creating a "menu" of replicable models for the region.

By consistently presenting these successes in regional forums, Indonesia is not only sharing its best practices but also engaging in normative leadership in the region. It projects an alternative, more attainable smart city model that resonates deeply with the developmental realities of many ASEAN member states, offering a compelling counter-narrative to the capital-intensive models often promoted by Western and East Asian nations. This aligns perfectly with the function of smart city diplomacy, which leverages local innovation to shape international discourse and projects national competence.

Second, by driving the Investment Toolkit, Indonesia has played the role of a regional leader in providing essential public goods. This action moved beyond rhetoric and delivered a concrete tool that empowered all member states, thereby legitimizing Indonesia's leadership through tangible contributions rather than mere assertions. This act of "leading by example" is a cornerstone of middle power influence (Nanda, 2023). This approach could also be perceived as Indonesia leveraging its diverse smart city conditions to develop pilot cities as models for other ASEAN nations.

Fourth, Indonesia skillfully used its shepherdship to manage external partnerships and reinforce ASEAN Centrality. The Indo-Pacific is an arena of intensifying geopolitical competition, with the US, Japan, Australia, and the EU all promoting their own smart city partnership programs (Dharmaraj, 2025; UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), n.d.; U.S. Department of State, 2018). By hosting high-level meetings, such as the ASEAN-Japan Smart Cities Network Forum, and engaging with a wide array of partners under the ASCN umbrella (Amran et al., 2024; Mastete, 2024), Indonesia has positioned the ASCN as a central and indispensable platform for international engagement. This strategy effectively channels external partners' interests into a framework managed by and for ASEAN, mitigating the risk of fragmentation and demonstrating a deft application of its hedging strategy to maintain regional autonomy (Anwar, 2023; Choiruzzad, 2022; Juned & Sutiono, 2024). This diplomatic maneuvering solidifies Indonesia's role as the "cornerstone" of ASEAN, actively shaping its regional architecture (Heiduk, 2016).

Finally, Indonesia's leadership assertion is cemented by its focus on delivering tangible regional public goods, moving beyond the diplomatic niceties that can sometimes characterize ASEAN processes. The foremost example is the finalization and launch of the ASEAN Smart City Investment Toolkit (ASCT). The difficulty in structuring bankable projects and accessing finance was a critical region-wide bottleneck identified in preceding years. By championing the toolkit's development, Indonesia provided a concrete solution to a shared problem, which is a hallmark of effective regional leadership. This action, combined with the strategic vision to shift the network's focus towards "Industry and Innovation," provided a clear and necessary direction for the ASCN. Such leadership provides a crucial bridge to the future.

4. Conclusion

Indonesia's tenure as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network Shepherd from 2023 to 2025 represents a significant chapter in the network's evolution and serves as a compelling case study of effective leadership by a middle power. By strategically leveraging its dual role as Chair and Shepherd, Indonesia successfully navigated the ASCN from the conceptualization phase to the pragmatic implementation phase. This was not merely an administrative transition but a deliberate act of regional leadership that addressed the network's most pressing need: translating plans into bankable, actionable projects.

The delivery of the ASEAN Smart City Investment Toolkit stands as the principal legacy of this period, a tangible regional public good that enhances the capacity of all member states. Through the sophisticated use of smart city diplomacy—showcasing its diverse urban successes as replicable models and managing external partnerships to bolster ASEAN Centrality—Indonesia reinforced its credentials as a regional leader. This leadership was validated by endorsements from ASEAN’s leadership and active engagement with its peers. While challenges of technical capacity and digital inclusivity persist, Indonesia’s shepherding has undeniably provided the critical momentum and institutional tools necessary for the network’s long-term viability. It has laid a robust foundation upon which the forthcoming ASEAN Smart Cities Network Action Plan (2026–2035) can be built, ensuring that the aspiration for smarter and more sustainable urban futures in Southeast Asia is grounded in a proven capacity for collective action in the region.

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Framing Rodrigo Duterte's ICC arrest: Examining Coverage in Philippine News Media

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Abstract

This study examines how leading Philippine news media outlets – Manila Bulletin, Philippine Daily Inquirer, and The Philippine Star – framed the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrant against former President Rodrigo Duterte in connection with his administration's war on drugs. Through a content analysis of 114 news articles published between March and April 2025, the study identified three dominant frames employed by the media outlets: legitimacy and accountability, victimization and political persecution, and sovereignty and nationalism. These frames reflect competing narratives, ranging from the ICC's role as a neutral legal institution to portrayals of Duterte as a victim of politically motivated retribution. The study also analyzed the tone of coverage, revealing a plurality of articles critical of Duterte. Findings underscore how news media not only shape public discourse around legal accountability and state sovereignty but also mediate tensions between international justice and domestic political dynamics. By highlighting the diversity of perspectives and the strategic use of frames and tone, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how contested political events are negotiated in media narratives. Implications for press freedom, democratic engagement, and the future of transitional justice in the Philippines are discussed.

Keywords: Media Framing, Rodrigo Duterte, International Criminal Court, War on Drugs, Content Analysis

1. Introduction

Rodrigo Duterte's six-year presidency in the Philippines (2016–2022) has been defined by his aggressive and highly controversial war on drugs (Lamchek & Jopson, 2024). Upon assuming office, Duterte initiated a nationwide anti-drug campaign that prioritized police-led operations against suspected drug users and dealers (Thompson, 2022). While the campaign received widespread domestic support at the onset, it quickly garnered international attention due to the unprecedented number of fatalities associated with it (Amnesty International, 2021; Lozada, 2021). According to estimates, 6,000 to over 30,000 individuals were killed during the anti-drug operations (Iglesias, 2023; Simangan, 2018). Many of these deaths are claimed to be extrajudicial, committed by police or vigilante groups with tacit state support (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Thompson et al., 2024).

Scholars and human rights organizations alike have raised serious concerns about the legal and moral legitimacy of Duterte's approach (Kenny & Holmes, 2020; Lamchek & Jopson, 2024; Medriano & Awi, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2018) documented consistent patterns of abuse, including planted evidence, falsified reports, and harassment of witnesses and families. Amnesty International (2019) also described the drug war as a “large-scale murdering enterprise,” implicating the state in potential crimes against humanity. These concerns prompted the International Criminal Court (ICC) to initiate a preliminary examination in 2018, which eventually developed into a formal investigation into allegations of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations. In March 2025, the ICC issued an arrest warrant against Duterte, citing credible evidence of systematic attacks against civilian populations (International Criminal Court, 2025).

The Philippine government, under both Duterte and his successor Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has resisted the ICC's jurisdiction, invoking national sovereignty as a basis for non-cooperation (Cabato, 2024; Presidential Communications Office, 2024). However, debates continue whether the Philippines' prior ratification of the Rome Statute—before its withdrawal in 2019—provides sufficient legal grounding for the Court to proceed with its investigation (Bradfield, 2024).

Amid these legal and political developments, the media has played a central role in shaping public understanding of the drug war and the ICC's investigation. Media framing—defined as the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of reality in news discourse while obscuring other elements (Entman, 1993)—significantly influences how audiences interpret the motivations, consequences, and legitimacy of government actions. In a politically polarized media environment like the Philippines, where press freedom coexists with state pressure and ownership concentration (Vera Files, 2024), coverage of Duterte's ICC case is not merely a matter of reporting facts. It involves narrative construction that may reinforce official justifications or foreground accountability and justice.

This paper looks at how Philippine news media construct narratives around Duterte's ICC arrest. It aims to determine the dominant frames that arise in news coverage, exploring whether the media portrays Duterte as a political figure facing legitimate legal consequences, a persecuted leader, or a sovereign nationalist. It also seeks to examine the various tones used by these media outlets in their reporting—critical, supportive, or neutral—to assess how journalistic stance influences the shaping of public discourse around transitional justice.

The significance of this research stems from its contribution to media studies, political communication, and Philippine democracy. By analyzing the framing strategies employed by different news media outlets, this study provides insights into the development of public debate on political and legal accountability. Furthermore, it underscores the implications of press freedom in the Philippines, particularly amidst the rise of populist governance and increased media polarization. The findings can contribute to conversations about how media practices help promote or weaken democratic norms in politically charged legal cases such as Duterte's ICC arrest.

1.1. Framing theory and the media's role in political and legal crises

Entman (1993) was the first to define ‘media framing’, which describes how media entities select and emphasize certain aspects of an event to promote specific interpretations. The media uses frames to help shape public understanding by highlighting particular themes while minimizing others, thereby influencing perception, policymaking, and societal discourse (Happer & Philo, 2013). Media framing functions on two levels: an individual cognitive level, in which audiences internalize certain meanings, and a societal one, in which framing influences public debates and policy decisions (Lim et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2004).

Studies in political communication demonstrate the influence of media framing, particularly in cases that are highly political and legal in nature (Baird & Gangl, 2006; Chilawa, 2011; Haider-Markel et al., 2006). In the context of international justice mechanisms involving institutions such as the ICC, media outlets utilize frames to situate the event within larger political narratives (Kitagawa & Shen-Bayh, 2024; Selvarajah & Fiorito, 2023). In such cases as Duterte's ICC arrest, the media's involvement goes beyond mere reporting; it plays an important role in shaping legitimacy and mobilizing public opinion (Bates & Gillooly, 2023).

Given the high stakes and gravity of Duterte's ICC case, competing frames in Philippine media outlets serve not only to inform but also to persuade, reinforcing ideological positions and influencing public discourse on governance, state accountability, and international law. The choice of sources, tone, and specific angles creates an impact on the audience's perception of Duterte's culpability or victimization. The extent of media polarization, bias, and alignment with political actors may also affect the depth and objectivity of coverage.

Given the above context, the paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What *frames* did Philippine print media use in covering Duterte's ICC arrest?
2. How was the *tone* of media coverage distributed across different news outlets?

2. Method

2.1. Selection of news media outlets and data collection

This study draws from three of the most prominent news media outlets in the Philippines: Manila Bulletin, Philippine Daily Inquirer, and The Philippine Star. These newspapers were selected based on their high readership, nationwide circulation, and established reputation in the Philippine media industry. According to the Media Ownership Monitor (MOM) Philippines project by Reporters Without Borders and Vera Files (2023d), these three outlets are the top print newspapers in the country in terms of audience share, making them ideal sources for analyzing media framing in national discourse.

Manila Bulletin, originally established in 1900 as a shipping journal, is the oldest existing English-language newspaper in the Philippines. It is published by the Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation and is owned by the Yap family (Reporters Without Borders, 2023a). Over the years, the newspaper has expanded its content scope to include national and international news, business, lifestyle, and public service updates. Known for its broad coverage and longevity, Manila Bulletin retains strong brand recognition and remains a key player in both the traditional print and digital news industries.

Philippine Daily Inquirer is one of the country's leading broadsheets, established in 1985, shortly before the People Power Revolution. The newspaper is published by Philippine Daily Inquirer, Inc. and is owned by the Rufino-Prieto family. It has grown to become one of the most widely read newspapers in the Philippines, particularly in urban centers. Its history is closely tied to post-authoritarian press revival, and it has since maintained a strong national presence both in print and online through platforms such as Inquirer.net (Reporters Without Borders, 2023b).

The Philippine Star, founded in 1986, emerged during the democratic transition following the fall of the Marcos regime. It is published by PhilStar Daily, Inc. and is owned by the Belmonte family. The paper was initially positioned as a platform for post-EDSA journalism and has since evolved into one of the country's most circulated and commercially successful broadsheets (Reporters Without Borders, 2023c). It offers a comprehensive mix of news, features, and opinion columns and maintains a robust digital counterpart via Philstar.com, contributing to its accessibility and relevance in national media.

Together, these newspapers provide a rich dataset for analyzing how Philippine news media construct narratives around high-stakes political and legal events. Their prominence and longevity also ensure continuity in editorial practices and institutional memory, which allows for more grounded insights into framing trends over time.

For this study, news articles were collected over a one-month period (March 11 – April 11, 2025) following major announcements related to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigation and the subsequent issuance of an arrest warrant for former President Rodrigo Duterte. This timeframe was selected to capture the immediate framing and narrative construction employed by each publication, particularly during periods of heightened media attention.

The dataset includes online news articles to provide a comprehensive view of how information and perspectives were presented to readers. Articles were identified using targeted search terms such as “*Duterte arrest order*,” “*war on drugs*,” “*International Criminal Court*,” “*Duterte ICC trial*,” and “*human rights violations*.” These keywords were applied systematically across the digital archives of the selected newspapers to ensure consistency in retrieval and relevance to the research questions. Only articles written in English were included in the final dataset to maintain uniformity in analysis. From these, a total of 114 news stories comprised the sample and the unit of analysis for the study: 32 Manila Bulletin, 40 Philippine Daily Inquirer, and 42 The Philippine Star.

Each article was reviewed and coded for its dominant media frame and tone. This process allowed for both qualitative thematic coding and quantitative frequency analysis. By employing this mixed-methods approach, the study provides a nuanced account of how different Philippine newspapers framed Duterte’s ICC arrest in both form and substance.

3. Results

3.1. Dominant Media Frames

Through qualitative coding of the collected news articles, three dominant frames emerged that shaped the narrative construction of Rodrigo Duterte’s ICC arrest in Philippine news media. These frames represent distinct ways in which the media interpreted and presented the developments surrounding the ICC’s actions, reflecting broader socio-political discourses in the country.

3.1.1. Legitimacy and Accountability Frame

This frame centers on the interpretation that the ICC’s actions represent a legal and institutional effort to address allegations of human rights violations committed during the Duterte administration’s war on drugs. News articles aligned with this frame typically emphasize the ICC’s mandate to investigate and prosecute grave crimes when national systems appear unable or unwilling to act. The Philippine Star highlighted this in one article, stating:

Excerpt 1:

The ICC, which is hailed as the court of last resort, previously noted the Philippine government’s inability to adequately prosecute those responsible for the drug war killings, saying that local proceedings have not led to “tangible, concrete and progressive investigative steps.” (Chi, 2025c)

Media reports underscore that the arrest warrant is part of a formal judicial process governed by international norms and due process, rather than political intent. Several articles highlight the ICC’s attempts to remain neutral and avoid politicizing the case, portraying the tribunal as operating within its established legal framework rather than pursuing a targeted campaign against a particular leader. This is reflected, for example, in one article from the Philippine Daily Inquirer:

Excerpt 2:

The denial by the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) of the motion made by Salvador Medialdea [Duterte’s legal counsel] to defer Friday’s hearing and the passive reaction of the judges to his claims that former President Rodrigo Duterte was renditioned to The Hague indicated that the tribunal avoids politicizing the case. (de Villa, 2025a)

This is further reflected in a report from the Manila Bulletin which underscored the Court’s commitment to impartiality and fairness.

Excerpt 3:

Former president Rodrigo Duterte is assured by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of fairness as the clock ticks down to Sept. 23, the day of the pivotal confirmation of charges hearing that will determine his fate in The Hague. (Geducos, 2025b)

Within this frame, international human rights organizations and legal scholars are frequently cited to contextualize the significance of the case. Articles may discuss procedural developments at the ICC, past documentation of extrajudicial killings, and victim testimonies. For instance, an article from the Philippine Daily Inquirer referenced a former associate justice of the Supreme Court as saying:

Excerpt 4:

In the end, however, it is the ICC, which has custody of Duterte, that will weigh the legality of his arrest and the seriousness of the charges against him, former Associate Justice Adolfo Azcuna told senators during a hearing on Thursday, raising doubts about the ex-president's possible release from detention. (Santos, 2025)

However, this frame does not exclude alternative viewpoints. Many reports also present responses from Duterte's legal team, Philippine officials, or constitutional experts who question the legal foundation of the ICC's involvement. An article from The Philippine Star emphasized this, citing the argument of Duterte's defense team concerning the Philippines' withdrawal from the Rome Statute.

Excerpt 5:

The defense team is expected to question the jurisdiction of the ICC over Duterte, and the implementation of the warrant of arrest against the former president, following his arrest in the Philippines. (Mateo, 2025)

3.1.2. Victimization and Political Persecution Frame

In contrast, this frame characterizes Duterte as being on the receiving end of a politically motivated campaign, involving both international actors and domestic critics. It suggests that efforts to hold him accountable are seen by his supporters as part of a broader attempt to discredit his leadership and influence. This perspective appeals to nationalist sentiment by framing the situation as an external and internal challenge to a democratically elected official. One news article from the Philippine Daily Inquirer pointed out:

Excerpt 6:

Former President Rodrigo Duterte's arrest is a "pure and simple kidnapping," according to his legal counsel and former Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea.

Medialdea also claimed that the ICC and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. struck an "unlikely alliance" in arresting Duterte. (Mendoza, 2025b)

Another article by the Philippine Daily Inquirer highlighted how the arrest of the former president intersected with the escalating political tensions in the country. The report situated Duterte's legal troubles within the broader context of shifting alliances and rivalries between the Dutertes and Marcoses, raising questions about the potential domestic motivations behind the timing and treatment of the case.

Excerpt 7:

His arrest in Manila came amid worsening relations between his family and the Marcos administration. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte—Rodrigo Duterte's daughter—are embroiled in political conflict, with the latter facing an impeachment trial over allegations including an assassination plot against Marcos. (Mendoza, 2025a)

The frame often draws on statements from Duterte's allies and official sources who question the ICC's legitimacy and argue that the case is less about achieving justice and more about silencing a key political figure. Through this lens, Duterte is portrayed as a victim of coordinated retaliation and an embattled leader facing persecution for policies that resonated with ordinary citizens. In a Manila Bulletin report, for example, the coverage focused on appeals for compassion toward the former president, highlighting the human dimension of his detention.

Excerpt 8:

Former president Rodrigo Duterte's common-law wife, Honeylet Avanceña, has appealed for consideration for the detained 80-year-old former chief executive.

"Have compassion. Be compassionate. You don't have to respect him, just have compassion. Anyway, he served [the country], right?" (Manila Bulletin, 2025)

Another Manila Bulletin article also quoted Vice President Sara Duterte that her father, the former president, would be like Ninoy Aquino "who was assassinated upon his return to Manila from exile" (Geducos, 2025a).

This portrayal of Duterte as a victim has also “unleashed a flood of false information” (Chi, 2025a) from his supporters, containing spurious claims about his detention. This is evident in an article by The Philippine Star, which stated:

Excerpt 9:

Fabricated quotes from celebrities and world leaders, manipulated videos of unrelated events presented as pro-Duterte rallies, and a coordinated messaging campaign that framed his arrest as a “kidnapping” have spread rapidly across multiple social media platforms since Duterte’s arrest on March 11. (Chi, 2025a)

In contrast to claims of political persecution, various groups point to Duterte’s track record of intimidating critics and fostering a climate of fear. Human rights advocates argue that his rhetoric and policies have discouraged victims and witnesses from speaking out, raising questions about the credibility of portraying him solely as a victim. As reported by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, quoting human rights lawyer Dino de Leon:

Excerpt 10:

The ex-president’s “power” and “track record of bullying and making people afraid to come forward” could also be factored in as well, he said, noting the absence of a single case against him in the Philippines. (de Villa, 2025b)

3.1.3. Sovereignty and Nationalism Frame

The sovereignty and nationalism frame centers on the ongoing debate over the extent of the ICC’s legal jurisdiction in domestic affairs, particularly considering the Philippines’ withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2019. News items reflecting this frame highlight arguments emphasizing national autonomy and self-determination.

In a Philippine Daily Inquirer report, Senator Christopher “Bong” Go asserted that Duterte’s arrest undermined national sovereignty and insisted that the Philippine justice system is fully capable of addressing such matters. This stance resonates strongly with nationalist sentiment, especially among those who see the ICC’s actions as ignoring the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs.

Excerpt 11:

Long-time Duterte ally and Sen. Christopher “Bong” Go maintained on Thursday that the former president’s arrest was an attack on the country’s sovereignty and that the local judicial system was fully capable of handling domestic matters. (Sigales, 2025)

The same article, however, cited the ICC’s justification, stating that Duterte’s continued influence posed risks to the investigation and the safety of witnesses and victims.

Excerpt 12:

According to the ICC arrest warrant, it was necessary to arrest Duterte because he “appears to continue to wield considerable power” despite no longer being president and due to the “risk of interference with the investigations and the security of witnesses and victims.” (Sigales, 2025)

A Philippine Star article also reflected the sovereignty frame by noting that while the Marcos administration maintains the ICC no longer has jurisdiction following the country’s 2019 withdrawal, it has nonetheless affirmed its commitment to honor arrest warrants issued through Interpol, of which the Philippines remains a member.

Excerpt 13:

Marcos administration has repeatedly insisted that the ICC no longer has any jurisdiction in the Philippines after the country withdrew its ratification of the Rome Statute in 2018 and officially left the ICC in 2019. But it has also consistently vowed to honor any arrest warrants requested by the Interpol, of which the Philippines remains a member. (Chi, 2025b)

However, this frame also includes views that acknowledge international law’s relevance under certain conditions. Some articles cite legal experts who argue that the ICC retains jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was still a party to the Rome Statute.

Excerpt 14:

Azcuna said the Philippines still had to cooperate with the ICC in implementing an arrest warrant because the country had “residual obligations” even after its withdrawal from the ICC in 2019. (Santos, 2025)

Other articles suggest that international scrutiny arises when national institutions are perceived to have failed. This was pointed out in a Philippine Star article, quoting human rights group Karapatan.

Excerpt 15:

Since the Rome Statute allows the ICC to intervene only when a state is “unable or unwilling to genuinely carry out the investigation and prosecute the perpetrators,” Karapatan said the pre-trial proceedings expose the failure of domestic redress mechanisms. (Flores, 2025a)

Figure 1 below shows the frequency distribution of the three dominant frames—legitimacy & accountability, victimization & political persecution, and sovereignty & nationalism—for each outlet:

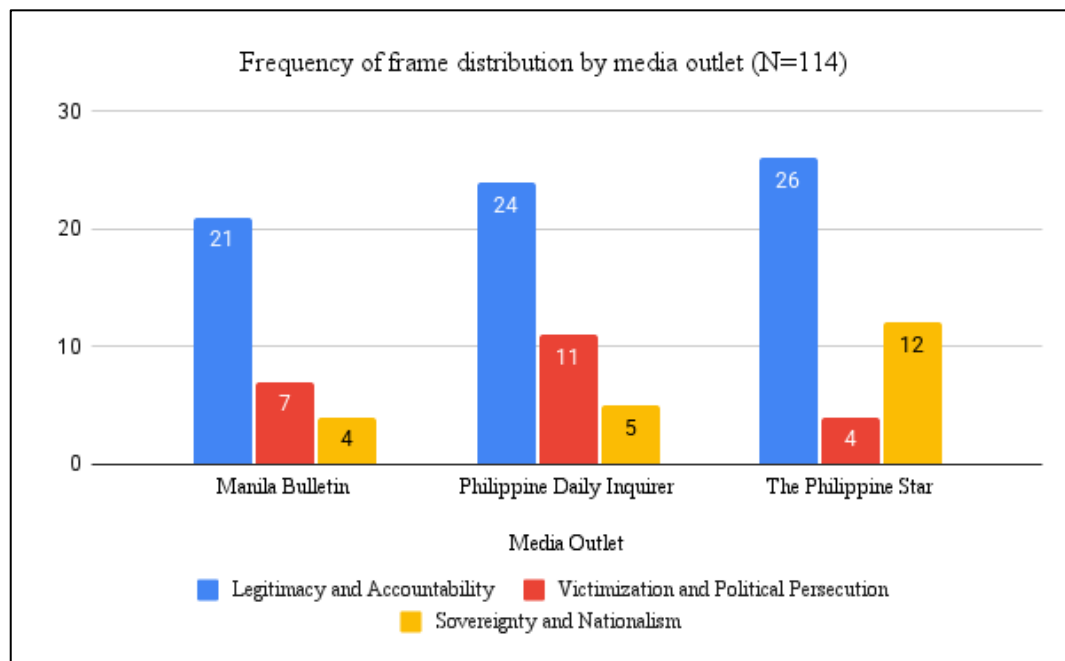


Figure 1: Frequency of frame distribution by media outlet.

3.1.4. Manila Bulletin

Manila Bulletin demonstrates a clear preference for the Legitimacy & Accountability frame, which appears in 21 (65.62%) of its articles. This suggests that the publication's coverage largely aligns with narratives portraying the ICC as a credible institution investigating Duterte for legitimate legal reasons. Such framing foregrounds international law, justice, and human rights, possibly reflecting Manila Bulletin's emphasis on official legal developments.

However, the presence of the Victimization & Political Persecution frame in 7 (21.88%) of its content indicates that the news outlet also accommodates alternative narratives that frame Duterte as being unfairly targeted by foreign powers or institutions. This dual presence implies a degree of editorial flexibility. While the paper emphasizes accountability, it also acknowledges the political dimensions of the case and Duterte's counterclaims of persecution.

The Sovereignty & Nationalism frame, present in 5 articles (12.5%), reflects Manila Bulletin's occasional engagement with the argument that international bodies should not interfere in Philippine domestic affairs. Although not a dominant theme, its appearance signals a recognition of the legal and diplomatic debates and broader discourse surrounding the country's withdrawal from the Rome Statute.

Overall, Manila Bulletin's distribution of frames suggests a moderately balanced, though still institutionally aligned, approach. It appears to uphold the value of legal accountability while offering limited space to nationalist and sympathetic Duterte narratives - perhaps to maintain its broad readership and editorial neutrality.

3.1.5. Philippine Daily Inquirer

Among the three outlets, the Philippine Daily Inquirer has the highest number of articles ($n=40$), with 24 articles (60%) adopting the Legitimacy & Accountability frame. This consistency with the dominant trend suggests that it sees Duterte's case primarily as a legal and moral issue rather than a geopolitical one. The newspaper's long-standing reputation for investigative journalism and its history of holding public officials accountable may explain its emphasis on international legal processes and human rights.

Interestingly, the Philippine Daily Inquirer allocates 11 (27.5%) of its articles to the Victimization & Political Persecution frame, which is the highest among the three outlets. This might signal a deliberate editorial decision to reflect Duterte's side of the story and the broader political discourse surrounding international justice mechanisms. By allowing space for these counter-narratives, the Philippine Daily Inquirer appears to present a more pluralistic and multifaceted view of the issue, possibly appealing to a broader audience or reaffirming its credibility as a balanced news source.

The Sovereignty & Nationalism frame appears in 5 (12.5%) of the Philippine Daily Inquirer's coverage. This suggests that while nationalist arguments are acknowledged, they are not central to the paper's overall narrative construction. The Philippine Daily Inquirer may be engaging with these frames to contextualize legal developments within ongoing debates about Philippine autonomy and jurisdiction.

The overall trend indicates that the Philippine Daily Inquirer maintains a strong commitment to legal accountability while also recognizing the political complexities of the ICC case. Its relatively high use of the victimization and persecution frame implies an attempt to capture the full spectrum of public opinion, contributing to a more nuanced and journalistically robust portrayal of the issue.

3.1.6. The Philippine Star

The Philippine Star exhibits a more distinct framing pattern compared to the other two outlets. While the Legitimacy & Accountability frame still dominates, comprising 26 (61.9%) of its articles, the most striking aspect is its significantly higher use of the Sovereignty & Nationalism frame, which appears in 12 (28.57%) of its coverage. This is more than double the proportion found in Manila Bulletin and the Inquirer, suggesting that The Philippine Star places greater emphasis on narratives defending Philippine sovereignty and resisting international legal scrutiny.

This heightened focus on sovereignty may reflect the paper's editorial leanings or an intent to engage more critically with the ICC's role in postcolonial states. It positions the ICC arrest not just as a legal issue, but as one with implications for national independence, legal jurisdiction, and the Philippines' right to self-determination. By elevating this frame, The Philippine Star may be catering to audiences that view international bodies with skepticism or who prioritize nationalist perspectives.

In contrast, the Victimization & Political Persecution frame appears in only 4 (9.52%) of The Philippine Star's articles - the lowest among the three outlets. This limited representation of Duterte's personal narrative of being politically targeted suggests that while the newspaper engages strongly with nationalist themes, it is less inclined to portray Duterte as a victim. This could indicate a preference for more structural or institutional arguments (like sovereignty) over emotionally resonant ones (like persecution), or it could reflect a more cautious stance on explicitly endorsing Duterte's defense rhetoric.

Overall, The Philippine Star presents a framing pattern that leans more toward defending national sovereignty while still acknowledging the legal and accountability dimensions of the case. Its editorial approach appears to offer a distinct voice in the media landscape, one that emphasizes the geopolitical implications of international law enforcement in the Philippine context.

3.2. Tone analysis of news articles from the news media outlets

In reporting on Rodrigo Duterte's arrest by the ICC, Philippine news media adopted varying tones that shaped how audiences interpreted both the legal process and Duterte's legacy. Tone, in this context, refers to the general attitude or orientation of a news article toward Duterte and the ICC case. For this study, coverage was classified into three tonal categories: Supportive of Duterte, Critical of Duterte, and Neutral.

3.2.1. Supportive of Duterte Tone

News articles with a supportive tone tended to emphasize Duterte's entitlement to legal protections and fair treatment throughout the ICC proceedings. Several articles underscored that the former president was "informed of his rights" (Geducos, 2025c), was "given more privileges than ordinary suspect" (Aurelio & de Villa, 2025), and was "given due process by the ICC...a normal process where a court gives a person the opportunity to respond to the accusations against him" (Ager, 2025).

Coverage also highlighted the public support Duterte continues to receive, including prayer vigils organized by allies and loyal supporters. Manila Bulletin highlighted this in one article, stating that his supporters "held a candle-lighting and prayer vigil for the former president... and performed songs, including Celine Dion's 'Immortality'" (Manila Bulletin, 2025).

In these narratives, the principle of presumption of innocence is invoked, with the argument that, like any accused individual, he has the right to a fair and speedy trial. This tone generally framed the legal process as ongoing and unresolved, cautioning against premature judgment while reaffirming his status as a former head of state deserving equal protection under the law. The Philippine star reflected this in a news report referencing the ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan:

Excerpt 16:

As the international tribunal heads to the next phase of proceedings, Khan underscored that the former president is presumed innocent and will make his initial appearance before the court soon. Khan said his office's investigation is still ongoing. (Chi, 2025d)

3.2.2. Critical of Duterte Tone

Articles reflecting a critical tone often emphasized the seriousness of the charges against Duterte and highlighted how his arrest was seen as a milestone by local and international human rights watchdogs. These reports framed the event not only as a legal proceeding but also as a symbolic shift in the country's accountability landscape. A Philippine Star report, for example, described Duterte's hearing as the beginning of a protracted legal battle and a possible moment of reckoning for victims of his anti-drug campaign and state-sponsored violence.

Excerpt 17:

This hearing marks the start of a long legal battle in The Hague—an era of reckoning for victims of Duterte's brutal anti-drug campaign and other forms of state-sponsored violence during his regime. (Visto, 2025)

Some narratives drew attention to Duterte's physical appearance during his arrest, with an article from the Philippine Daily Inquirer describing him as visibly "sluggish, sleepy...appearing frail... and noticeably listless" (de Villa, 2025c), which stood in stark contrast to his previously dominant public persona. This contrast was often used to underscore the gravity of his current legal situation, which was depicted as an uphill battle with potentially long-lasting implications.

Reports with this tone frequently included statements from advocacy groups that welcomed the arrest as a long-awaited development in the fight against impunity, portraying it as a sign that even powerful figures can be held to account under international law. Another Philippine Daily Inquirer report, for example, highlighted the response of faith-based groups to Duterte's arrest, framing it as a moment of moral and social significance.

Excerpt 18:

A group of church leaders on Tuesday said that the arrest of former President Rodrigo Duterte for alleged crimes against humanity upholds “God’s gift to human dignity.” The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) said that they stand in solidarity with the families of the victims of Duterte’s drug war and that they affirm the sanctity of human life through human rights. (Sampang, 2025)

3.2.3. Neutral Tone

In some articles, a neutral stance was maintained by acknowledging that “Duterte’s arrest has been widely divisive” (Sarao, 2025), while emphasizing the importance of allowing legal proceedings to “unfold without outside influence” (Geducos, 2025d). These narratives underscored that Duterte’s fate is now in the hands of the court, not the media or public opinion. Even the former president urged his supporters “not to interfere in his case before the International Criminal Court (ICC),” as reported by Manila Bulletin (Geducos, 2025b).

The coverage often reiterated that the role of the court is to examine the evidence impartially, reinforcing that only the judges are empowered to issue a decision on the case. This tone avoids taking a firm position on guilt or innocence, instead presenting the situation as a matter of ongoing legal proceedings. As The Philippine Star reports:

Excerpt 19:

While former President Rodrigo Duterte's camp questions the legality of his arrest by the International Criminal Court (ICC), the tribunal’s spokesperson said only its judges can rule on the matter. (Flores, 2025b)

This is also echoed in another The Philippine Star article that noted:

Excerpt 20:

During the hearing, the prosecution will present evidence for each charge, while the defense may object, challenge the evidence or present its own. Based on the proceedings, the Pre-Trial Chamber will either confirm or dismiss the charges. (Flores, 2025c)

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of the tonal categories for each media outlet:

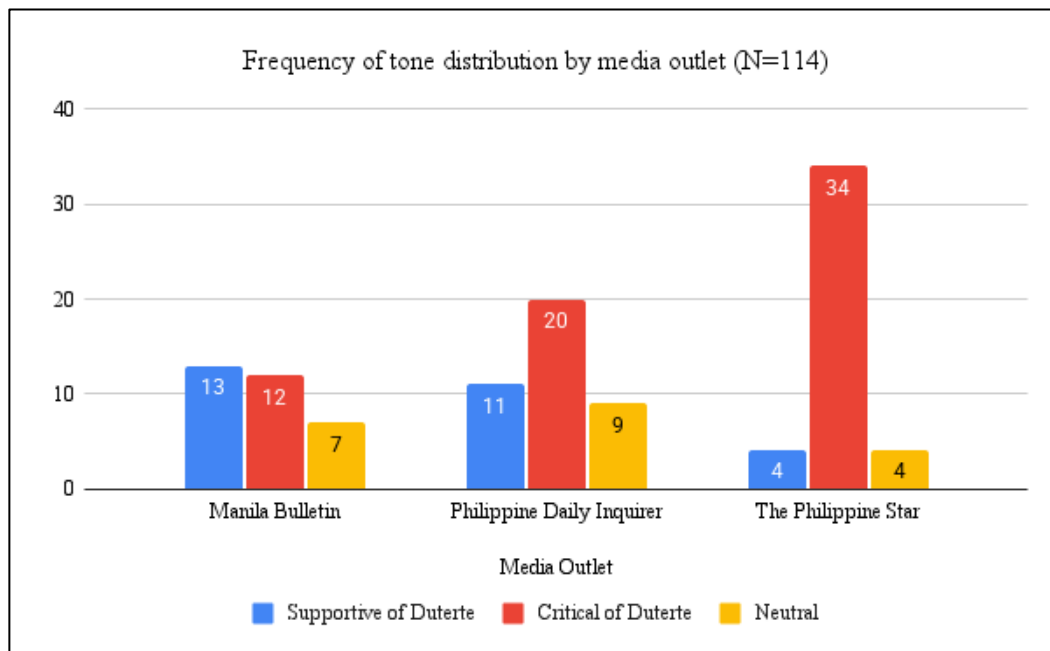


Figure 2: Frequency of tone distribution by media outlet.

3.2.4. Manila Bulletin

Manila Bulletin presented the most balanced distribution of tones among the three outlets. Of its 32 articles, 13 (40.63%) were supportive of Duterte, 12 (37.5%) critical of Duterte, and 7 (21.88%) neutral. This near-equal representation of supportive and critical of Duterte perspectives reflects an editorial approach that accommodates competing narratives while still maintaining space for neutral reportage. The relatively high percentage of pro-Duterte articles suggests the Bulletin was more receptive to Duterte-aligned framings compared to its counterparts.

3.2.5. Philippine Daily Inquirer

Philippine Daily Inquirer showed a marked inclination toward critical reporting. Of its 40 articles, 20 (50%) were critical of Duterte, compared to 11 (27.5%) that are supportive of Duterte and 9 (22.5%) neutral. The dominance of the tone critical of Duterte aligns with the Inquirer's long-standing tradition of watchdog journalism and human rights advocacy. The presence of both supportive and neutral tones, however, points to a continued effort to reflect multiple voices and maintain journalistic balance despite a clear editorial leaning.

3.2.6. The Philippine Star

The Philippine Star stood out for its overwhelmingly critical coverage. Among its 42 articles, 34 (80.95%) employed the critical of Duterte tone, which is the highest proportion among all news outlets. Only 4 articles each (9.52%) fell into the supportive of Duterte and neutral tones. This distribution suggests a strong editorial emphasis on accountability and legal scrutiny, with minimal space allocated to either sympathetic narratives or dispassionate reporting. The Philippine Star's tone distribution signals a clear positioning in favor of international justice and a critical appraisal of Duterte's human rights record.

In sum, while all three newspapers reported on the ICC case with varying degrees of critical engagement, the Philippine Star was the most critical, the Inquirer maintained a strong but more balanced opposition, and Manila Bulletin provided the most even distribution of tones, including the highest proportion of articles supportive of Duterte. These differences highlight how editorial and institutional orientations influence not just what is reported, but how it is told.

4. Summary of Findings

This study reveals how Philippine print media construct competing narratives around Rodrigo Duterte's ICC arrest, with coverage shaped by both framing strategies and tonal orientation. Across three leading news media outlets—Manila Bulletin, Philippine Daily Inquirer, and The Philippine Star—the most dominant frame was Legitimacy and Accountability, underscoring the ICC's role in pursuing justice for human rights violations linked to Duterte's war on drugs. This framing presents the arrest as a lawful and necessary response to impunity, and it aligns with international norms of legal redress and institutional oversight.

In contrast, two counter-frames—Victimization and Political Persecution and Sovereignty and Nationalism—emerged less frequently but were strategically deployed, particularly in publications more sympathetic to Duterte. The former emphasized Duterte as a target of unjust foreign intervention, while the latter stressed Philippine autonomy and challenged the ICC's jurisdiction. The Philippine Star notably elevated the sovereignty frame, highlighting postcolonial and jurisdictional concerns, while Manila Bulletin and Inquirer leaned more toward legal and rights-based perspectives.

In terms of tone, the study found that articles using tone critical of Duterte dominated overall coverage, comprising more than half of the sample. These articles framed the ICC proceedings as a necessary step toward justice and were often grounded in critical, rights-based reporting. The tone supportive of Duterte appeared in nearly a quarter of the articles, reflecting narratives aligned with political persecution and sovereign defiance. The neutral tone—marked by procedural reporting and minimal evaluative language—was the least common, suggesting that most news coverage leaned toward interpretive, value-laden accounts of the ICC investigation.

These trends varied significantly across media outlets. The Philippine Star was the most critical in tone, with over 80% of its articles adopting a critical of Duterte stance. The Philippine Daily Inquirer maintained a strong but more balanced critique, while Manila Bulletin offered the most even distribution of perspectives, including the highest proportion of pro-Duterte coverage. The framing and tone differences across outlets highlight the influence of editorial positioning on how media shape public understanding of international legal interventions.

Together, the findings point to a polarized media landscape and underscore the complex role of Philippine media in navigating between journalistic responsibility, political narratives, and democratic accountability in the face of global legal scrutiny.

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Future Directions

The findings above reveal implications significant for press freedom and democratic accountability. First, the diversity of frames and tones suggests that despite mounting political pressure during and after Duterte's administration, Philippine news media outlets have retained a degree of independence in voicing dissent and engaging with international legal discourse. The prevalence of critical framing and tone—especially in The Philippine Star and Philippine Daily Inquirer—demonstrates the press's potential as a watchdog in democratic society. However, the presence of pro-Duterte and sovereignty-focused narratives also highlights the persistent vulnerability of media to nationalist rhetoric and political influence, which may hinder public understanding of global justice mechanisms.

From a democratic standpoint, the media's ability to present multiple narratives—particularly those centered on accountability—can help cultivate a politically literate public that is attuned to the consequences of state violence and the demands of transitional justice. At the same time, the unequal distribution of tone and framing across media outlets underscores the need for greater scrutiny of media ownership, editorial autonomy, and structural biases that shape reporting in high-stakes political and legal contexts.

Future research can expand on this study by examining broadcast and digital media platforms, where audience reach and engagement may differ significantly from print. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track how framing and tone evolve as the ICC investigation progresses or as political administrations change. Ultimately, comparative analyses with other countries facing ICC scrutiny may also yield insights into how national media systems mediate between global justice institutions and domestic political dynamics.

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The Right of Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities: Case Study of Vietnam

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Abstract

The right of access to justice constitutes a fundamental human right, firmly established in numerous international legal instruments and widely recognised within the domestic legal frameworks of many nations. Individuals with disabilities, owing to their physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial impairments—combined with prevailing societal stigma and systemic barriers—are disproportionately vulnerable to social exclusion and often face significant obstacles in exercising their right to justice on an equal footing with others. This article undertakes a comprehensive analysis and critical evaluation of the current legal provisions and institutional measures implemented in Vietnam to safeguard access to justice for persons with disabilities. Drawing upon this assessment, the article puts forward a set of targeted recommendations aimed at enhancing the national legal framework, strengthening institutional capacity, and fostering a more inclusive and accessible justice system that fully upholds the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

Keywords: Ensuring, Right, Disabilities, Legal Framework

1. Introduction

The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) is the first legal instrument to comprehensively and fairly recognize the rights of persons with disabilities across all aspects of life. The bill has specific protections to guarantee persons with disabilities access to justice. Immediately after the Convention was approved by the United Nations General Assembly, Vietnam promptly followed suit, marking a significant step forward in the country's process of integrating protections of human rights by international standards, particularly with regard to the rights of persons with disabilities. Vietnam has consistently made efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, as reflected most noticeably in the promulgation and refinement of its policy and legal framework. This article does not aim to provide a broad overview of the protection of all rights of persons with disabilities, but rather focuses on a specific right - the right of access to justice. It examines the current situation in ensuring this right for persons with disabilities in Vietnam and puts forward appropriate recommendations.

The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) represents a historic milestone in the global recognition of the inherent dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. As the first comprehensive international legal instrument dedicated to the full spectrum of rights for individuals with disabilities, the CRPD enshrines their

entitlement to equal participation in all areas of life, including education, employment, healthcare, political engagement, and, notably, access to justice. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 and entering into force in 2008, the Convention reflects a paradigmatic shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach to disability. It challenges states to dismantle legal, institutional and societal barriers and to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

2. An Overview of the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities

2.1. Concept

“Justice” is a complex and abstract term, and to this day, there is yet to be an universally agreed-upon definition. From a linguistic perspective, “justice” is defined as: “...*rightness, fairness, impartiality, objectivity, and the absence of bias*” (Vietnamese Dictionary, 1999); or as “... *the recognition and respect, in accordance with what is right, for the rights and interests of all people*” (Nguyen Lan. Prof, 2006); or as “*a principle in accordance with morality and the common interests of society*” (Institute of Linguistics, 2000). At the individual level, justice is regarded as a fundamental moral virtue, reflecting a commitment to fairness and ethical conduct. From a societal perspective, it is conceptualized as a normative ideal or collective value toward which communities aspire in order to preserve social order and foster sustainable development. Legally, justice is understood to operate both alongside and independently of formal legal systems, indicating that the existence of law does not necessarily guarantee the realization of justice. While the law is built and refined to reflect and protect justice, justice itself serves as a benchmark and standard for assessing the fairness and progressiveness of a country's legal system. Therefore, justice can be understood as righteousness, fairness, and what is morally right and aligned with the common good of society. On the other hand, there is currently no official definition for the “right of access to justice”. Discussions around this concept still vary between viewpoints and approaches, most notably those that interpret it broadly and narrowly.

In a broader context, the right of access to justice extends beyond mere access to courts and judicial bodies in cases of rights violations. It also encompasses the ability to engage with various institutions within the political system and to benefit from the humane, progressive, civilized, and ethical values that underpin a just and equitable social order. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined: “*Access to justice is the ability of people to seek and obtain remedies for grievances through formal or informal institutions of justice, including institutions such as investigation, prosecution, and adjudication bodies, as well as non-formal mechanisms like national human rights institutions or parliamentary oversight bodies, adhering to human rights standards*”. According to UNDP, ensuring access to justice for citizens, especially vulnerable social groups, is one of the important responsibilities of governments.

In a narrow sense, the right of access to justice is understood as the right to a fair trial, as acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (Articles 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 (Articles 14, 15, and 16) as a fundamental human right. This right is also recognized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2007, the first convention specifically dedicated to a group with distinct physical characteristics and a higher risk of rights violations compared to other members of society (Articles 12 and 13). In Vietnam, while the right of access to justice is not explicitly defined in statutory law, it is implicitly embodied in the right to a fair trial as stipulated in Article 31 of the 2013 Constitution, the nation's supreme legal document. This constitutional provision establishes a foundational link between access to justice and the legal protection of individuals. However, such protection is predominantly confined to access to judicial services, allowing individuals to exercise specific procedural rights within the formal justice system. This interpretation aligns with the conventional understanding of access to justice, which is widely recognized in the constitutional and legal frameworks of numerous jurisdictions.

Overall, the right of access to justice can be understood as the right to access legal mechanisms in both substance and procedure, and to benefit equally from the law through a system of legal norms that ensure every citizen has the opportunity to seek fairness, justice, and values consistent with morality and the common good of society.

Regarding the definition of “persons with disabilities”, Article 1 of the CRPD states: “Persons with disabilities

include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” In Vietnam, the Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010) defines a person with disabilities as: “A person who has an impairment in one or more body parts or a functional decline, which is exhibited in the form of a disability, causing difficulties in working, daily life, and learning” (Clause 1, Article 2). Therefore, a person is identified as disabled based on functional impairments in body parts, typically shown in conditions such as hearing loss or visual impairment, which create obstacles to employment, education, or daily activities.

Based on the above analysis, the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities can be understood as a legally protected right, one that ensures equal access to procedural and substantive legal mechanisms through the legal system, and equal treatment in judicial proceedings. This right serves to protect individuals with impairments affecting one or more parts of the body, or with functional limitations categorized as disabilities, which hinder their ability to work, study, or perform daily activities. The core components of this right include: equality before the law and non-discrimination; the right to legal aid and the right to reasonable conditions throughout legal proceedings.

The term “ensuring” can be interpreted as the act of ensuring that something is fulfilled, preserved, or adequately provided. In this context, ensuring the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities refers to the obligation of the State and other relevant stakeholders to establish, implement, comply, and promote the necessary measures to protect the lawful rights and interests of individuals who have impairments or functional limitations that manifest as disabilities, causing difficulty in employment, education, or daily life. This is achieved through the legal framework and the guarantee of fair adjudication by relevant state authorities.

2.2. Justice for persons with disabilities in Vietnam

Persons with disabilities are a group vulnerable to harm within society which have the right to access justice on an equal footing with other members of society. To ensure the effective realization of this right, several critical conditions must be satisfied: *First, establishing a mechanism that ensures equality between persons with disabilities and other members of society.* This requirement stems from the fact that persons with disabilities possess distinct characteristics compared to others. Therefore, ensuring equality means providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to be treated equally, not only under the law, but also economically, politically, culturally, and other domains. This is not a matter of preferential treatment or “favoritism,” but rather a reflection of the State’s attention to and responsibility for safeguarding the human rights of a vulnerable group.

Improving the legal framework is a critical requirement for every nation in promoting human rights in general, and the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in particular. Law is not merely a tool of the State, it is an institutional framework for realizing human rights and defining the responsibilities of public authorities. A well-developed legal system provides the foundation for persons with disabilities to fully enjoy their rights across all areas of life, on an equal basis with others. This is an essential and objective requirement in the process of building a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam.

Raising awareness among both persons with disabilities and the broader society is vital to the realization of the right to access justice. This involves dismantling societal prejudices and removing invisible barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully exercising their legal rights. Simultaneously, empowering persons with disabilities through legal education enables them to understand and assert their rights effectively. Public understanding and recognition of these rights are essential for fostering a non-discriminatory judicial system and embedding legal protections into everyday practice.

Establishing and kickstart the functioning of institutional mechanisms that guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities. These institutions include state agencies, particularly those with authority in judicial proceedings such as courts, procuracies, and investigative bodies. There should be dedicated departments or specialized personnel within these institutions to support persons with disabilities. Additionally, organizations dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities should be established to assist state bodies in disseminating legal knowledge and

organizing educational sessions to raise awareness, not only among persons with disabilities but society at large. Furthermore, it is essential to establish an independent oversight body to monitor the implementation of these legal provisions, ensuring they are enforced in practice. A national human rights institution is a common model in many countries which can play a significant role in promoting human rights in broad, and in safeguarding the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in particular.

The importance of ensuring access to justice for persons with disabilities extends beyond individual rights, bearing significant implications for the State and society at large.

For persons with disabilities, adequate legal safeguards are essential to overcoming systemic barriers and achieving full societal participation. In the absence of such protections, individuals may be denied recognition and subjected to unequal treatment. Conversely, when access to justice is assured, persons with disabilities are empowered to live with dignity, participate meaningfully in society, and no longer feel marginalized or burdensome.

For the State, guaranteeing access to justice affirms its progressive nature and strengthens its ability to meet international human rights obligations, particularly those under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which Vietnam is a signatory.

For society, upholding the right to access justice reflects core values of equality and fairness. Effective implementation of this right contributes to the reduction of discrimination and stigma, thereby fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and humane social order. Ultimately, it supports the broader national objective of building a democratic, just, and civilized society.

3. Current situation of ensuring the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in Vietnam

3.1. The legal framework for ensuring the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities

Since joining the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and following its ratification by the National Assembly of Vietnam in 2014 through Resolution No. 84/2014/QH13, Vietnam has continued to develop and implement policies aimed at enhancing care and support for persons with disabilities. These efforts are intended to create favorable conditions for persons with disabilities to exercise their right of access to justice in practice. Nevertheless, Vietnam's legal system has yet to explicitly recognize the concept of the “right of access to justice” in general, and specifically the “right of access to justice for persons with disabilities.” However, as a member of international human rights conventions, particularly as an active member in the CRPD, Vietnam places great importance on the fulfillment and enforcement of its international obligations. Even though the aforementioned concepts may not yet be explicitly ratified, the Constitution and Vietnamese law consistently put emphasis on the fundamental values of human rights, democracy, equality, justice, progress, and non-discrimination across all areas of social and economic life. In this context, the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities is reflected in Vietnamese law through the recognition and protection of specific rights and aspects of law, including:

The right to equality before the Law and Non-Discrimination

The right to equality before the law and non-discrimination is enshrined in Article 16 of the 2013 Constitution of Vietnam the highest legal authority in the country, states that “*Everyone is equal before the law*” and “*No one shall be discriminated against in political, civil, economic, cultural, or social life.*” As human beings, persons with disabilities are entitled to fairness and must not be discriminated against on the basis of their impairments. In order to uphold the constitutional principles and demonstrate the State's commitment to supporting vulnerable groups, Vietnam has issued a broad array of legal instruments such as the 2015 Penal Code, 2015 Civil Code, 2019 Labour Code, 2015 Criminal Procedure Code, and 2015 Civil Procedure Code. These procedural laws consistently affirm the right of every individual to a fair and public trial. Notably, the Law on Persons with Disabilities 2010 guarantees the right of persons with disabilities to “*participate equally in all social activities*” and strictly prohibits

all acts of “*stigmatization or discrimination against persons with disabilities*” (Law on Persons with Disabilities, 2010).

These provisions increasingly align Vietnam’s domestic legal framework with key international legal instruments to which the country is a member, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the ICCPR, and especially the CRPD. Equality and non-discrimination are core guiding principles that permeate the CRPD. Article 5 of the Convention explicitly states: “*1. Members recognize that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. 2. Members shall prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.*” While Vietnamese law has made notable progress in recognizing the right to equality and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities, it still lacks a dedicated, specific, and comprehensive legal provision that clearly defines this right for this distinct group. As a result, the implementation of such rights can often remain abstract and lacking in enforceable legal mechanisms, which risks creating a situation where equality exists in principle but not fully in practice.

The right to legal aid.

The right to legal aid for persons with disabilities is recognized in international law both as a fundamental human right and as a means to support other human rights (Mai, 2024). This right is outlined in various international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the CRPD (2007), the ICCPR (1966), the ICESCR (1966), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). Given that persons with disabilities are at higher risk of discrimination and violations of their rights and interests, legal aid is considered one of the most effective tools to ensure their access to justice.

According to Article 2 of the Law on Legal Aid 2017, the term “legal aid” is defined as “*the provision of free legal services to eligible individuals in legal aid cases as prescribed by this Law, contributing to the protection of human rights and citizens’ rights in access to justice and equality before the law.*” Furthermore, providing legal aid to persons with disabilities is considered a “*responsibility of the State*” (Law on Legal Aid, 2017). This highlights that legal aid is not merely a humanitarian act or a form of social support, but a legal obligation of the State. Forms of legal aid include legal consultation, participation in legal proceedings, and non-litigation representation in all legal areas except for business and commerce (Law on Legal Aid, 2017).

The right to legal aid for persons with disabilities is recognized under Point d, Clause 1, Article 4 of the Law on Persons with Disabilities 2010, which identifies persons with disabilities as naturally eligible for legal aid services. However, Article 7 of the Law on Legal Aid 2017 provides that only persons with disabilities who meet one of the following additional conditions are entitled to legal aid: “*1. People with meritorious service to the revolution. 2. Members of poor households. 3. Children. 4. Ethnic minorities residing in areas with extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. 5. Persons charged with a criminal offense aged 16 to under 18. 6. Persons charged with a criminal offense who belong to near-poor households. 7. Individuals in financial difficulty who fall into one of the following categories: a) Parents, spouses, or children of martyrs and caregivers of martyrs when they were young; b) Victims of Agent Orange; c) Elderly persons; d) Persons with disabilities; đ) Persons aged 16 to under 18 who are victims in criminal cases; e) Victims of domestic violence; g) Victims of human trafficking as defined in the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking; h) Persons living with HIV.*” As such, there are still inconsistencies in how the law defines persons with disabilities as subjects entitled to legal aid. The lack of uniformity and coherence between different legal documents has affected the understanding and implementation of this right for a portion of the disabled population. Consequently, this creates confusion and inconsistency in practice, undermining the effective enforcement of the right to legal aid for persons with disabilities.

The right to reasonable accommodation during legal proceedings.

In the field of litigation, Article 20 of the 2015 Civil Procedure Code grants persons with hearing, speech, or visual impairments the right to use language, signs, or characters specifically designed for persons with disabilities during proceedings, and provides for the arrangement of interpreters who understand these means of communication.

Similarly, the 2015 Criminal Procedure Code includes provisions for interpretation at trial. Article 263 requires that if the accused, victims, related parties, or witnesses do not understand Vietnamese or are mute or deaf, interpreters must convey to them the statements, questions, answers, court decisions, and other relevant content in a way they can understand. This ensures that the intentions of persons with disabilities are conveyed accurately, which is important to ensure mutual understanding during litigation and that trials are conducted objectively, fairly, and transparently (Binh, 2022).

Additionally, due to the specific nature of their impairments, persons with hearing disabilities may face challenges in language or communication during proceedings. The issue of sign language is addressed in Clause 4, Article 30 of the CRPD, which states that “Persons with disabilities have the right to recognition and support of their specific linguistic and cultural identity, including sign languages for hearing impaired persons.” According to the 2015 Civil Procedure Code, procedural documents such as notices, summonses, invitations, judgments, court decisions, prosecutorial protests, and documents from enforcement agencies must be delivered or notified to persons with disabilities using the following methods “1. direct delivery, by postal service, or through an authorized third party; 2. electronic means upon request, in line with the law on electronic transactions; 3. public posting; 4. announcements via mass media; and 5. other methods provided under Chapter XXXVIII of the Code” (Article 173 Civil Procedure Code, 2015). The 2015 Criminal Procedure Code also outlines the delivery of court decisions to defendants or their representatives, and to defense counsels, victims, and related parties within legal deadlines to allow them to exercise their rights and obligations (Article 286 Criminal Procedure Code, 2015). These provisions help ensure timely access to notifications and legal information during proceedings for all individuals, including persons with disabilities.

In general, Vietnam’s legal framework on the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities is increasingly comprehensive and aligned with international legal standards. This is an important foundation for pushing this right in practice and affirms the Vietnamese State’s efforts in advancing human rights. However, few legal shortcomings remain, from the definition of persons with disabilities to the specific provisions on their right to access justice, which continue to pose challenges to effective implementation. For instance, the absence of a clear and comprehensive legal framework to prevent all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities is a significant gap. Existing legal documents do not yet clearly stipulate mechanisms for individuals or organizations to file complaints or lawsuits in cases of discrimination. Furthermore, some discriminatory acts are still not addressed in current laws, making it difficult to prevent or deal with them in practice. The lack of clearly defined coordination and oversight mechanisms also significantly affects the assurance of the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities.

3.2. The current situation of ensuring the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in Vietnam

According to the National Survey on persons with disabilities in Vietnam conducted by the General Statistics Office in the 2023, there are approximately 7 million persons over 16 years old with disabilities across the country (The Association for the Support of Vietnamese Handicapped and Orphans, 2023).

Table 1: Disability rate by function and age group in 2023 (%)

Function/Group	Age 2-4	Age 5-15	Age 16+
Overall	4,44	1,56	7,31
<i>Including</i>			
Visual	0,01	0,09	1,14
Hearing	0,12	0,19	2,21
Lower limb mobility	0,30	0,44	5,20
Cognition	0,34	0,59	2,68
Communication	0,62	0,47	1,10
Self-care		0,48	1,51
Upper limb mobility	0,13		2,34
Neurological	3,92	1,05	0,48

Multiple functional disabilities	0,38	0,64	3,65
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Source: Based on calculations from VDS 2023 data

The table above shows that disability types are numerous and diverse. Therefore, to ensure the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities, it is essential to establish appropriate mechanisms, policies, public infrastructure, and support measures tailored to each specific type of disability. In order to gradually ensure the rights of persons with disabilities more effectively, the State has been actively implementing and enhancing policies aimed at promoting care and support for persons with disabilities, thereby creating favorable conditions for them to exercise their right of access to justice. Legal documents issued by central authorities serve as the foundation for local state management agencies to carry out concrete actions. Most local authorities have issued various implementation guidelines and detailed regulations concerning the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities, particularly regarding the right to legal aid.

At present, legal aid is provided through the Legal Aid Centers and Legal Aid Participating Organizations. As of the end of 2023, all 63 provinces and cities in Vietnam have established Legal Aid Centers, staffed by a wide range of officials, legal aid lawyers, and other personnel involved in legal aid activities. Most legal aid cases have been assessed as meeting acceptable or higher standards of quality and have not been subject to complaints or denunciations. In many cases, the courts have handed down lighter sentences, reclassified charges, or applied more lenient sentencing frameworks than those recommended by the People's Procuracy (National legal aid agency, 2024).

Through the coordinated and effective implementation of various forms of legal aid, local authorities have focused on the core task of legal aid services, particularly participation in legal proceedings. From 2018 to June 2024, legal aid organizations across the country have provided nearly 213,000 legal aid cases, of which over 120,000 involved participation in legal proceedings (accounting for 56.4%). In terms of beneficiaries, since the implementation of the Law on Legal Aid in 2017, approximately 12,800 persons with disabilities facing financial hardship have received legal aid (Thanh, 2025).

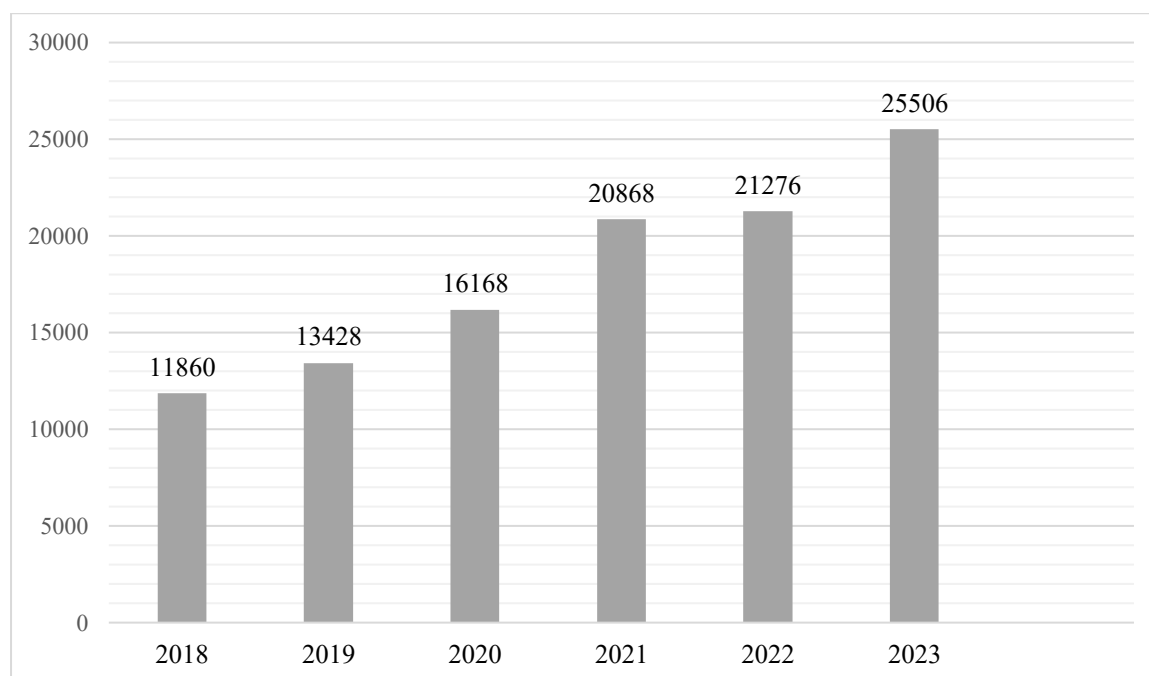


Figure 1: Legal Aid in Procedural Matters for Persons with Disabilities from 2018 to 2023

Source: Thanh, T.T. (2025). Solutions to ensure the right to legal aid in the new period. *Journal of Democracy and Law*, No.420 – 2025

These figures demonstrate that legal aid services are increasingly becoming a practical tool for protecting the legal rights and legitimate interests of aid recipients in general, and of persons with disabilities in particular. In doing

so, legal aid contributes significantly to ensuring human rights, citizenship rights, and equality among different groups in society, especially for persons with disabilities, who are among the most vulnerable.

Nevertheless, despite these achievements, practical implementation has revealed that Vietnam's legal framework on the rights of persons with disabilities still faces several limitations as follows:

There are limitations in accessing and utilizing legal aid services due to the uneven distribution of legal aid centers, especially in rural, mountainous, remote, and economically disadvantaged areas. Additionally, the management of legal aid service quality has not received adequate attention and has yet to be implemented regularly and consistently. As a result, a portion of persons with disabilities remain unaware of their right to legal aid or, even if they are aware, are unable to access these services due to insufficient outreach, dissemination, and education efforts, which often fail to align with the needs of different types of disabilities.

The management, inspection, evaluation, and quality assessment of legal aid services has not been sufficiently prioritized or routinely carried out. Although Vietnam has a population of over 101 million people, the number of legal aid centers remains relatively limited. Despite the presence of these centers in all centrally governed provinces and cities, they still fall short of meeting the actual needs of many localities. This has made it difficult for persons with disabilities to access and utilize legal aid services. While the number of legal aid providers continues to grow annually, it remains modest relative to the needs of a densely populated country like Vietnam. Moreover, most legal aid professionals are concentrated in major cities, which presents significant obstacles to the handling of cases in densely populated or hard-to-reach areas.

The current court system in Vietnam still does not ensure easy and convenient access for persons with disabilities. This remains one of the major barriers to ensuring their right to access to justice. In practice, courtrooms are often located on upper floors, posing significant difficulties for individuals with mobility impairments, especially those who are visually impaired or wheelchair users who face considerable inconvenience in reaching these spaces. Additionally, auxiliary facilities such as restrooms, holding cells, entrances, elevators, and other infrastructure within courts, police stations, procuracies, and administrative agencies are not yet appropriately designed to accommodate persons with disabilities (Bình, 2022). These shortcomings highlight the lack of consistency in policy and implementation regarding access to public buildings, an issue already emphasized in the 2010 Law on Persons with Disabilities and the CRPD.

4. Some recommendations to ensure the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in Vietnam

Vietnam should revise the statutory definition of "person with a disability" to capture both the impairment-specific and socially constructed barriers that restrict equal participation. Aligning the domestic definition with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) would ensure that the legal system recognises all relevant forms of long-term physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial impairments and the interactive barriers they encounter. Such alignment would also emphasise the overarching principle of substantive equality, thereby providing a firmer doctrinal basis for subsequent legislative and policy reforms.. More detail, it could be amended as follows: *"A person with a disability is someone who has a long-term physical, neurological, intellectual, or sensory impairment, which, in interaction with various barriers, hinders their participation in society on an equal basis with others."*

Vietnamese law should consider adding explicit provisions on the right of access to justice in general, and the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities in particular. The concept of "access to justice" in this context can be approached in a narrow sense, referring specifically to the right to a fair trial and the right to equal access to the judicial system. This content is already articulated in Article 13 of the CRPD, which requires State Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to justice and are provided with the necessary support throughout legal proceedings. Therefore, incorporating this provision into Vietnamese law would not only fulfill international obligations but also demonstrate the State's strong commitment to upholding human rights and citizens' rights. At the same time, it would reflect the progressiveness and humanistic view of the national legal system. Once the right of access to justice is formally recognized, it can serve as a legal basis on the constitutional

principle that “*everyone is equal before the law*”, for persons with disabilities to be fully acknowledged as equal right-holders under the law, entitled to legal protection of this right.

It is recommended that the State consider the promulgation of a comprehensive Law on Anti-Discrimination. Currently, Vietnam lacks a standalone legal instrument specifically dedicated to addressing discrimination. Instead, anti-discrimination provisions are dispersed across various sector-specific laws, each employing distinct mechanisms and approaches based on the respective regulatory domain. This fragmented legal framework may limit the coherence and effectiveness of efforts to combat discrimination comprehensively and uniformly across different sectors of society.

In order to ensure the rights to equality and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities, it is necessary to establish a unified legal framework that clearly defines and prohibits discriminatory acts. Moreover, a dedicated law would introduce specific oversight mechanisms and penalties applicable to discriminatory behavior in general, and against persons with disabilities in particular. This would provide a solid legal foundation for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and ensuring their equal treatment in all aspects of life.

The State should consider expanding the number of legal aid centers, particularly in areas with high populations of persons with disabilities or in remote regions where access to legal aid services remains limited. This measure not only aims to meet the growing legal support needs of persons with disabilities but also aligns with the broader goal of building a fair and inclusive legal aid system. Such a system would reflect the commitment to protecting groups with unique characteristics compared to other members of society. To realize this proposal, the State needs to adopt policies that enhance financial resources and implement strategies to attract, train, and retain qualified legal professionals. This would ensure the stable and sustainable operation of legal aid centers and contribute to the comprehensive and substantive realization of the right of access to justice.

It is necessary to synchronize the system and ensure that the design of public facilities and infrastructure within state agencies, and more specifically judicial bodies is accessible and suitable for persons with disabilities. Improving the legal framework and standards is essential to guarantee that all citizens, regardless of physical condition, can access state institutions equally. This not only fulfills legal obligations but also demonstrates the State’s commitment to inclusivity and equal participation.

It is essential to further strengthen legal dissemination, public education, and awareness-raising efforts to enhance understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly the right of access to justice. In the context of Vietnam’s rapid transformation and the remarkable advancement of digital technology, legal communication strategies must also be modernized in both form and medium. This includes applying technology to reach persons with disabilities in ways that are appropriate for each type of disability. Legal education initiatives should not only target persons with disabilities but also their families and society as a whole. Additionally, content on the rights of persons with disabilities should be integrated into training programs for public officials and civil servants working in the justice, health, and education sectors through regular training sessions, as well as short and long-term courses. This is not only a measure to raise awareness, but also a long-term recommendation for building a fair, democratic, and civilized society.

Ensuring the right of access to justice for persons with disabilities is not only a crucial aspect of protecting human rights but also a key requirement and objective of the State in building and improving a socialist rule-of-law state, aligned with the context of globalization and international integration. From the current situation of ensuring access to justice for persons with disabilities in Vietnam, it is clear that the legal framework has incorporated a number of provisions and policies aimed at supporting and safeguarding this group’s ability to exercise their rights. However, the realization of this right is still affected to some extent by various factors such as economic and social conditions, public awareness, and even the awareness of persons with disabilities themselves. Therefore, it is essential to implement a comprehensive set of legal and practical measures to improve the legal system and enhance the effectiveness of ensuring access to justice for this group.

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The Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Connecting Central Asia with South Asia

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Abstract

Afghanistan is one of the few countries in the world that holds an exceptionally important geostrategic position for linking various geographic regions of Asia and beyond. Geostrategically located at one of the most sensitive points in the world, Afghanistan connects four major regions of Asia: Central Asia, East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia. Among these, its role in connecting Central Asia and South Asia is of particular and outstanding significance. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the present study seeks to answer the following question: What role does Afghanistan's geostrategic position play in connecting Central Asia with South Asia? The hypothesis of this research is that Afghanistan, by virtue of its central location in Asia and its substantial capacities in political, security, economic, and cultural dimensions, can play a key role in facilitating and completing the process of integration between Central and South Asia. This includes fostering convergence in these dimensions and improving the level of stability and the quality of life for the citizens of both regions. Ultimately, such integration may contribute not only to better living conditions for the people of Central and South Asia but also to broader regional stability across both regions and the Asian continent as a whole. This study is conducted through a synthesis of Mackinder's Heartland Theory and the concept of New Regionalism. Methodologically, the research is applied in terms of its objective, descriptive-analytical in nature, and relies on documentary and library-based methods for data collection.

Keywords: Geostrategic, Afghanistan, Central Asia, South Asia, Convergence

1. Introduction

Afghanistan is one of the oldest and most strategic countries in the world. Throughout its long and rich history, it has played a central role in Asia and the broader world as an essential part of a great global civilization. Due to its unique geographical location within the Asian continent, Afghanistan has consistently served as a hub for political, commercial, cultural, and even military exchanges among various civilizations and cultures. Due to its geographical location along the historic Silk Road, Afghanistan has long held a unique significance as a crossroads of major cultures and civilizations. Throughout various periods, it has served as a regional crossroads, notably both before and after the advent of Islam, and has been recognized as one of the greatest centers of civilization. In ancient times, Afghanistan was the convergence point of the Persian, Greek, and Chinese empires, and during the Islamic era, it was acknowledged as one of the foremost scientific and cultural centers of the Islamic world. In the

contemporary era, Afghanistan continues to play a crucial role as a significant and strategic country in Asia, serving as a key connector between several important Asian regions, including West Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia.

Afghanistan, due to its connections with multiple regional systems, has consistently been at the forefront of global attention and is considered one of the most important regions in the world, especially in the twenty-first century. Afghanistan and the regional systems of which it is a member have continually experienced significant and complex political, economic, military, and cultural transformations. These developments have not only affected the member countries of these systems but have also impacted global systemic changes, with Afghanistan playing the most prominent role among them. Afghanistan, endowed with significant geostrategic capacity and due to its proximity to major regional and global powers, has consistently been regarded as a gateway connecting the regions of Asia to the rest of the world.

Recognizing the importance of Afghanistan's geostrategic position as a pivotal junction in Asia, and due to its significant geostrategic standing across various dimensions—political, economic, security, and cultural—particularly in the interactions between Central Asia and South Asia, conducting research on Afghanistan's geostrategic role in linking these two regions appears essential. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analyze Afghanistan's geostrategic role in integrating two important Asian regions—Central Asia and South Asia—through a combined theoretical framework of the Heartland Theory and New Regionalism. The main research question is: *What is the geostrategic role of Afghanistan in connecting Central Asia with South Asia?* The hypothesis posits that Afghanistan, due to its significant capacities in political, security, economic, and cultural spheres, can play a vital role alongside the ongoing process of integration between Central and South Asia. It can foster convergence between the two regions and contribute to enhancing stability and improving the quality of life for the citizens of both areas. Such developments may ultimately lead to increased stability not only within both regions but also across the broader Asian continent.

In the literature review section, it becomes evident that no research has specifically addressed the geostrategic role of Afghanistan and the country's importance in facilitating regional connectivity between Central Asia and South Asia. Most existing studies have instead focused on Afghanistan's strategic location in terms of economic significance or have explored how this location contributes to instability within Afghanistan and the broader region. As examples, we will briefly refer to the findings of several studies conducted by different authors.

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, in her study titled "Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia", published by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in 2012, explores the importance of Afghanistan for the Central Asian countries. The findings of this research indicate that Afghanistan holds exceptional significance for these states, particularly in the context of regional connectivity and strategic interactions. The author of this study highlights that Central Asian countries approach their relations with Afghanistan with great caution and precision. The threat posed by the expansion of terrorist organizations, extremist groups, drug trafficking, and organized crime has led these countries to adopt a cautious stance toward deepening ties with Afghanistan. The study argues that these challenges have prevented the development of stronger relations between Central Asian states and Afghanistan. In addition to this observation, the research also emphasizes that Afghanistan has the potential to offer significant opportunities, particularly in serving as a corridor for the transmission of Central Asian energy to other regions. However, due to fears stemming from Afghanistan's persistent instability, these opportunities remain largely unrealized. As a result, Central Asian countries prioritize a stable Afghanistan, viewing such stability as a prerequisite for mitigating the risks associated with regional cooperation and for expanding bilateral and multilateral relations with the country. (Tadjbakhsh, 2012, p. 1_62) Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it becomes evident that the research primarily focuses on the negative impacts of Afghanistan's internal situation on the development of its relations with Central Asian countries. In contrast, the present study aims to examine the role of Afghanistan's geostrategic location in connecting the countries of Central Asia with those of South Asia. Additionally, this research seeks to analyze the prospects for regional integration by combining Mackinder's Heartland Theory with the conceptual framework of New Regionalism.

The joint study titled "The Role of Afghanistan in Central Asia: Risk and Future Prospect Overview" by Ghulam Rasool, K.S. Mukhtarova, and Bilal Naqeeb Jan, published in 2024, explores the role of Afghanistan's geographical position in relation to Central Asia. The findings of this study indicate that Afghanistan shares numerous historical, civilizational, and cultural commonalities with the Central Asian states. However, since the separation of the Central Asian territories from Afghanistan, the nature of Afghanistan's relations with its northern neighbors—particularly Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, with which it shares borders—has entered a new phase. Beyond the historical context, the study primarily focuses on the security threats emanating from Afghanistan's borders that pose risks to Central Asian countries. These threats include instability, rising insecurity, the presence of extremist groups near the borders, increased flows of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), narcotics trafficking, and the expansion of organized criminal networks. One significant and more recent issue the study highlights as an emerging threat from within Afghanistan is the implementation of the Qosh Tepa Canal project. This irrigation canal, being constructed in northern Afghanistan and fed by the Amu Darya River, aims to support agriculture in the region. However, the study argues that the realization of this project may lead to political tensions and environmental challenges for Central Asian countries, particularly those dependent on shared water resources. (Ghulam Rasool, K.S. Mukhtarova, Bilal Naqeeb Jan, 2024, p. 66_68) An analysis of the findings of this study reveals that Afghanistan's geography is primarily examined through a security-focused lens. This security-centric perspective constitutes one of the main differences between this research and the study we are conducting. Our research seeks to explore Afghanistan's role in linking Central Asia with South Asia, emphasizing the potential opportunities that such regional connectivity could bring—not only for Central and South Asia, but also for greater Asia and the international system as a whole. The emphasis on security threats in the aforementioned study limits its scope, distinguishing it clearly from our study, which focuses on the geostrategic potential of Afghanistan as a bridge for regional integration.

Imran Khan and Safdar Ali Shirazi, in their study titled *"Geostrategic Importance of Afghanistan for Pakistan"*, examine the geostrategic position of Afghanistan in relation to Pakistan. The authors highlight Afghanistan's role as a connecting hub between Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and East Asia, emphasizing its importance as a key corridor within the broader Asian region. The findings of the study reveal that Pakistan faces a serious energy shortage, particularly in oil and gas, and the most accessible and viable source for meeting this demand lies in the Central Asian countries. The research underscores that Pakistan's access to these energy resources is largely dependent on transit through Afghanistan. Overall, the study's focus is primarily on linking Pakistan to Central Asia for the purpose of accessing energy resources, thereby framing Afghanistan's geostrategic value in terms of energy transit and connectivity. (IMRAN KHAN, SAFDAR Ali SHIRAZI, 2021, p. 137_149) An analysis of the findings of this study reveals that its geographical focus is limited solely to Pakistan, and it addresses only one primary dimension—economic connectivity. In contrast, the research we are conducting seeks to explore four key dimensions of regional cooperation, including political, economic, security, and cultural integration, which are among the defining characteristics of New Regionalism. This broader, multi-dimensional approach sets our study apart, as it aims to present a comprehensive framework for regional connectivity between Central and South Asia through Afghanistan's geostrategic position.

Dr. Muhammad Munir and Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, in their study titled *"Geostrategic Significance of the Wakhan Corridor for Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan"*, examine the strategic and economic importance of the Wakhan Corridor, located in Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan. This corridor, an economic passage connecting Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and Tajikistan, spans approximately 350 kilometers in length and 16 to 64 kilometers in width, linking the four member countries. Wakhan is a mountainous and high-altitude region in northeastern Afghanistan that borders Badakhshan Province in Tajikistan and the Xinjiang region of China. The study emphasizes that the corridor, if fully developed and operational, holds substantial economic potential for the participating countries. The research primarily focuses on the economic and security benefits that the corridor may bring to Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan, while also discussing the challenges and obstacles facing the realization of this project. (Muhammad Munir, Muhammad Shafiq, 2018, p. 203_213) An examination of the findings reveals that this study differs from our research in terms of nature, objectives, and the level of actors involved.

Mr. HD Joginder Singh Saklani and Ritesh Kumar, in their study titled *"Geopolitical Significance of Afghanistan in the Context of South Asia,"* examine the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan within the South Asian region.

The authors begin by introducing South Asia and its member countries, followed by an analysis of the relations between India and Afghanistan. The authors argue that despite the absence of a direct shared border between Afghanistan and the Republic of India, the deep cultural, civilizational, and social ties between the two countries mitigate the significance of this geographical separation. Furthermore, the study emphasizes Afghanistan's strategic importance to India, China, and Pakistan, with particular focus on India's access to energy resources from Central Asian countries through Afghanistan. (Joginder Singh Saklani, Ritesh Kumar, 2022, p. 33_44) An analysis of the findings of this study reveals significant differences compared to the research we are undertaking, particularly in terms of objectives, scope, and level of analysis. Therefore, our study has the potential to offer valuable insights, as it focuses more comprehensively on connecting the countries of Central Asia with those of South Asia across shared political, economic, security, and cultural dimensions.

Amaia Sanchez Cacicedo, in her study titled *"Unlocking Afghanistan's Connectivity Potential,"* examines the importance of Afghanistan's geographical position in linking the countries of the region and its neighbors. The findings indicate that Afghanistan, due to its strategic location, is situated close to major regional and global powers such as China, the Russian Federation, India, Pakistan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which enhances its significance. Moreover, Afghanistan occupies a pivotal position as a connection point between East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Its proximity to the Eurasian region and the Middle East—neighbors to European countries—further elevates Afghanistan's importance for European nations as well. This study primarily focuses on Afghanistan's economic potential and examines its importance in the context of various regional economic projects. For instance, it highlights Afghanistan's critical role in the implementation of energy transmission projects such as CASA-1000, which involves Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; the CASREM energy project connecting Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan; the rail connectivity project linking China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan; as well as the TAPI gas pipeline project and other initiatives where Afghanistan plays a central role. (Cacicedo, 2022, p. 1_8) An analysis of this study reveals that the author primarily focuses on Afghanistan's economic potential within the Asian region, without addressing other capacities of Afghanistan in connecting Central Asia and South Asia.

Sujit Kumar Datta, in his study titled *"Afghanistan, the New Hotspot of South Asian Geostrategic Competition,"* examines the significance of Afghanistan's location and its impact on the country's instability. The findings indicate that Afghanistan's position as a neighbor to major regional and global powers—including the Russian Federation, China, Pakistan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its proximity to Turkey—has negatively affected the situation within Afghanistan. (Datta, 2021, p. 197_212) An analysis of the findings of this study reveals that it views Afghanistan's geostrategic position primarily as a negative factor contributing to insecurity and instability within the country. In contrast, our research focuses on Afghanistan's geostrategic location as a potential catalyst for regional stability and integration.

Dr. Faramarz Tamanna, in collaboration with several other Afghan authors, has published a book titled *"Afghanistan Foreign Policy on Regional Cooperation."* This work, published as a collection of articles, is regarded as a valuable contribution to the field of Afghanistan's foreign policy. It examines Afghanistan's diplomatic relations with 14 countries and analyzes the opportunities and challenges present in these bilateral relations. A particularly important section for our research is Part Three, which focuses on economic cooperation and regional organizations. This section discusses Afghanistan's geoeconomic significance in fostering integration between Central Asia and South Asia, highlighting the country's potential role in regional convergence. (tamanna, 2014, p. 467_508) An analysis of the findings of this book shows that it primarily focuses on Afghanistan's foreign policy and its bilateral relations with fourteen key regional and extra-regional countries. In its third section, the book also addresses Afghanistan's economic potential in linking Central Asia and South Asia. However, in contrast, our research takes a broader approach by examining political, economic, security, and cultural dimensions, as well as Afghanistan's overall capacity to connect the countries of Central Asia with South Asia.

A review of the existing literature reveals that our study, titled *"The Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Connecting Central Asia and South Asia,"* not only addresses a significant research gap, but also contributes to the theoretical development of regional integration between South Asia and Central Asia. Moreover, it highlights Afghanistan's potential role in promoting stability across the region, including within Afghanistan itself as well

as among its Central and South Asian neighbors. This, in turn, could foster regional development and long-term stability throughout Central and South Asia, and more broadly, across the Asian continent.

The methodology of this study is applied in terms of its objective. For data collection, the library (documentary) method has been used, while for data analysis, a descriptive-analytical approach has been employed.

2. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the geostrategic role of Afghanistan in connecting Central Asia and South Asia, this study adopts a combined theoretical approach that integrates Mackinder's Heartland Theory and the concept of New Regionalism. This integrated framework offers a comprehensive lens through which to understand regional and geopolitical developments. According to Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, the Eurasian region—referred to as the "Heartland"—holds vital importance in global politics. Control over the Heartland is considered a key to accessing global power. Given its location at the crossroads of Eurasia—particularly at the junction between Central and South Asia—Afghanistan occupies a strategically significant position within this critical region. Complementing this classical perspective, New Regionalism emphasizes multilateral cooperation, the participation of diverse actors, and the voluntary engagement of states. Unlike classical regionalism, which often stemmed from top-down political or security arrangements, New Regionalism is grounded in spontaneous, interest-based cooperation across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. By synthesizing the Heartland theory with New Regionalism, Afghanistan is conceptualized not only as a geostrategic pivot in line with classical geopolitical thinking, but also as a potential agent of regional integration. In particular, its role in linking the Central Asian and South Asian regions could serve as a foundation for promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development, both at the regional and transregional levels.

2.1. *The Heartland*

The heartland Theory was introduced on January 20, 1904, by Halford J. Mackinder, then Director of the London School of Economics, during an academic lecture at the Royal Geographical Society, entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History." In this lecture, Mackinder sought to highlight the significant impact of geographical factors on the course of global history. In his Heartland Theory, which is also known as Mackinder's geopolitical philosophy, he identified a central point in the heart of the Earth, referring to it as the most strategically important and advantageous geographical region—the heart of global politics. Mackinder defined the Eurasian region as the geopolitical pivot of the world and considered its role crucial for international security. He emphasized that the Heartland region possesses immense political, security, and economic potential. In addition to the geographical emphasis, Mackinder also underlined the importance of having good neighbors. In his work *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, he asserted that a good life is impossible without good neighbors. According to Mackinder's perspective, Central Asia lies at the core of global politics and holds exceptional strategic significance. (Enayatollah Yazdani, Ali Omidi, Parisa Shah Mohammadi, 2017, p. 166_170) A review of Mackinder's Heartland Theory reveals that, more than a century later, it still retains significant academic credibility. The Eurasian region, located within the continent of Asia, continues to hold strategic relevance. Afghanistan, with its critical geostrategic and geopolitical position, effectively functions as the heart of Asia and a pivotal part of the Eurasian Heartland. This reinforces the idea that Afghanistan represents not only the center of the Asian region but also serves as a practical embodiment of Mackinder's Heartland. If the countries of regions such as Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and East Asia utilize Afghanistan's strategic location wisely, it could undoubtedly create substantial opportunities for regional and transregional development—not only across Asia but also at the broader international level.

2.2. *New Regionalism*

In political geography, various definitions have been proposed for the concept of regionalism. In a general sense, regionalism refers to a special focus on a specific geographical space that possesses common characteristics and serves as the most suitable platform for realizing the goals, interests, and aspirations of multiple nations. According to John M. Collins, political geography refers to a broad region characterized by significant cultural and physical

homogeneity and shared traits. From another perspective, regionalism refers to a grouping of countries within a specific geopolitical space that maintain organic interrelations, such that a transformation in one country inevitably impacts the others, preventing them from remaining indifferent to regional developments. (Bahador Zarei , Jalil Delshad , Seyed Mehdi Musavi Shahidi , Seyyed Mahmoud Alavi, 2016, p. 744_745) Regionalism is also among the paradigms that have emerged as a result of changes and transformations in the international system. Given the dynamic nature of international politics and the evolving structure of the global order, regional systems have also undergone significant transformations. Regionalism initially emerged during the bipolar structure of the Cold War era—first in European countries, and subsequently in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa—each with differences in objectives, nature, and scope. However, the end of the Cold War marked a turning point in the evolution of regionalism. It gave rise to a new form of intra-regional cooperation across political, economic, trade, and cultural dimensions, which came to be known as New Regionalism. This post-Cold War regionalism differs significantly from the earlier form of regionalism that emerged around 1979, particularly across four dimensions: agency, motivation, orientation, and expansion. In terms of agency and actors, unlike classical (old) regionalism, which focused primarily on the role of states, New Regionalism seeks to include a broader spectrum of actors—including state, individual, and societal actors, both within and beyond the region. From the perspective of motivation and objectives, New Regionalism is not unidimensional or based on a single variable. Rather, it represents a form of multilateral and multidimensional integration, encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. Its goals extend well beyond merely establishing free trade regimes or military-security alliances. The direction and trajectory of New Regionalism also differ from that of traditional regionalism. Unlike the old model, which was often top-down and imposed by states or superpowers, New Regionalism is not driven by structural determinism or immutable necessities. Instead, it is formed organically through human agency, practices, and interactions, under conditions where interests and processes are redefined. The scope and territorial extent of New Regionalism have also expanded significantly. Regionalism and regional integration now go far beyond the European experience and have evolved into a universal and global phenomenon. (Firouzabadi, 2010, p. 109_110)

Classical regionalism was formulated to explain the European integration theories of the 1960s and 1970s, primarily within the frameworks of federalist, functionalist, and neo-functionalist theories. This model of regionalism was largely aimed at establishing peace in the aftermath of the two World Wars, particularly in the European context. However, due to several challenges—such as the Europe-centric nature of classical integration and the failure of other countries and regions to replicate this model successfully—the need arose for a more adaptable and inclusive approach. As a result, New Regionalism emerged, particularly influenced by the White Paper of 1985, which aimed to revitalize the concept of integration and offered a new perspective on regional cooperation. This shift gave rise to what is now referred to as New Regionalism. (Ehsan Sheikhou , Roohallah Talebi arani, 2020, p. 100_102) New regionalism, compared to old regionalism, has its own advantages, including the utilization of financial and organizational resources to achieve international objectives, the specialization of the division of labor from an organizational perspective, the efficient use of local knowledge to ensure peace, the establishment of military, economic, and cultural unions, and a high degree of autonomy among aligned actors. (Mozaffar Hasanvand , Mehdi Esfandyari, 2019, p. 40_42)

With an understanding of Afghanistan's geostrategic position at the heart of the Asian continent, particularly in its role as a connector among key Asian regions including Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and West Asia, and given the country's considerable political, economic, security, and cultural capacities, it can be asserted that Afghanistan possesses both potential and actual capabilities to play a significant role at the regional, transregional, and global levels. Afghanistan, as a natural linking hub between important Asian regions, not only connects transportation, energy, and trade routes, but also facilitates extensive cultural and security interactions. This strategic position can be analyzed through the lens of Halford Mackinder's geopolitical Heartland Theory—a theory introduced in the early twentieth century that posits that any power controlling the Heartland region (Eurasia) can influence the political destiny of the world. Mackinder identified Eurasia as the "geographical pivot of history" and regarded it as the center of global power. Within this framework, Afghanistan's location in the southern part of Eurasia, adjacent to key Asian regions, especially Central and South Asia, grants it a vital role in regional geopolitical dynamics and positions it as a potential hub for regional integration.

Alongside Afghanistan's important position as the heart of Asia based on the Heartland Theory, the New Regionalism Theory also provides a suitable analytical framework for better understanding Afghanistan's role in regional and international interactions. Unlike classical models, this theory emphasizes multilateral integration and the participation of a diverse range of state and non-state actors. New Regionalism is founded on the belief that local and transnational actors, motivated by multidimensional interests and operating in a voluntary space, are capable of advancing regional cooperation processes. From this perspective, Afghanistan, relying on its geopolitical position, particularly as a strategic link between Central Asia and South Asia, can smartly leverage its internal and regional capacities to create the necessary foundation for sustainable political, economic, and security cooperation. This role not only contributes to strengthening stability and development within the country but also transforms Afghanistan into an influential hub in the new regional and global order, aiding in the formation of coherent structures connecting peripheral regions.

3. Overview of Afghanistan

Geographically, Afghanistan is a mountainous country located in the heart of Asia. It is renowned regionally and globally for its high-altitude position, towering mountains, and deep valleys. Afghanistan has an irregular oval-shaped structure, covering an area of approximately 652,225 square kilometers. Its highest point rises above 6,000 meters in elevation. Climatically, Afghanistan resembles countries in the Middle East and lacks the monsoon rainfall typical of the Indian subcontinent. As a result, its climate is generally classified as semi-arid. (Mossalanejad, *The Evolution of Social Structure and Geopolitics of Power in Afghanistan*, 2009, p. 170_172) Afghanistan shares its borders with the Turkmenistan Republic to the northwest, the Uzbekistan Republic to the north, the Tajikistan Republic to the northeast, the People's Republic of China to the east, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the south and southeast, and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the west. Major cities in Afghanistan include Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat, and Jalalabad. Accurate population statistics are not readily available. The main languages spoken in the country are Persian (Dari), Pashto, Uzbeki, and Turkmeni. The official religions are Sunni and Shia Islam. Historically, Afghanistan has an ancient and rich history spanning several thousand years. Due to its strategic position, it has frequently undergone changes and invasions by foreign powers, including Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Timur, the British, Tsarist Russia, and the Soviet Union. (Afghanistan Heartland of Asia, 2004, p. 97_101) Afghanistan holds exceptional importance in terms of geostrategy and political geography for the region. According to political geography theorists, Afghanistan has been described as the "crossroads of Asia" or the "heart of Asia." As Mackinder noted, every continent has a pivotal point that countries strive to control, and dominance over this point is tantamount to control over the entire continent and its center. Due to its significance, Afghanistan has been a region over which many empires have sought to exert control from the perspective of political geography. With its geostrategic position, Afghanistan connects several important Asian regions: Central Asia to the north, East Asia to the east, South Asia to the south, and West Asia to the west. For this reason, Afghanistan is often referred to as the "four-way crossroads of Asia." (Farhad Atai, Mohammad Musa Jafar, 2019, p. 161_162) An examination of Afghanistan's geostrategic position reveals that the country holds special significance for both the region and the world, particularly due to its substantial capacity to connect key Asian regions, notably Central Asia and South Asia. These two regions are complementary, and if effectively linked through Afghanistan, they could generate significant opportunities for the region, Asia as a whole, and at the global level.

4. Afghanistan's Diplomatic and Geostrategic Role in Connecting Foreign Relations of Central Asian and South Asian Countries

4.1. *The Diplomatic and Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Foreign Relations with Central Asian Countries*

4.1.1. Afghanistan's Diplomatic Position in Foreign Relations with Central Asian Countries

Due to its strategic position, Afghanistan is influenced by several geopolitical systems, including the Central Asian regional system, the South Asian regional system, an independent geopolitical system, and the West Asian regional system. It is evident that Afghanistan occupies a special and prominent place among these systems. (Dr. Zahra Pishgahifard, Sardar Mohammad Rahimi, 2008, p. 108_109). Among these regions, it is evident that Afghanistan

shares ancient and longstanding relations with Central Asia. Afghanistan has historically served as one of the strategic and geographical axes in strengthening this civilizational connection, playing a fundamental role in its expansion. Due to the importance of the relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan, we now turn to an examination of the nature of these relations.

4.1.1.1. Republic of Uzbekistan

Afghanistan's relationship with the Republic of Uzbekistan is rooted in deep historical ties. As one of the major centers of civilization, culture, and ancient literature in the Central Asian region, Afghanistan has historically maintained a shared identity with the countries of Central Asia, particularly through its economic and connective role with neighboring states. Uzbekistan, one of Afghanistan's northern neighbors, also possesses a rich historical and cultural heritage. Like other Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1917, remaining under Soviet rule until 1991, when it gained independence. Afghanistan was among the first countries to officially recognize Uzbekistan's independence in the same year. Since then, relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have been among the most positive and cooperative bilateral relations, encompassing various political, economic, and cultural dimensions. (tamana, 2014, p. 62_66) As previously mentioned, the relationship between Afghanistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan is considered one of the oldest foreign relations in the history of both countries. Due to their significant civilizational and historical commonalities, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan have always maintained strong ties as brotherly nations sharing a common geographical and cultural landscape. This can be clearly observed in the interactions between citizens living on both sides of the Afghanistan–Uzbekistan border. At present, the level of diplomatic and bilateral relations between the two countries remains positive and constructive. With greater attention and investment in various sectors, both nations have the potential to further enhance these relations—particularly in connection with South Asian countries, which could generate numerous opportunities and benefits for both Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

4.1.1.2. Republic of Tajikistan

The history of the Republic of Tajikistan shares many similarities with other Central Asian countries. Historically, like its regional neighbors, Tajikistan has been under the influence of various dynasties such as the Achaemenids, Samanids, Seljuks, Khwarazmians, and the Gurkanians. (Habibullah Abolhassan Shirazi , Mohammad Reza Majidi, 2003, p. 217) A study of the history of the Central Asian region reveals that Afghanistan, like Tajikistan, shares a civilizational history and common values, underscoring the importance of relations between the two countries. Due to the expansionist policies of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Tajikistan, like other Central Asian republics, remained under Soviet domination until the late twentieth century. The Republic of Tajikistan gained its independence on September 9, 1991, joined the United Nations in 1992, and experienced a period of civil war from independence until 1997, when peace was finally achieved. Afghanistan was among the first countries to recognize Tajikistan's independence on December 12, 1991, establish diplomatic relations, and play a significant role in ending the civil war. Since then, Afghanistan's foreign policy toward Tajikistan has been based on neighborliness, brotherhood, and multilateral cooperation. (Arzoo, 2015, p. 110_112) Relations between Afghanistan and the Republic of Tajikistan have always been based on the principles of neighborliness and brotherhood. A clear example of this close relationship can be observed during the Tajikistani civil wars, when a significant number of Tajikistani refugees sought shelter in Afghanistan. Following the end of the conflict and the establishment of peace, with the support of Afghanistan, these refugees returned to Tajikistan. (Habibullah Abolhassan Shirazi , Mohammad Reza Majidi, 2003, p. 219_235) In addition to these considerations, due to the historical, civilizational, and cultural commonalities between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the bilateral relations between the two countries have remained at a good level. Relations between Afghanistan and the Republic of Tajikistan have consistently been based on the principles of brotherhood and neighborliness, standing together even in difficult and adverse circumstances. This reflects the strength and resilience of their relationship under all conditions. Furthermore, if Tajikistan invests in its significant political, economic, social, security, and cultural capacities, it can further enhance the level of bilateral relations, which in turn could bring about greater opportunities in the Central Asian region.

4.1.1.3. Republic of Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is one of the Central Asian countries that, like other members of the region, gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The country shares borders with several neighboring states that have common

civilizational ties, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Afghanistan. The Amu Darya River, along with other shared attributes, constitutes one of the important commonalities between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is home to various ethnic minorities, including Turkmens, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Russians, Azerbaijanis, Tatars, Germans, and Ukrainians, making it one of the more ethnically diverse countries in the region. (Siddiqi, 2016, p. 142_146) Afghanistan's relations with the Republic of Turkmenistan have a long-standing history, with their most notable interactions traceable back to the era of Greater Khorasan. However, these relations have been more formally studied and developed since 1991. Turkmenistan gained its independence in 1991 and joined the United Nations as a sovereign state. Afghanistan was among the first countries to recognize Turkmenistan's independence and also one of the earliest to acknowledge Turkmenistan's neutral foreign policy. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, both countries have consistently sought to expand their bilateral ties. This effort has led to the signing of several bilateral and multilateral strategic agreements, which have created numerous political, security, economic, and cultural opportunities between the two nations. (tamana, 2014, p. 188_207) Due to the longstanding historical and civilizational ties between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, as well as their mutual interdependence, the two countries hold a special position in each other's foreign relations. Recognizing this, Afghanistan can serve as a key point of connection, linking Turkmenistan—with its considerable economic and cultural capacities to South Asian countries that have essential needs. This dynamic, alongside the strengthening of Turkmenistan's relations with South Asian states, can further contribute to the expansion of ties between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.

4.1.1.4. Republic of Kazakhstan

The Republic of Kazakhstan is located in the central part of the Eurasian continent and northern Central Asia. It shares borders with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Republic of Turkmenistan. Covering an area of 2,717,300 square kilometers, Kazakhstan is the eighth largest country in the world and the second largest among the former Soviet republics in terms of land area. Despite its vast size, Kazakhstan is considered one of the least densely populated countries in the world. Its geographical location and vast territory significantly contribute to Kazakhstan's geostrategic importance. (Dero, 2019, p. 55_57) Although the Republic of Kazakhstan does not share a border with Afghanistan, it possesses significant commonalities with Afghanistan similar to other Central Asian republics. The geographical separation has never diminished Kazakhstan's importance as a country with profound civilizational and historical ties to Afghanistan. The history of relations between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan should be examined primarily from the time of Kazakhstan's independence. Afghanistan was among the first countries to recognize Kazakhstan's independence, and since then, bilateral relations have remained strong and positive. Examples of this cooperation include both countries' membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with Kazakhstan as a full member and Afghanistan as an observer member, as well as their collaboration within the framework of the Istanbul Process. (tamana, 2014, p. 402_408)

Moreover, due to the shared history and cultural heritage, the relationship between the two countries has always maintained a special status. In this context, Kazakhstan's vast mineral resources and its strong agricultural potential, combined with Afghanistan's supply of inexpensive labor, create opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. Afghanistan, acting as the gateway for Kazakhstan and Central Asia to South Asia, holds a strategic position that enables it to function as a corridor for Central-South Asian collaboration. This situation highlights Afghanistan's geopolitical importance and underlines its strategic role in political, security, economic, and cultural dimensions in relation to Kazakhstan. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the current relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan are already at a positive level. With effective utilization of the extensive political, economic, security, social, and cultural capacities of both nations, these relations have the potential to expand significantly.

4.1.1.5. Republic of Kyrgyzstan

The Republic of Kyrgyzstan, like other Central Asian republics, shares a similar historical background. It experienced a period of control under Tsarist Russia and later under the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan came under the rule of the Russian Empire in 1876, and following the 1917 revolution, it became one of the republics of the Soviet Union. This status continued until the dissolution of the USSR. In 1991, with the approval of the Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan, the country declared its independence from the Soviet Union. (Habibullah Abolhassan Shirazi ,

Mohammad Reza Majidi, 2003, p. 193_197) Afghanistan's official and diplomatic relations with Kyrgyzstan date back to the period following Kyrgyzstan's independence. However, due to prolonged internal conflicts in Afghanistan, these relations did not develop to a significant level. It was not until 2002 that a major transformation occurred in bilateral ties, marked by the appointment of Abdul Qadir Dostum as Afghanistan's first ambassador to Kyrgyzstan. Key aspects of the bilateral relationship since 2001 can be analyzed at various levels. These include the presence of the Kyrgyz minority in Afghanistan, Afghanistan's status as an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Kyrgyzstan's permanent membership in the same organization, and regional commonalities. Such factors have contributed to making the Afghanistan–Kyrgyzstan relationship increasingly noteworthy. (tamana, 2014, p. 440_451) Although Afghanistan does not share a geographical border with Kyrgyzstan, the two countries are connected through civilizational ties and shared cultural and ethnic elements most notably, the presence of Kyrgyz minorities in Afghanistan. Despite facing internal challenges, including economic difficulties, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan maintains cultural and historical connections with Afghanistan. Given the significance of Central Asian countries particularly Kyrgyzstan for regional cooperation, Afghanistan holds the potential to create substantial opportunities by linking these states to South Asia. In this context, Afghanistan's strategic geographical position enables it to serve as a vital bridge between Central Asia and other regions, especially South Asia.

4.1.2. The Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Foreign Relations with Central Asian Countries

Afghanistan's unique geostrategic position plays a significant role in shaping the geostrategic definition of the region. Frequently referred to as the "crossroads of Asia," the "Heartland," or the "Heart of Asia," Afghanistan has long been recognized for its strategic importance. According to Halford Mackinder, Afghanistan is among the strategic regions whose control could lead to the control of Asia—and potentially the world. In this context, Afghanistan's geopolitical relations with the Central Asian countries have been of extraordinary significance and continuity. One of the key factors strengthening this enduring connection is Afghanistan's geographical borders with three major and influential Central Asian countries through its northern frontier, rendering these ties both vital and unbreakable. (Farhad Atai , Mohammad Musa Jafar, 2019, p. 161) In addition to geographical proximity, the peoples of Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries share deep-rooted civilizational, historical, and cultural commonalities. These shared features were disrupted primarily due to political compulsions—particularly the rivalries among colonial powers during the 17th and 18th centuries—which led to their separation. Nevertheless, despite these divisions, strong relations between Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia have consistently existed across various sectors. (saeed vosoughi , Ehsan Fallahi , Qurban Ali Haidari, 2014, p. 155_158) An analysis of Afghanistan's position and its connection to the Central Asian region highlights one key element above all: Afghanistan's strategic role as a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. Geographically, Afghanistan shares borders with three Central Asian countries—Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan—positioning it as the gateway from Central Asia to South Asia. Conversely, it also serves as South Asia's entry point to Central Asia. From both historical and civilizational perspectives, Afghanistan shares significant commonalities with Central Asian countries, which further reinforces its vital geopolitical role. If the nations of Central Asia can effectively utilize Afghanistan's existing potential as a connector to South Asia, this could create major opportunities for political, economic, security, cultural, and social cooperation across the two key regions of Asia. Moreover, the mutual interdependence of Central Asian and South Asian countries on Afghanistan not only accelerates regional connectivity, but also paves the way for broader opportunities. Ultimately, such cooperation could contribute not only to regional stability, but also to enhanced collaboration, integration, and balanced development across the wider Asian continent.

4.2. *The Diplomatic and Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Foreign Relations with South Asian Countries*

4.2.1. The Diplomatic Role of Afghanistan in Foreign Relations with South Asian Countries (India and Pakistan)

The concept of "region," first introduced by Barry Buzan in his book *People, States, and Fear*, posits that national and international levels of analysis are insufficient for adequately examining regional issues. Therefore, an intermediate level of analysis is necessary. To address this gap, Buzan proposes the "regional level" of analysis as a middle ground that bridges the divide between the state level and the international system level. (Mohammad

Musa Jafari , Ali Ahmad Tawhedi, 2018, p. 13) Based on existing theories proposed by various scholars, Afghanistan has been examined as part of different regional groupings. Among these, four main approaches stand out: First, an approach that considers Afghanistan within the Middle East region; Second, an approach that places Afghanistan within Central Asia; Third, an approach that includes Afghanistan in South Asia; And fourth, an approach that does not categorize Afghanistan within any of these regions, instead viewing it as a distinct border area—an intersection between Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. (Seyed Ahmad Fatemi Nejad , Alireza Mohammadzadeh, 2018, p. 400_401) However, in the geopolitical spatial framework proposed by Goldstein, Afghanistan is considered part of the South Asian region. According to this theory, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are regarded as the most important countries within South Asia, with India occupying a central position, while Pakistan and Afghanistan hold peripheral positions. (Rahimi, 2017, p. 286) However, the author of this research believes that, given Afghanistan's significant geographical position and its various commonalities with countries across multiple regions—including Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and East Asia—Afghanistan functions as a complementary link among these regions. Afghanistan's strategic importance is far greater and more valuable than limiting it to a single geographic region. Simultaneously, Afghanistan can be considered a member of all these regions due to its dependencies and shared characteristics. Furthermore, countries in these regions can utilize Afghanistan as a connecting point to foster political, economic, security, cultural, and social development. Considering the importance of Afghanistan's policy and the South Asian region, this study proceeds to examine Afghanistan's policy towards two major South Asian countries, India and Pakistan, following Goldstein's perspective.

4.2.1.1. Republic of India

The Republic of India and Afghanistan have shared friendly and historic relations throughout various periods of history. Before the emergence of Pakistan as an independent country, India was Afghanistan's neighbor, and the destinies of the two nations were closely interconnected. However, with the establishment of Pakistan, India lost its direct border with Afghanistan. The onset of the Cold War between the two major South Asian countries, India and Pakistan, had significant repercussions on Afghanistan's political and security situation. (Abdullah Alizadeh , Khan Ali Azimi, 2024, p. 166) From its independence in 1919 until India's independence in 1947, Afghanistan, as an independent country, engaged in political interactions primarily with Britain. However, following India's independence, Afghanistan was among the first countries to recognize India's sovereignty and establish diplomatic relations with it.. (tamana, 2014, p. 260) In reviewing India's approach towards Afghanistan, it is important to note that India has consistently maintained cordial and friendly relations with Afghanistan regardless of the type of political regime in power. Since Afghanistan's independence, diplomatic relations between the Republic of India and Afghanistan have been established and further strengthened through friendship and strategic agreements. Over the past two decades, India has been one of the largest investors in Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. (Nowzar Shafiee , Shahriar Faraji Nasiri , Afshin Mottaghi, 2012, p. 134_139) India's foreign policy has consistently been based on respect and support towards Afghanistan. This approach is evident in India's assistance to Afghanistan's educational institutions, particularly through programs such as ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) and ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation). Through these initiatives, thousands of Afghan youth have received education and training in India. Additionally, India has played a significant role in Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. Notable contributions include the construction of the Shahtoot Dam, Salma Dam, and Kamal Khan Dam, the development of the Zaranj Highway, and support for Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). (Abdullah Alizadeh , Khan Ali Azimi, 2024, p. 178_184) Alongside India's positive and fraternal policies, if we examine the foundations of India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan, two major issues emerge: security concerns—particularly preventing the encirclement of the region by China and Pakistan—and India's economic interests in Central Asia. However, due to the interdependence between South Asian and Central Asian countries, economic interests appear to be significantly more important for India. As a major neighbor of Central Asia, India holds vital economic and geostrategic interests in the region. One of the most important aspects of this vision is cooperation in the fields of energy and security. With a population exceeding one billion and a large commercial market alongside a serious energy demand, India views Central Asia—with its vast energy reserves and promising market for Indian products—as key to achieving its goal of fostering integration between South Asia and Central Asia. (Nowzar Shafiee , Shahriar Faraji Nasiri , Afshin Mottaghi, 2012, p. 132_133) As previously mentioned, due to its significant strategic position in the heart of Asia and as a connecting point of four major regional systems, Afghanistan can serve as a bridge

linking India—the core of the South Asian region—with the countries of Central Asia. In this regard, Afghanistan, as the gateway from South Asia to Central Asia, can play a valuable role in connecting South Asia, especially the Republic of India, to Central Asia. Afghanistan's shared borders with three key Central Asian countries further enhance its strategic value. Additionally, the Caucasus region and the Russian Federation could potentially access the warm waters of the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan. Over recent years, India has maintained deep cultural relations with the people of Afghanistan. The presence of Indian diplomatic and consular missions in Kabul and other provinces underscores Afghanistan's strategic importance to India. Recognizing this importance and the mutual interdependence between South Asia and Central Asia, fostering integration can help reduce tensions among regional actors—including Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan—while simultaneously increasing cooperation and coordination between the countries of Central and South Asia.

4.2.1.4. Islamic republic of Pakistan

Afghanistan has long been referred to as the "Heart of Asia" due to its highly strategic geographical location. This position grants Afghanistan significant importance across various fields, including politics, economics, and transportation, for all countries in the region. In particular, Afghanistan holds exceptional significance for neighboring Pakistan. (Mahmood Ketabi, Yadolah Dehghan, Sara Dehghan Nasiri 2, 2016, p. 26) After the emergence of Pakistan from the partition of India in 1947, Afghanistan established diplomatic relations with Pakistan at the ambassadorial level. (tamana, 2014, p. 135) Pakistan shares deep religious, cultural, linguistic, and geographical ties with Afghanistan. As a landlocked country, Afghanistan shares approximately 2,200 kilometers of border with Pakistan and serves as Pakistan's gateway to Central Asia. Pakistan's primary objectives in its engagement with Afghanistan include pursuing geostrategic, security, and economic interests, as well as balancing India's influence in the region. (Alireza Khodagholipour, Farideh Mohammad Alipour, Mohammad Vali Modarres, 2020, p. 270_290) The interconnected geographical positioning of Afghanistan and Pakistan, situated in a strategically important region, has long been observed to function in a complementary manner. Pakistan maintains deep interdependencies with Afghanistan in political, security, cultural, and economic spheres. (Seyed Ahmad Fatemi Nejad, Alireza Mohammadzadeh, 2018, p. 409_412) There is a need to shift from Hobbesian policies toward more peaceful and cooperative Lockean approaches. Such a transition can play a significant role not only in stabilizing the South Asian region but also in promoting the development and progress of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan, which shares eastern and southern borders with Afghanistan, has a strong need to connect with the Central Asian countries. In this context, Afghanistan can serve as a strategic corridor for Pakistan. Recognizing Afghanistan's importance as the gateway to South Asia, strategic investment and the adoption of aligned policies—particularly by Pakistan—could enable Afghanistan to create significant political, economic, security, and cultural opportunities for both South Asian and Central Asian countries.

4.2.2. Afghanistan's Geostrategic Role in Foreign Relations with South Asian Countries

According to the geopolitical framework presented by Goldstein, Afghanistan is considered part of the South Asian regional subsystem. Within this structure, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are identified as key countries in the system. (Rahimi, 2017, p. 286) South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, consists of eight countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This region is considered one of the most important in the world due to its significant energy needs, population dynamics, and geopolitical, economic, and geographical factors. With a total area of approximately 5,134,664 square kilometers and a population of over 1.952 billion people (according to the United Nations estimate in 2021), South Asia stands out as a critical region. Furthermore, based on the International Monetary Fund's 2020 report, the region's gross domestic product exceeds \$3.336 trillion, and its rapid population growth further enhances its global significance. (Marjan Badiie Azandehie, Bahador Zarei, Moein Barzegarzadeh zarandi, 2022, p. 1456) South Asia has a serious and growing need for energy. For nearly six decades, the region has been plagued by various internal and cross-border conflicts, including the wars between India and Pakistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Afghanistan's civil wars, and, most recently, the U.S.-led war in the region. These conflicts have significantly affected South Asia, leading to the destruction of development infrastructure, the rise of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and other major challenges. As a result, South Asia has remained an underdeveloped region in the global system, despite its abundant human and material resources, which otherwise make it capable of becoming a developed and prosperous region on the international stage. (Abdolreza Farajirad, Mohammad Darkhor, Seyyed

Hadi Sadati, 2012, p. 34) Afghanistan, which is connected to the South Asian region through Pakistan, is considered one of the key actors within the regional system of South Asia. In addition to sharing approximately 2,200 kilometers of border with Pakistan, Afghanistan has deep religious, cultural, linguistic, and geographical ties with its neighbor. In fact, Afghanistan serves as the gateway for South Asian countries to access Central Asia. (Alireza Khodagholipour, Farideh Mohammad Alipour, Mohammad Vali Modarres, 2020, p. 271_272) Pakistan shares borders with the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Afghanistan, as the gateway from South Asia to Central Asia—and to countries such as the Russian Federation and the Caucasus region—holds a strategic position of particular importance. For the countries of South Asia, Afghanistan's geostrategic role is highly significant across political, economic, cultural, and security dimensions. The presence of consular missions from the two major South Asian actors—India and Pakistan—in Kabul and various Afghan provinces reflects the country's strategic relevance. In this context, Afghanistan serves as a principal corridor linking South Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus region.

5. The Security Role of Afghanistan in Connecting Central Asia with South Asia

From a geopolitical perspective, Afghanistan is encompassed within the security frameworks of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Although Afghanistan is not geographically fully part of South Asia, it has become integrated into the dynamics of the South Asian region and is often considered a component of it. This integration has effectively removed Afghanistan from isolation and incorporated it into South Asia. The strategic importance and potential of Afghanistan have often been neglected by neighboring countries and regional actors. This neglect has contributed to cycles of instability and internal crises in Afghanistan spilling over into other regions, particularly Central and South Asia. South Asia is one of the most fragile and conflict-prone regions in the world. Multiple factors have contributed to this instability, with the core issue being the ongoing conflicts between the two major regional powers, India and Pakistan. These tensions have affected neighboring countries, including Afghanistan, further exacerbating instability across the region. Key factors driving insecurity include the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan, the arms race between the two countries, and disputes involving Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's connection to Central Asia is established through its northern borders with neighboring countries. Geographically, Afghanistan's northern borders link it to Central Asia, and the region shares common characteristics with Afghanistan. However, the historical geopolitical rivalry between Russia and Britain in the 18th century separated these areas. Despite shared commonalities, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries face limitations that hinder closer cooperation. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan each pursue their own interests in collaboration with Afghanistan. Challenges such as drug trafficking, weak economies, terrorism, the spread of fundamentalism, and ethnic-religious conflicts have made these countries cautious in expanding their relations with Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as Afghanistan's influential northern neighbors and landlocked countries, hold significant strategic importance. Overall, Afghanistan is strategically positioned as a crucial corridor for energy trade and providing Central Asian countries access to open seas. However, insecurity within Afghanistan and South Asia has impeded this potential. Moreover, the shared borders have become conduits for drug trafficking by armed groups, posing national security threats to these countries. Russia, in particular, has noted that it is one of the first countries to suffer the most from Afghanistan's instability and the associated narcotics trafficking. (Mohammad Musa Jafari, Ali Ahmad Tawhedi, 2018, p. 10_28) Recognizing the crucial importance of security in Afghanistan, it is clear that ensuring stability there can create significant security opportunities for both Central and South Asia. Therefore, it is essential for countries in these regions—particularly those in Central and South Asia—to adopt coordinated policies aimed at establishing stability and security in Afghanistan. Such collaboration, alongside maintaining peace and security, can lead to comprehensive stability across both Central and South Asia. The outcome of this effort would promote progress and development not only within these two regions but also across Asia and the world.

6. The Economic Role of Afghanistan in Connecting Central Asia with South Asia

Given its significant geostrategic and geoeconomic position in the heart of Asia, and its considerable potential, Afghanistan can serve as an economic crossroads of Asia. Alongside this, the substantial economic capacities of the surrounding regions—particularly Central Asia and South Asia—could facilitate Asia's transformation into the world's largest economic hub, with Afghanistan playing a vital role in this process. Recognizing Afghanistan's

important position, this section briefly introduces three examples of transit and trade projects between Afghanistan and the Central and South Asian regions that contribute to the stability and integration of these two areas.

6.1. *Lapis Lazuli (lajward) Corridor Project*

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor is one of the most important and newest transit routes connecting Afghanistan to Central Asian countries, European nations, and the rest of the world. This corridor has a historical background and was once part of the ancient Silk Road. Over 2,000 years ago, Afghan lapis lazuli (from Badakhshan) was exported via this route to the Caucasus, Russia, the Balkans, Europe, North Africa, and especially to Eastern civilizations along the ancient Silk Road. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor connects Afghanistan and South Asian countries to Europe by road through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, making it one of the shortest transit routes for Afghanistan and South Asian countries. This corridor offers significant trade opportunities for Afghanistan, Central Asia, and South Asia. Moreover, due to shared cultural, historical, and civilizational ties among the countries along this corridor, the project can further strengthen regional relations. In addition, this international corridor can provide multiple benefits for Afghanistan and the neighboring countries, with the primary objectives of this transit project aimed at contributing to regional and global development and progress.

1. Regional integration and internationalism.
2. Expansion of large-scale economic interactions.
3. Access to open seas.
4. Promotion of domestic products and their export to global markets.
5. Enhancement of domestic competitiveness and promotion of a balanced internal economy.
6. Encouragement of domestic investment.
7. Establishment of trade relations and attraction of foreign commercial assets to Afghanistan.
8. Membership in international treaties and agreements.
9. Efforts toward regional security and peace.
10. Existence of multiple transit and trade partners in Afghanistan. (Tariq, 2023, p. 276_279)

A brief review of this project shows that, alongside enhancing cooperation among Central Asian and South Asian countries—including Afghanistan—it can foster economic integration between the two regions and contribute to the economic prosperity of the countries within Central and South Asia.

6.2. *TAPI Project*

The TAPI project is an energy transit initiative that transports natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to South Asian countries. The name "TAPI" is an acronym derived from the member countries of this major energy transmission project: Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The TAPI pipeline is a historic project aimed at transporting Turkmen gas to South Asia (Pakistan and India) via Afghanistan. The initial plan for this project was formulated in the 1990s, but the practical agreement was signed in 2010 by the presidents of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Prime Minister of India. The construction began in 2015, led by the leaders of these four countries. The TAPI pipeline stretches approximately 1,735 kilometers, entering Pakistan through the Herat-Kandahar route in Afghanistan. Of this length, about 200 kilometers are within Turkmenistan, 735 kilometers within Afghanistan, and 800 kilometers within Pakistan before reaching India. This project is designed to transport approximately 33 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas annually through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India.. (Qasem Turabi , Razieh Sanei, 2017) The TAPI project is among the few initiatives that have utilized the potential for cooperation between Central and South Asia through Afghanistan. Upon its completion, it will meet the high energy demands of South Asian countries, particularly India and Pakistan. Therefore, if the full potential of collaboration between the two regions can be realized, there is no doubt that cooperation in other sectors can also be accelerated. This, in turn, could contribute to improving the level of welfare in both Central and South Asian countries.

6.3. *CASA-1000*

CASA-1000 is an energy transmission project that aims to transfer electricity from Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan. Launched in 2006, the project is designed to deliver 1,300 megawatts of electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan, along a 1,200-kilometer transmission line. (Daisuke Sasaki, Mikiyasu Nakayama, 2015, p. 90) The CASA-1000 project, which facilitates the transmission of electricity from Central Asia to South Asia, is seen as having a high energy transfer capacity. Central Asia, being landlocked and without direct access to the sea, can be connected to South Asia and open waters through Afghanistan, due to its strategic geographical position. Afghanistan, which—like the countries of South Asia—faces challenges related to energy shortages, can benefit from projects such as CASA-1000. These projects can help meet the energy needs of both Afghanistan and South Asia. Additionally, they can enhance regional cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia, which in turn can contribute not only to the stability of these two regions but also to broader peace and security in the area. (Zaheer Abbas, Inayat Kalim, Muhammad Shoaib Malik, 2019, p. 42) An examination of the CASA-1000 project and other similar initiatives reveals that there exists substantial economic potential for cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia through Afghanistan. Joint investments by the countries of both regions—particularly in sectors such as the transmission of energy from Central Asia to South Asia, the export of raw materials from Central Asia to the South, and South Asian investments (especially from India) in technology and environmental industries—could create significant opportunities for investment and employment in Central Asia. This would enhance the economic capacity of both Central and South Asian countries and contribute to greater stability and prosperity across the region.

7. The Economic Role of Afghanistan in Regional Connectivity Between Central and South Asia

Afghanistan holds a significant geoeconomic position in one of the most important regions of the world. The importance of this position is well reflected in Afghanistan's regional cooperation strategy. Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of four densely populated and resource-rich regions: South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. It serves as the hub connecting these four regions. Broadly speaking, Afghanistan can be divided into two zones: the internal zone, which includes all six neighboring countries sharing borders with Afghanistan, and the external zone, which encompasses most countries in Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and East Asia. Furthermore, Afghanistan holds a pivotal position in the Asia-Europe continental trade network. Situated along major East-West trade routes across the vast Eurasian region, Afghanistan is a natural center and axis of continental trade extending through various corridors from India, Southeast Asia, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and China. For over two thousand years, Afghanistan has been the intersection point for all trade routes linking India, China, the Middle East, and Europe. While Afghanistan's geoeconomic position provides significant economic opportunities not only for its neighboring regions but also for the entire Asia-Europe continental zone, this study focuses on Afghanistan's potential role as a land bridge between its two key neighboring regions: Central Asia and South Asia. These two regions are increasingly seeking land connectivity to promote sustainable economic growth and enhance bilateral trade. (tamana, 2014, p. 473) The countries of South Asia and Central Asia, through cooperation with Afghanistan and investment, can not only enhance their trade exchanges but also meet their critical needs, particularly in the sectors of energy and raw materials.

7.1. Afghanistan as the Corridor Between Central and South Asia

Afghanistan, as the shortest and most cost-effective transit route between Central and South Asia, plays a key role in unlocking the complementary trade potential between the two regions. Compared to alternative routes, Afghanistan can offer the shortest and most economical paths for road networks, railways, and energy transmission lines—such as gas and electricity—linking Central and South Asia. A road corridor passing through Afghanistan could significantly reduce transportation time and costs, thereby increasing the volume of trade between the two regions. According to a 2005 study conducted by the Asian Development Bank on the economic impacts of road corridors between Central and South Asia via Afghanistan, if the required 13,586 kilometers of road corridors for regional trade—including 3,657 kilometers within Afghan territory—were completed, regional trade would increase by 160%, and overall transit trade in the region would rise by 111%. If we further account for the projected benefits of planned railway corridors connecting Central and South Asia through Afghanistan, the economic gains from overland connectivity between the two regions would be significantly greater. (tamana, 2014, p. 482-483) An examination of this matter reveals that Afghanistan, due to its important strategic location between Central and

South Asia, can serve as a short and cost-effective corridor connecting the two regions. If countries invest in Afghanistan and in the broader region, Afghanistan could function as a key transit hub, opening a gateway to prosperity and development not only for the countries of Central and South Asia but also for the wider Asian continent and the world at large.

7.2. Energy Transmission from Central Asia to South Asia via Afghanistan

Today, energy security is one of the greatest concerns of governments in the international system. As such, the supply of various forms of energy—including oil, gas, coal, and others—has become a key strategic priority for states. South Asian countries, which are experiencing a rapid increase in energy demand, are facing energy shortages, making the provision of sufficient energy one of their top governmental priorities. To secure energy resources and improve supply, these countries are actively seeking national and international investments within their territories. South Asia holds approximately 5.7 billion barrels of oil reserves, which accounts for only 0.5% of global reserves. Due to limited domestic resources, oil imports in the region are expected to multiply in the coming years. Industrialization, urbanization, and population growth have significantly raised energy demand across South Asia. A large portion of oil consumption in the region is driven by the growing needs of the transportation sector, electricity generation, and household use. Many South Asian countries remain heavily dependent on a single energy source—fossil fuels. (Marjan Badiie Azandehie , Bahador Zarei , Moein Barzegarzadeh zarandi , 2022, p. 1551_1552) Due to South Asia's critical dependence on fossil fuels, energy supply in the region has become a major security concern. Considering the growth in fossil fuel consumption between 2010 and 2020, projections indicate that energy demand in the region will increase by approximately 33% by the year 2040. (Marjan Badiie Azandehie , Bahador Zarei , Moein Barzegarzadeh zarandi , 2022, p. 1551_1552) On the other side, while South Asia faces an urgent need for energy supply, Central Asia—which includes the five republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan—possesses some of the world's largest fossil fuel reserves. According to research by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London and the International Energy Agency (IEA), the total recoverable oil resources in Central Asia are estimated to range between 17 and 37 billion barrels. Furthermore, these institutions report that the region holds between 6.6 and 9 trillion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, with an additional 60 trillion cubic meters of unproven reserves—representing approximately 37% of the world's natural gas potential. In addition, data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) provide country-specific figures. Uzbekistan ranks 47th globally in proven oil reserves with 94 million barrels and holds 1.841 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, placing it 19th in the world. Tajikistan, with limited energy resources, was estimated in 2013 to have 12 million barrels of proven oil reserves (ranking 84th globally) and 5.663 billion cubic meters of natural gas (ranked 90th globally). According to the same source, Turkmenistan possesses 600 million barrels of proven oil reserves (45th globally) and an estimated 24.3 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, ranking it 4th in the world in terms of gas reserves. Kazakhstan holds approximately 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, placing it 11th globally, and with 2.407 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, it ranks 14th in the world. (Ansari, 2018, p. 107_108) Meanwhile, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has reported the fossil fuel reserves of Central Asian countries as follows:

Kazakhstan:

- 6.350 billion tonnes of coal equivalent (tce) of crude oil
- 3.455 billion tce of natural gas
- 25.102 billion tce of coal

Kyrgyzstan:

- 0.008 billion tce of crude oil
- 0.007 billion tce of natural gas
- 0.553 billion tce of coal

Tajikistan:

- 0.003 billion tce of crude oil

- 0.007 billion tce of natural gas
- 0.304 billion tce of coal

Uzbekistan:

- 0.126 billion tce of crude oil
- 2.353 billion tce of natural gas
- 0.768 billion tce of coal

Turkmenistan:

- 0.127 billion tce of crude oil
- 13.044 billion tce of natural gas (EUROPE, 2023, p. 1_4)

Recognizing the global importance of energy, along with the significant energy needs in South Asia and the abundant energy reserves in Central Asia, the transmission of energy from Central Asia to South Asian countries can play a vital role in meeting the region's energy demands. Such cooperation has the potential to substantially enhance regional collaboration between the two regions. In this context, Afghanistan—serving as the transit route for Central Asian energy toward South Asia—acts as a facilitator of economic interaction. This not only strengthens Afghanistan's strategic position but can also have a meaningful impact on boosting international trade at both the regional and broader Asian levels.

7.3. The Densely Populated Economic Markets of South Asia

South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world. High population growth, rapid urbanization, fast-paced economic development, and industrialization have led to a sharp rise in demand for essential resources such as food, water, and energy, significantly intensifying their consumption. Although South Asian countries have made notable social and economic progress in recent years, they still face serious challenges such as hunger, poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, low living standards, lack of access to modern energy, and poor health conditions. Despite remarkable economic growth in the past decade, South Asia continues to be home to over 40% of the world's poor and 35% of those suffering from malnutrition. About 51% of the poor population in the region faces food energy deficiency, and over 56% of the world's underweight infants are born here. Roughly 20% of the population lacks access to safe drinking water. With less than 5% of the world's land area, South Asia must feed one-fourth of the global population. While land, water, and vital ecosystem resources are diminishing, the population is steadily growing. If the current growth rate continues, the population is expected to reach 2.3 billion by 2050. This population growth—coupled with declining agricultural land—has led to increasing pressure on water and energy resources. Climate variability, along with food insecurity, is pushing South Asia toward a future in which more food must be produced with less land, less water, and rising energy prices. Most South Asian countries suffer from food shortages because their domestic production cannot meet internal demand. (meysam hadipour , mohamadreza hafezneia , s .mahamad kazem sajadpoor ,mohammadreza khorashdizadeh, 2020, p. 38)

In contrast to the countries of South Asia, the nations of Central Asia possess vast arable and cultivable lands along with abundant raw material and food resources. Undoubtedly, Central Asian countries have the capacity to meet the food shortages and needs of South Asian countries. In this regard, Afghanistan can serve as the shortest route for transferring these essential goods from Central Asia to South Asia. Beyond addressing food shortages in South Asia, this transit role can also expand trade between the two regions and strengthen commercial ties between these two important parts of Asia. In the long term, such developments can elevate the levels of welfare and stability in both regions, contributing to broader peace and security in Asia and globally.

8. Afghanistan's Role in Connecting Central Asia and South Asia through Regional Organizations (SAARC, SCO, and ECO)

Due to the significant role of non-state actors in fostering cooperation and integration between Central and South Asian countries, this section examines the collaboration between these regions. Regional organizations, grounded in the theory of new regionalism, play a crucial role in promoting regional cooperation. The countries of Central

and South Asia can enhance their cooperation and regional integration through expanded collaboration within the frameworks of these organizations. In the following, we analyze the cooperation between Central and South Asian countries within the structures of three key regional organizations.

8.1. SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is composed of countries from South Asia. South Asia is the southern part of the Asian continent, encompassing the countries south of the Himalayan mountains, and is bordered by West Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Currently, the members of SAARC typically include Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Essentially, the primary rationale behind the establishment of SAARC has been economic, with political objectives being secondary priorities. The main founding goals of SAARC, according to its charter, can be listed as follows:

- Enhancing the social welfare of the peoples of the South Asian region and improving their quality of life.
- Accelerating economic growth and utilizing the region's full potential to expedite social and agricultural programs, thereby ensuring suitable living opportunities for all people.
- Promoting and strengthening cooperation among member countries within South Asia.
- Reinforcing multilateral treaties and fostering mutual understanding of problems and other issues.
- Enhancing effective collaboration and multilateral coordination in economic, social, cultural, scientific, and technological fields.
- Strengthening cooperation with developing countries.
- Consolidating cooperation among member states regarding international affairs.
- Collaborating with international and regional organizations that share similar goals and objectives.

Despite the establishment of SAARC in 1985 by the South Asian member countries, the region has remained one of the most complex and volatile areas in international politics over the past seventy years. This is largely due to the presence of two nuclear powers and the unique social, economic, and geographical characteristics of the area, which have facilitated the establishment of militant and terrorist groups. As a result, South Asia has been a focal point of international politics and one of the most conflict-prone and insecure regions in the world. Considering Afghanistan's position in South Asia and the complexities of the region, Afghanistan's participation in South Asia, and particularly in SAARC, can have significant implications for the country. (Sadeqi, 2024, p. 6) (SAARC, 2025) In conclusion, an examination of the members of this organization reveals that they share significant historical, civilizational, and cultural commonalities. Undoubtedly, cooperation among the member countries can contribute to security and the achievement of stability. Alongside this, Afghanistan's strategic position can play a vital role in the development of the region—particularly in the energy sector and key markets of Central Asia and the Caucasus—and in linking South Asia with Central Asia. This, in turn, can foster greater integration and cohesion among the countries of South Asia and Central Asia.

8.2. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established on June 15, 2001, by six countries: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, in the city of Shanghai, China. This is why the organization bears the name Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO covers a geographic area of over 30 million square kilometers and has a population exceeding 1.5 billion people. When observer countries are included, this population roughly doubles. The SCO was founded with the aim of fostering long-term cooperation in economic, trade, commercial, and security fields. (Dero, 2019, p. 108_113) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) currently has nine member states: the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Additionally, there are three observer states: Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, and Mongolia. In 2022, during the SCO Summit in Samarkand, the process of elevating the status of the Republic of Belarus to full membership within the organization began. Currently, the SCO has 14 Dialogue Partners, including the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of

Bahrain, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the State of Qatar, the State of Kuwait, the Republic of Maldives, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Turkey, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Socialist Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (sco, 2025)

This organization was established with the following objectives:

- To strengthen mutual trust, friendship, and good neighborliness among member countries;
- To encourage effective cooperation among member states in various fields including politics, trade, economy, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, tourism, environmental protection, and more;
- To jointly ensure and maintain peace, security, and stability in the region; and
- To promote a new democratic, just, and rational international political and economic order .(sco, 2025)

By examining the significance and substantial capacity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its members, it is evident that most countries from Central and South Asia are members of this organization. Undoubtedly, comprehensive cooperation among these members can enhance the level of collaboration and accelerate the processes of stability and development in both Central and South Asia.

8.3. Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

The Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) was established by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the Republic of Turkey, and was renamed the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1985. The ECO region, with a population of approximately 550 million and spanning over 8 million square kilometers, connects the north to the south, the south to the east and west, Asia to Europe, and Eurasia to the Arab world. The ECO, composed of countries from the Caucasus, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia, is one of the oldest intergovernmental organizations. Its primary goal is to create favorable conditions for continuous and sustainable economic development aimed at the welfare and prosperity of its member states. Currently, the organization comprises ten member countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. (ECO, 2025) The members of this organization vary in terms of their economic size and gross domestic product, and their economic systems also differ. However, by utilizing a complementary economic strategy, they can achieve a significant level of integration, especially in the sectors of fossil energy resources and raw materials, which constitute some of the largest fossil fuel reserves in the world. Moreover, the ECO member states, most of which are located in strategically important regions of the world, have long attracted the attention of both regional and extra-regional countries. The history of this area also reflects shared cultural and historical ties spanning several millennia, covering a vast territory from western Turkey in Europe to eastern Kazakhstan, and from the borders of Mongolia and China to the coasts of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, extending to northern parts of Central Asia. The ECO region lies on the east-west transit route, connecting Europe and Africa on one side with East and Southeast Asia on the other. Through its waterways, the ECO region can engage in trade via the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea with Europe and Africa, and via the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean with East Asia. In brief, it serves as a junction point for three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. Additionally, this region possesses key maritime areas such as the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and controls strategic straits including Hormuz, Bosphorus, and Dardanelles, giving it significant global influence. These factors collectively enhance the strategic importance of the ECO region. (Rasoul Afzali , Adel Ansari, 2017, p. 350_353) An important point regarding this organization relates to its membership. Upon reviewing its members, it is evident that most are from Central and South Asia, including Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, comprehensive cooperation among the members of this organization can play a significant role in expanding collaborative relations across various political, security, economic, and cultural fields between Central and South Asian countries. Afghanistan, in particular, can play a pivotal role as a bridge connecting these two regions, which could accelerate economic development in both areas.

9. Afghanistan's Cultural Role in Connecting Central Asia and South Asia

The countries of the Eastern world hold a prestigious position in terms of civilizational and cultural identity. A significant part of this honor is attributed to the countries of Central and South Asia. The modern-day countries of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are considered members of a unified civilizational sphere. Cultural, historical, religious, and spiritual commonalities among Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries have fostered closer ties between the nations in this region. (tamana, 2014, p. 71) On the other hand, Afghanistan shares deep-rooted historical ties and significant commonalities with the countries of South Asia. It holds substantial interests in historical, religious, linguistic, and cultural spheres that render Afghanistan's relationship with the South Asian region inseparable. (Seyed Ahmad Fatemi Nejad , Alireza Mohammadzadeh, 2018, p. 410) Understanding the regional commonalities between the countries of Central and South Asia and recognizing Afghanistan's pivotal role in connecting these two regions, cooperation among these areas can undoubtedly enhance relations among member countries. Numerous opportunities exist for cultural collaboration, particularly in the fields of language, Islamic art, and education. Expanding cooperation in these sectors fosters a broader approach toward collaboration and integration among the countries of these two regions. Acknowledging the significance of these aspects, we examine several key cultural domains that link Central and South Asia, highlighting Afghanistan's role in this connection.

9.1. Existence of Shared Islamic Art

The spread and influence of Islam in the Indian subcontinent coincided with the political life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This process initially occurred through Arab trade networks established during the Prophet's era, which maintained commercial relations with the southwestern region of India (Malabar). Subsequently, Arab merchants and investors traveled throughout the Indian subcontinent, disseminating Islam and constructing mosques to facilitate religious practices. According to historical perspectives, Islam first entered the Indian subcontinent via the regions of Merv, Kabul, and Zabul. (Hamid Hajipoorian , Elham Taheri, 2013, p. 3_4) Following the Arabs, one of the most influential factors in the spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent were dynasties originating from present-day Afghanistan, including the Ghurids, Ghaznavids, and the Mughals, descendants of Babur. An important point to note regarding the dissemination of Islam is that these dynasties simultaneously ruled over vast parts of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, which contributed to the expansion of a cohesive Islamic culture across both South Asia and Central Asia. This cultural unity is vividly reflected in various art forms such as literature, architecture, calligraphy, painting, ceramics, music, and more. Furthermore, the monumental historical sites in the Indian subcontinent, including the Humayun's Tomb, Sher Shah Suri's Tomb, Akbar's Tomb, and the Taj Mahal, stand as testament to the profound influence of Islamic art in the region. (Shirazi, 2021, p. 1_15) In Central Asia, Islam was first introduced during the Arab conquest led by Qutayba ibn Muslim in the early eighth century CE. The Arab armies conquered major cities in Central Asia, particularly Bukhara and Samarkand, which became the most important Islamic centers in the region. Throughout the ninth century CE, Central Asia was regarded as an integral and vital part of the Islamic world. (Abdolreza Faraji Rad , Javad Khansari, 2011, p. 49_50) The spread of Islam in Khorasan, Central Asia, and present-day Afghanistan, alongside political and religious transformations, brought profound impacts on the field of art. Especially during the medieval period, scholars such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Al-Biruni, Al-Farabi, and others gained prominence. Alongside this, significant literary and artistic works emerged in these countries. An important aspect related to Central Asia is the rise of dynasties that played a vital role in promoting and spreading science and art, including the Timurids, Safavids, Shaybanids, Mughals, and others. During the rule of these dynasties, numerous Islamic monuments were left as a legacy, particularly mosques, palaces, gardens, and mausoleums, which vividly demonstrate the influence of Islamic civilization in the region. (Moghbeli, 2017, p. 60_68) An important topic concerning Central and South Asia is Afghanistan's pivotal position in terms of civilizational and religious matters, as well as the shared civilizational, artistic, and Islamic commonalities between these two regions. Examining these aspects reveals that ruling dynasties in both regions, particularly the Mongol dynasty, played a significant role in the dissemination of Islamic art. This underscores the potential for expanding relations between these two regions, with Afghanistan playing a crucial role in strengthening and broadening these connections.

9.2. Persian Language

The role of the Persian language as a fundamental and influential element in the connection between Central and South Asia holds great significance. Although the origin of this language and its rich literature lies in the lands of Afghanistan, Iran, and present-day Central Asian countries, its influence extends not only over Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia but also widely encompasses the Indian subcontinent, including India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. In some cases, the cultural and linguistic ties of Persian with this region have even surpassed political and social relations. (Abbaszaidi, 2010, p. 87) Among these, the significant presence of Persian poets and writers in the Indian subcontinent—and, most importantly, the use of Persian as the official and administrative language of Indian rulers for nearly eight hundred years—demonstrates the profound influence of the Persian language in the region. (tamana, 2014, p. 259) The regions of Central and South Asia have experienced difficult periods of occupation in their recent history, which negatively impacted the spread of the Persian language in the past. However, it is evident that Persian remains a living and important language with a special status in both Central and South Asia, particularly when viewed within its historical context, where it has held great prestige and significance. Understanding this, regional cooperation between Central and South Asia, along with the increasing role of Persian-speaking countries such as Afghanistan as a connector between these two regions, can undoubtedly contribute not only to the revitalization of the Persian language but also to the expansion of regional collaboration.

9.3. Technology and Innovation

An examination of the conditions in South and Central Asia reveals a high potential for cooperation in the fields of education and technology between the two regions. The Central Asian countries, which faced major technological and technical challenges following their independence, (koolae, politics and government in central asia, 2015, p. 68_69) Even now, Central Asian countries have not been able to turn this challenge into an opportunity. However, given their abundant human capital and natural resources, they could undoubtedly do so through international cooperation. On the other hand, South Asia—particularly the Republic of India—has, over the past two decades, emerged as one of the world's leading powers in technology and communications. India's information technology and software industry has been growing at a rapid pace. In fact, the development of software and information and communication technology (ICT) services has significantly contributed to India's rise as a global player. According to the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), India has become a major hub for ICT product development globally. The country's technology sector generates revenues exceeding hundreds of billions of dollars. In addition to ICT, India also holds a prominent position in global biotechnology. Biotechnology—an applied science—plays a key role in modern agriculture, animal husbandry, pharmaceuticals, vaccine development, pollution control, environmental protection, and energy production. Today, more than 350 biotechnology companies operate in India, employing over 20,000 scientists, and exporting biotechnology and pharmaceutical products to more than 100 countries annually. (Abdolreza Farajirad , Masoud Abdi, 2016, p. 71_75) In light of this potential, the Republic of India, with its vast capabilities in technology and biotechnology, can undoubtedly create valuable opportunities to enhance the capacities of both South and Central Asian countries. Such cooperation could be fostered through the provision of academic scholarships for students from South and Central Asia, as well as through the signing of multilateral agreements aimed at sending scientists and experts for advisory missions to member countries in these regions, including Afghanistan. India, in particular, has made significant educational investments in Afghanistan. Each year, through programs such as ICCR and ITEC, it offers higher education opportunities to Afghan students in India. Consequently, India has become one of the primary academic destinations for Afghan students across various educational levels. This model of cooperation can undoubtedly serve as a valuable example for broader scientific, technological, and academic collaboration between the two regions. (Abdullah Alizadeh, Khanali Azimi, 2023, p. 179_180)

10. Conclusion

Afghanistan is one of the few countries that enjoys an extraordinarily significant geostrategic position at both the regional and global levels. With a history spanning over 5,000 years, it is considered one of the cradles of ancient human civilization. The land known today as Afghanistan was historically referred to as Khorasan and Ariana, encompassing a vast geography that now includes parts of Central Asia, Iran, and South Asia. Despite the reduction of this historical territory due to the geopolitical maneuvers of colonial powers, the strategic importance of

Afghanistan's location has remained undiminished. In the 21st century, Afghanistan continues to occupy a vital geostrategic position at the crossroads of four key regions of Asia: Central Asia, East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia—making it a consistent focal point of interest for global powers. However, this strategic position has not been effectively utilized. Recognizing Afghanistan's considerable potential to connect these four regions, this study has focused on the country's specific role in linking Central and South Asia—two regions with deep civilizational, geographical, and cultural ties. The findings of this research confirm that, as the “Heart of Asia,” Afghanistan holds significant capacity to serve as a bridge between Central and South Asia. This potential is analyzed through the lens of the theory of New Regionalism, particularly across four dimensions: political, security, economic, and cultural.

Political Dimension: South Asia, comprising the eight member states of SAARC, represents one of the most important regions of the world due to its vast geography and immense human resources. This region includes two key geopolitical actors—India and Pakistan. Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the subsequent emergence of India and Pakistan as independent states, South Asia has experienced persistent political tensions and instability. These strained relations, particularly between India and Pakistan, have also cast a shadow over Afghanistan's own political environment. Since 1947, Afghanistan has maintained formal diplomatic relations with key South Asian countries, especially India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. Historically, Afghanistan's relations with South Asian countries—except for Pakistan—have been relatively positive. Considering the region's substantial political potential, particularly with the presence of shared civilizational values and institutional frameworks such as SAARC, Afghanistan could play a significant role in facilitating diplomatic engagement within the region, especially between India and Pakistan. Turning to Central Asia, which consists of five republics, Afghanistan shares deep historical, civilizational, and geographical ties with these nations. However, diplomatic relations with the Central Asian republics formally began only after their independence in 1991–1992. Since then, Afghanistan has enjoyed generally positive and stable relations with these countries. When assessing diplomatic relations between Central and South Asia, it becomes evident that there remains a serious need for stronger diplomatic engagement between the two regions. Given its geographic position as a bridge between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan is well-placed to facilitate and expand these relations. This role would not only contribute to greater regional stability but also foster the groundwork for regional integration. Ultimately, this could lead to enhanced cooperation across broader Asia and at the international level.

Security Dimension: The two regions of South Asia and Central Asia face significant security challenges. South Asia, considered one of the most unstable regions in the world over the past few decades, has a pressing need for enhanced cooperation among the South Asian countries themselves as well as with neighboring regions, particularly Central Asia. Central Asian countries are also grappling with serious security threats, including drug cultivation and trafficking, organized crime, separatist movements, and the activities of illegal armed groups. Like South Asia, Central Asia is threatened by issues such as organized crime, drug trafficking, and unlawful militant activities. Many of these threats in Central Asia stem from developments in South Asia, underscoring the urgent need for cooperative security frameworks between the two regions. In this context, Afghanistan, as a pivotal interregional country, can play a critical role in enhancing security cooperation—particularly in combating drug trafficking, fighting against international and organized crime, countering separatist movements, and curbing the operations of illegal armed groups. Such cooperation would not only reduce crime and enhance security in both Central and South Asia, but would also lay the groundwork for strengthening ties in other areas such as politics, economy, and culture—ultimately leading to greater regional integration.

Economic Dimensions: Afghanistan plays a significant role in fostering regional cooperation and promoting both regional and international connectivity. However, the country's geographical position also provides it with substantial economic potential, particularly between two major regions of Asia—Central Asia and South Asia. South Asia, with its large human resources and vast economic market, has a serious demand for raw materials and energy in order to meet the needs of its citizens. In contrast, Central Asia—with its vast territory, small population, and abundant reserves of raw materials and energy—seeks to export these resources to larger markets. Among the most viable and closest destinations for Central Asian exports is South Asia. In this context, Afghanistan, due to its key connecting position between Central and South Asia, can serve as a suitable economic corridor to facilitate this linkage between the two regions. Therefore, there is a serious need for the member countries of both regions

to enhance their cooperation, particularly in the transfer of raw materials and energy from Central Asia to the South, and likewise in the export of South Asian goods to Central Asian countries. In this process, Afghanistan—as the most important and efficient transit route—can play a vital role in the economic development of the two regions, the expansion of economic relations among their countries, and the promotion of regional integration. This will not only contribute to resolving economic challenges and reducing poverty but also help raise the standard of living for the people of both regions. Moreover, this process would allow Afghanistan's strategic location to be further utilized in developing economic and trade relations with other parts of Asia as well. In the broader perspective, it could pave the way for the flourishing of Asian regions as a global economic center—with Afghanistan, as the Heart of Asia, having the potential to become its beating heart.

Cultural Dimensions: Afghanistan shares extensive cultural, civilizational, and historical commonalities with the countries of Central Asia and South Asia, as they are part of a unified civilization. Historically, Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries were once part of the same territorial domain. Similarly, Afghanistan and the South Asian countries also belonged to a single territorial entity until major geopolitical changes occurred, binding their destinies together. A study of the historical backgrounds of Central and South Asia reveals that these regions share a common political and cultural fate. The ruling dynasties in both regions exercised power in similar ways, indicating a parallel governance tradition. Given these shared characteristics, there are significant cultural grounds between Central and South Asia that—if supported by joint investments—could facilitate cultural integration between the two regions. This is especially true in the fields of education, arts, language, and literature. In this context, Afghanistan, due to its central geographic and cultural position, can play a crucial connecting role in expanding cultural relations between Central and South Asia.

Based on the findings of the research, it is evident that Afghanistan possesses a significant connecting capacity as a bridge between two major regions of Asia—Central Asia and South Asia. Afghanistan, known as the Heart of Asia, and in accordance with the principles of the theory of new regionalism, not only provides the basis for linking and fostering integration between these two key Asian regions but also creates conditions for the stabilization and prosperity of South Asia and Central Asia. Alongside its capacity to connect Central Asia with South Asia and promote regional integration between them, Afghanistan has the potential—if this integration is realized—to facilitate the cohesion of other Asian regions, especially East Asia and West Asia, by linking Central and South Asia with these wider regions. In such a scenario, Afghanistan would become the pivotal communication hub of Asia. An examination of these points confirms that the research supports the main hypothesis of this study.

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University Engagement and Students' Perspectives in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve: A Case Study from Camili (Macahel), Türkiye

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Abstract

This study explores the role of regional universities in promoting sustainable development within UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (BRs), focusing on the case of Artvin Çoruh University (AÇÜ) and Camili (Macahel) BR in northeastern Türkiye. Despite Camili BR's ecological and cultural significance, challenges such as depopulation, limited accessibility, and low public awareness hinder its potential as a model site for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Using a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed and interviewed AÇÜ students to assess their awareness of the BR, engagement with sustainability issues, and perceptions of university-community collaboration. Results revealed low awareness among undergraduate students, while graduate students and those in relevant disciplines (e.g., forestry) demonstrated higher engagement. Interviews highlighted the dual nature of Camili BR's isolation –supporting conservation but limiting educational and economic opportunities– and emphasized the importance of preserving cultural heritage and fostering youth involvement. The findings suggest that regional universities can act as catalysts for sustainability by integrating BR-related content into curricula, facilitating community-based learning, and collaborating with NGOs or foundations such as TEMA. The study also identifies the need for improved infrastructure, digital outreach, and interdisciplinary initiatives to enhance BR visibility and impact. Methodological reflections highlight limitations in sample size and stakeholder representation, suggesting directions for future research. This case offers a replicable model for university-BR partnerships in other regions and contributes to the broader discourse on the role of higher education in UNESCO-designated sites.

Keywords: UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Regional Sustainable Development, Turkey (Türkiye), Camili (Macahel) Biosphere Reserve, Higher Education Institution (HEI), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

Sustainable development seeks to balance environmental, economic, and social dimensions to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. This concept has gained global recognition through key initiatives such as Our Common Future (1987) and Agenda 21 (1992), which emphasize intergenerational equity and a holistic approach to sustainability. Integral to these efforts is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), a transformative educational framework that addresses interconnected global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. According to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) (2005), ESD promotes interdisciplinary learning, cultural relevance, and life-long education. UNESCO (2012) further expanded this framework by introducing a fifth pillar of education – learning to transform society – in addition to the traditional four; learning to know, to do, to be, and live together. In this context, higher education institutions (HEI) play a pivotal role in advancing ESD through their core missions: research, education, and community engagement (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

1.2 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and the Role of Universities

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, established in 1971, provides a global framework for integrating biodiversity conservation with sustainable development. Unlike UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves (BRs) serve as living laboratories for testing and demonstrating sustainable practices. The Seville Strategy (1996) outlines three core functions of BRs;

- Conservation: Preserving genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes
- Development: Fostering sustainable economic and human development
- Logistical support: Facilitating projects for environmental education and training, monitoring related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development

The Lima Action Plan (2016), further emphasizes the role of universities in implementing the MAB Programme. Universities are expected to;

- Establish partnerships with universities/research institutions to undertake research (A.4.1.)
- Identify and disseminate good practices for sustainable development, and identify and eliminate unsustainable practices in BRs (A.4.4.)
- Organize regional education, capacity building and training programmes (B1.2.)

Along with these expectations, Mammadova (2019) reported that an international study program in a BR enhanced intercultural competence even in a short-term of stay at the site. However, on the other hand, the level of university engagement varies significantly across countries and individual BRs. While successful collaborations are reported in countries like Japan (e.g., Mount Hakusan BR and Kanazawa University) and Germany (Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development), such leading initiatives are less common or underreported in most BRs.

1.3 The Case of Camili Biosphere Reserve and Artvin Çoruh University

This study focuses on Camili (Macahel) BR, Türkiye's only UNESCO-designated BR, located in Artvin Province. Designated in 2005, Camili BR faces several challenges including depopulation, limited economic opportunities, and hard accessibility due to its mountainous geography (T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2007). These factors have hindered its development and visibility, both nationally and internationally.

Located in the same province, Artvin Çoruh University (AÇÜ) is a regional national university established in 2008. Given its geographical proximity and academic mission to support regional development, AÇÜ is well-positioned to act as a bridge between Camili BR and external stakeholders. Through its research capacity, community engagement, and international collaborations, AÇÜ has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the BR's sustainable development goals.

Türkiye's cautious stance on climate policy -highlighted by its 2021 ratification of the Paris Agreement with a reservation to protect its right to economic development (Batmaz, 2025) –further underscores the need for localized, context-sensitive approach to sustainability. In this setting, the synergy between a relatively inactive BR

and a newly established university offers a unique model for exploring the role of HEIs in promoting sustainability in underrepresented regions.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to investigate how a regional university can contribute to sustainable development in a less-active BR through ESD initiatives. In this context, the term “less-active BR” refers to BRs that exhibit limited engagement in educational, scientific, and community-based activities, as well as insufficient collaboration with higher education institutions and minimal integration in international networks. Camili BR, designated in 2005 and still operating under a draft management plan (T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2007) as of 2025, exemplifies such characteristics of a less-active BR.

To investigate this potential, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do university students perceive the MAB Programme, BRs, and local issues such as depopulation, limited accessibility, low employment opportunities?
2. What actions can AÇÜ students take to address these issues and contribute to regional sustainability?
3. How do ESD and SDGs-oriented activities within the Camili BR influence:
 - Students’ decision-making and behavior?
 - The impact of student-led initiatives on the local community?

A mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires and interviews with AÇÜ students and local youth was adopted to answer these questions. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the educational, social, and institutional dynamics shaping sustainability efforts in Camili BR.

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate university students’ awareness of the Camili BR, their attitudes toward regional sustainability, and their potential roles in addressing local challenges. The methodology combined a structured questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights.

2.1 Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was structured to assess students’ awareness of UNESCO BRs, their perceptions of Camili BR and AÇÜ, and their involvement in community-based sustainability efforts. The survey was adapted from previous studies by Mammadova (2021) and Gower (2022), which explored the relationship between educational practices, community engagement, and BR-university collaboration.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 items divided into three thematic sections;

1. Awareness of UNESCO BRs in general
2. Perceptions of AÇÜ and Camili BR
3. Community involvement and local engagement inside Camili BR

A total of 46 students from AÇÜ participated in the survey, all responding to the Turkish version of the questionnaire (Figure 1). The average age of respondents was 23.6 years. In terms of gender distribution, 60.9% identified as female (28/46), 37.0% as male (17/46), and 2.2% did not specify their gender (1/46). Participants represented a range of academic levels, from vocational school (*Artvin Meslek Yüksekokulu*) to doctoral programs (*Doktora*), and were affiliated with various faculties: 41.3% were from the Faculty of Forestry, 26.1% from the Faculty of Education, and 8.7% from the Faculty of Health Sciences (n=46). Regarding their place of origin, 34.8% were born in Artvin Province (16/46), while 45.7% came from the broader East Black Sea Region—defined by the DOKAP mandate area (2024)—including Artvin (21/46). Notably, only 10.9% of respondents (5/46) had personally visited the Camili BR.



Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (n = 46)

Note. Includes gender distribution, academic affiliation, faculty affiliation, and place of origin. Based on responses to the Turkish version of the questionnaire administered at AÇÜ between January and May 2024.

2.2 Interview Survey

To better understand the context behind the survey responses, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals in the Table 1;

Table 1: Overview of Interview Participants

Interviewees	Gender	Affiliation	Date of interview
A	F	Faculty of Education, Doctoral Course, TEMA Youth senior member	September, 2024
B	M	Faculty of Forestry, Masters Course	September, 2024
C	M	Employee at a tourist pension inside of Camili, TEMA Youth senior member	October, 2024

Note. Summarizes the gender, affiliation, and interview dates of three semi-structured interviewees. One participant (C) is a local youth not affiliated with AÇÜ.

Although the interviewee C was not affiliated with AÇÜ, his perspective as a local youth was considered valuable for understanding community-level insights. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom in Turkish, recorded, transcribed, translated into English, and manually coded for semantic analysis.

The interview questions were derived from a pre-distributed Turkish questionnaire sheet (Table 2), which was provided to participants prior to the interviews. The original questions were written in Turkish and later translated into English for analysis. This approach ensured consistency across interviews and allowed participants to prepare their responses in advance.

Table 2: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

To be asked	Questions
A,B,C	What do you think is the reason for the low awareness of Camili BR?

A,B	Do you have any ideas for the promotion of Camili BR?
A,B,C	What do you think about the activities of Macahel Education, Culture and Solidarity Foundation and Café Macahel in Istanbul?
A,B,C	What are your thoughts about the future vision of Macahel in 10 years (2034)?
A	What are the activities of Young TEMA and Alumni TEMA? Is there a specific program related to Camili BR, regional sustainable development or global networking?
A,B,C	What do you think about the idea of creating a new Biosphere Reserve in Türkiye? Would this cause Camili BR to lose its value as “the only Biosphere Reserve in Türkiye”?
A,B,C	How would you like to promote Camili BR on the global stage?
C	How much do you think the influence of Georgia is felt in Macahel?
C	How do you evaluate the use of the name “Camili” as the name of the BR?

Note. Lists the questions provided in advance to interview participants A, B, and C. Designed to explore perceptions of Camili BR, regional sustainability, and youth engagement.

These interviews provided deeper insights into students’ motivations, behavioral contexts, and the potential role of universities in regional development.

3. Results

3.1 Survey Results

A total of 46 valid responses were obtained from AÇÜ students between January and May 2024. Despite the proximity of Camili BR, only 10.9%(5/46) of respondents had ever visited the site. Awareness levels were also low;

- 41.3% (19/46) had heard of UNESCO BR
- 30.4% (14/46) knew Camili BR was designated as a UNESCO BR
- 50.0% (23/46) reported no knowledge of Camili BR at all

When asked to describe Camili BR, the most frequently mentioned features were;

- “Rich biodiversity” (34/46)
- “Abundant forest resources” (17/46)
- “Eco-tourism” (15/46)

Regarding environmental and social concerns, the decline of rare species was the most serious issue. Only 13.0% (6/46) had learned about Camili BR during their studies, and just 10.9% (5/46) believed their academic major was related to SDG-oriented activities in the region.

In terms of behavior:

- 10.9% (5/46) had participated in local sustainability activities(e.g., field research, conservation)
- 63.0% (29/46) considered community contribution is important for sustainable development
- 67.3% (31/46) agreed that BR designation helped protect the natural environment
- 54.3% agreed it improved local skills and job training

However, only 2.2% (1/46) were aware of SDG-related projects in Camili BR. When asked about future engagement;

- 13.0% (6/46) expressed interest in living and working in the region after graduation
- 43.5% (20/46) were unsure
- 43.5% (20/46) were unwilling

Finally, only 10.9% (5/46) believed they could participate in Camili BR projects remotely(e.g., online), while 39.1% (18/46) disagreed.

3.2 Interview Results

Three semi-structured interviews conducted with the individuals listed in the Table 1. Key themes that emerged from the interviews are summarized in the Table 2 and following opinions were obtained and categorized by topic.

3.2.1 Infrastructure and Accessibility

- All participants noted severe winter road closures and lack of public transport
- Electricity outages were common in winter, affecting year-round residency

3.2.2 Policy and Governance

- Forest laws were described as strong but poorly enforced
- Participants called for stricter environmental regulations

3.2.3 Demographic Trend

- A reversal of out-migration was observed, partly due to economic hardship, COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 earthquake
- Role of NGOs and Foundations
- TEMA was praised for promotion youth engagement, environmental education, and disaster response
- The passing of TEMA's founder, Ali Nihat Gökyiğit, was seen as a turning point in local conservation efforts

3.2.4 Tourism and Promotion-

- Eco-tourism was seen as promising but underdeveloped
- Café Macahel and the Macahel Foundation were viewed as effective promotional bodies
- Social media was considered useful for outreach, especially to urban audiences

3.2.5 Cultural Identity

- Georgian heritage (language, cuisine, village names such as Mahahel) was seen as a valuable cultural asset
- Participants stressed the importance of preserving both natural and cultural heritage

3.2.6 Education and Research

- Participants supported more academic collaboration and ecological literacy programs
- Suggestions included student-led surveys, workshops, and international exchanges

4. Discussion

4.1 Enhancing ESD through Regional Engagement

The survey revealed a significant gap in awareness of Camili BR among undergraduate students of AÇÜ, despite its geographical proximity. This suggests a missed opportunity for integrating regional sustainability into higher education. Graduate students and those in the Faculty of Forestry showed higher levels of awareness and engagement, indicating that disciplinary relevance and academic maturity influence students' connection to local sustainability issues (Table 3, Table 4).

Table 3: Awareness Levels by Academic Status

Group	Visited Camili BR	Heard of UNESCO BR	Aware of Protected Area
Graduate (n=7)	71.4 %	100 %	100 %
Undergraduate/ Vocational (n=39)	0 %	30.8 %	23.1 %

Note. Compares knowledge of Camili BR and UNESCO designations between graduate and undergraduate/vocational students. Shows higher awareness among graduate-level respondents.

Table 4: Awareness and Engagement by Faculty Affiliation

Group	Visited Camili BR	Heard of UNESCO BR	Aware of Camili as a BR	Importance of Community Engagement
Forestry (n=19)	21.1 %	47.4%	36.8%	73.7%
Others (n=27)	3.7%	37.0%	25.9%	55.4%

Note. Details differences in BR visitation, awareness, and perceived importance of community engagement between students from the Faculty of Forestry and other faculties.

To address this gap, incorporating BR-related content in undergraduate curricula -such as the MAB framework, regional development challenges, and local biodiversity- could foster broader understanding and engagement. Moreover, educational programs that include dialogue with local residents may help overcome misconceptions and promote reciprocal learning, aligning with UNESCO's emphasis on intergenerational and community-based education.

4.2 Youth Engagement and the Role of Foundations

Interviews highlighted the active role of TEMA Youth in environmental protection and community development. This contrasts with the low awareness levels found in the broader student population, suggesting that external organizations like TEMA (Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion; *Türkiye Erozyonla Mücadele Ağaçlandırma ve Doğal Varlıkları Koruma Vakfı*). Foundation (*vakfi*) can serve as effective intermediaries between BRs and youth. In the context of Türkiye, a *vakfi* refers to a traditional Islamic institution that supports public welfare through charitable activities. Unlike general usage of the word “foundation”, *vakfi* are deeply rooted in cultural and religious practices, often providing long-term support to communities without expecting immediate returns. As highlighted by Maruyama (2008), *vakfi* plays a bridging role in society, connecting diverse groups and fostering social capital. In the realm of ESD, *vakfi* contributes significantly by organizing environmental education programs and supporting local initiatives, thereby enhancing community resilience and sustainability.

Given its proximity and institutional mission, AÇÜ is well-positioned to collaborate with TEMA and similar foundations to co-develop capacity-building programs, field-based learning, and volunteer initiatives. These partnerships could enhance social capital and bridge the gap between academic institutions and local communities, reinforcing the MAB Programme's emphasis on youth participation.

4.3 Infrastructure and Accessibility Challenges

Camili BR's inaccessibility -particularly during snow season- was identified as both a barrier and a protective factor. While it limits educational and tourism activities, it also preserves the region's ecological integrity. Survey responses suggest that small, discipline-specific groups (e.g., forestry or graduate students) may be more suitable for field-based programs in such remote areas.

To mitigate seasonal isolation, infrastructure improvements (e.g., tunnel construction, reopening of historic passes) and digital engagement strategies (e.g., online workshops, virtual exchanges) could be explored. These approaches align with UNESCO's transboundary cooperation principles (2021) and offer scalable solutions for other isolated BRs.

4.4 University-Community Collaboration and Economic Development

AÇÜ existing research centers and regional specialization in medical and aromatic plants demonstrate its potential to contribute to local economic development. Successful commercialization of products like herbal creams illustrates how university-led initiative can generate tangible benefits for the region.

Expanding such efforts to Camili BR -through branding, certification, and interdisciplinary research- could enhance the BR's visibility and economic resilience. Moreover, AÇÜ's involvement in policy development and tourism planning could support more inclusive and sustainable regional strategies.

4.5 Cultural Heritage and Educational Innovation

Camili BR's location on the Türkiye–Georgia border presents unique opportunities for cultural preservation and cross-border collaboration. Interviews emphasized the importance of safeguarding local traditions, such as village name, language, cuisine, grape (wine) production, which are integral to the region's identity.

4.6 Strategic Positioning and Global Integration

As Türkiye's only UNESCO BR, Camili BR carries the unique responsibility of representing the MAB Programme in the country, yet it faces challenges in networking and visibility. The lack of domestic counterparts and limits opportunities for knowledge exchange and benchmarking. AÇÜ could help bridge this gap by facilitating regular dialogue with the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO and international partners. Establishing a UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair Programme at AÇÜ would formalize its role in advancing sustainability and education. This would align with global precedents and position the university as a leader in BR-based research and learning.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Contributions

This study explored the relationship between a regional university (AÇÜ) and Türkiye's only UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Camili (Macahel) BR, to assess how such partnership can foster sustainable regional development. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with local youth, mainly university students, the research revealed a significant gap in awareness and engagement with the BR, particularly among undergraduate students. However, it also identified promoting opportunities for collaboration, especially through targeted educational programs, youth engagement, and interdisciplinary initiatives.

The findings underscore the potential of regional universities to act as catalysts for sustainability by integrating ESD into their curricula, facilitating community-based learning, and collaboration with local stakeholders such as NGOs and foundations. AÇÜ's proximity to Camili BR and its institutional mission position it as a strategic partner in advancing the goal of the MAB Programme.

5.2 Policy and Practice Implications

To strengthen the impact of Camili BR, several practical steps are recommended;

- Curriculum Integration: Incorporate BR-related content and ESD principals into university programs, especially at the undergraduate level.
- Community Engagement: Facilitate dialogue between students and local residents to promote mutual understanding and co-learning.

- Digital Outreach: Develop online platforms for remote participation in BR activities, addressing accessibility challenges.
- Institutional Collaboration: Establish formal partnerships between local educational bodies such as AÇÜ, local organizations, and the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO to improve governance and visibility

5.3 Broader Relevance and Future Directions

The Camili-AÇÜ case offers a replicable model for other regions seeking to balance conservation and development. It highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, youth involvement, and culturally sensitive approaches to sustainability. Moreover, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of higher education institutions in UNESCO-designated sites, including Global Geoparks and World Heritage areas. Future research should expand the scope to include perspectives from local residents, explore cross-border cooperation with Georgia such as transboundary BR, and examine pedagogical strategies for embedding BRs into higher education. Establishing a UNESCO Chair/ UNITWIN programme at AÇÜ could further institutionalize its role in regional and global sustainability efforts.

5.4 Reflections on Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationship between a regional university and a UNESCO BR. While this design allowed for a comprehensive understanding of student perceptions and institutional roles, several methodological considerations and limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the sample size was relatively small, with 46 valid responses from AÇÜ students. Although the findings revealed meaningful trends, the limited number of participants – particularly in the graduate student group – restricts the generalizability of the results. Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to enable statistical significance and broader applicability.

Second, the study primarily focused on university's perspective, without incorporating direct input from Camili BR residents or local stakeholders. While student voices offer valuable insights, a more balanced view would require triangulation with community perspectives, especially regarding the effectiveness of ESD initiatives and local engagement.

Third, the geographical and cultural context of Camili BR, as a border region with historical ties to Georgia, emerged as a significant factor during interviews. However, this dimension was not fully captured in the survey design. Future research should consider cross-border dynamics and cultural heritages as integral components of sustainability discourse.

Finally, while the study identified promising educational strategies and institutional roles, it did not deeply examine pedagogical frameworks or curriculum design. Further investigation into how BR-related content can be systematically embedded into higher education programs would enhance the practical relevance of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable foundation for understanding university-BR collaboration and offers a model that can be adapted to other regions and institutions. The methodological insights gained here can inform future research designs and contribute to the evolving field of sustainability education.

Ethical Considerations:

This study received no external funding, and the authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Human and Social Sciences at Kanazawa University (Approval No. 05-64). Additional permission to conduct the research, including the distribution of questionnaires and the implementation of interviews on campus, was granted by the Board of Directors at Artvin Çoruh University (Approval No. E-12475423-605-133412).

All participants were fully informed of the study's objectives and procedures and provided informed consent prior to participation. This article draws upon survey data originally collected for the author's master's thesis, entitled "*The Role of the Relationship Between a Regional University and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (BR) in Promoting Sustainable Regional Development: A Case Study Based on a Student Survey at Artvin Çoruh University and the Camili (Macahel) UNESCO BR in Türkiye*," submitted to Kanazawa University in January 2025. A sample of the survey questionnaire is available from the author upon reasonable request.

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Website as a Battlefield for Marketing Communication Messages through Cultural Touch

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the characteristics of messages from the websites of Fuji Rock Festival (FRF, Japan), Sunburn Festival (SBF, India), Beijing Music Festival (BMF, China), and We the Fest (WTF, Indonesia). The cultural dimensions used are Individualism (IN)/Collectivism (COL), Masculinity (MAS)/Femininity (FEM), High/Low Power Distance (HPD/LPD), High/Low Uncertainty Avoidance (HUA/LUA), Indulgence (IND)/Restraint (RES), High/Low Context (HCX/LCX), High/Low Contact (HCT/LCT), and Long/Short Term Orientation (LTO/STO) as a result of combining cultural dimensions from Hofstede, Hall and Andersen. The analysis in this research draws on five theories: CMM, CAT, CMC, globalization, and transculturation. The research method uses quantitative content analysis. The results of the study show that the festival in China (BMF Website) emphasizes collectivism and high-power distance values, reflecting a hierarchical and long-term cultural context, with communication tailored to be inclusive. The festival in Japan (FRF Website), with a culture that prioritizes accuracy, efficiency, and communication adjustments, is oriented towards a multicultural audience, maintaining a balance between global and traditional elements. The festival in India (SBF Website) promotes open communication using English as a medium, incorporates mixed masculine and feminine values, and adopts an approach that balances local and global cultures. The festival in Indonesia (WTF Website) focuses on innovative and interactive design, with a lower emphasis on communication in context and power distance, encouraging user participation and community identity.

Keywords: Cultural Dimension, Website, Music Festival, Content Analysis

1. Introduction

Hall (1976, as cited in Ghanem, Kalliny, & Elgoul, 2013) stated that culture is communication, and communication is culture. The influence of culture on communication has been extensively studied in both academic and professional fields. A study by Ghanem, Kalliny, and Elgoul (2013) provides evidence that communication styles and world culture (Arab) are changing with the introduction of new technologies. These changes can have a ripple

effect on the way people communicate and conduct business in various parts of the world. This shift has significant implications for marketing practices, as companies will succeed or fail in attracting consumers depending on whether their approach aligns with these new changes.

Marketing communication activities are a set of processes carried out by companies to inform, persuade, and influence consumers directly or indirectly about the products and brands they sell (Terence, 2008). Marketing communication activities also need to consider cultural aspects and technological developments. The internet, web, and digital media have changed marketing and business since the first website, namely <http://info.cern.ch>, went live in 1991. With more than 3 billion people worldwide regularly using the web to find products, entertainment, and social connections, consumer behavior and the way companies market to consumers and businesses have undergone significant changes.

One of the tools used by companies, organizations, and individuals is the use of websites as a medium to communicate with target markets, audiences, and other stakeholders. The diversity of websites naturally requires unique features, both technically and in terms of the content they contain.

As a communication medium, websites are required to provide information that engages audiences and encourages them to visit. One way to do this is by adapting website content to the target audience's cultural context. It is important to note that websites are accessible worldwide. Burgmann, Kitchen, and Williams' (2006) research on web technology is reflected in the design aspect of the Graphical User Interface (GUI). Websites, like internet-based technologies, exist as a global medium that connects individuals who may still be culturally bound. To truly escape the limitations of space and time, online communication becomes effective if it pays attention to cultural aspects (Burgmann, Kitchen, Williams, 2006). On the other hand, research by Daniel W. Baack and Nitish Singh (2007) on Taiwanese informants shows that they prefer website adaptations that reflect Taiwanese culture. Pauwels (2012) found that websites are highly hybrid multi-author cultural meeting places, connecting offline and online practices from various cultures in transition. To some extent, websites can be considered cultural agents, exemplifying the processes of globalization and glocalization in an unparalleled way. These three studies conclude that the use of websites as a communication medium, transcending time and space, requires cultural considerations. On the one hand, websites are required to present information that is culturally appropriate to their target audience, which may be diverse. On the other hand, website owners can also showcase their own culture to create a distinctive image.

Singh, Zhao, and Hu (2005) researched website content that incorporates cultural elements by comparing company websites from China, India, Japan, and the USA. The results showed that local websites in India, China, Japan, and the USA not only reflect the cultural values of their home countries but also appear to differ significantly from each other in cultural dimensions referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This finding reinforces the need for marketers to culturally adapt their international websites as the web emerges as a global medium infused with local cultural values.

Research by Capece & Di Pillo (2019) examined how corporate website design can reflect culture. The study involved a content analysis of 75 websites of Chinese companies listed on the Hong Kong and Shanghai Stock Exchanges. The findings revealed that their website designs reflected local cultural characteristics. Furthermore, an analysis of the Chinese and English versions of the websites revealed that the latter offered little adaptation to international clients, particularly in terms of indicators of Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-Term Orientation.

Meanwhile, research by Chang-Hoan Choa & Hongsik John Cheon (2005) was more interested in comparing the interactivity that occurs through company websites in companies in the context of Western culture represented by the USA and UK (Western web), while Eastern culture is represented by companies from Japan and South Korea (Eastern web). Several cultural dimensions were employed to explain the differences in interactive communication styles among the four countries: high versus low cultural context for consumer message interactivity, power distance for consumer-marketer interactivity, and collectivism versus individualism for consumer-consumer

interactivity. The research concluded that Eastern websites employed less message-consumer and marketer-consumer interactivity, but more consumer-consumer interactivity, compared to Western websites.

The above research links websites to culture by utilizing cultural characteristics based on Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This has also been done by several other researchers such as Hamid (2016); Shobeiria, Mazaherib, and Laroche (2014); Callahan (2006); Yalcin, Singh, Dwivedi, and Sayfullin (2011); Wu^{rtz} (2006); Cyr and Trevor-Smith (2004); Singh and Matsuo (2004).

This research will modify the Cultural Values Framework (Sing & Matsuo, 2004; Singh et al., 2005), which has provided a framework for understanding cultural characteristics based on Hofstede's (Individualism, Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance) and Edward T. Hall's high- and low-context theories. The researcher added a dimension proposed by Peter A. Andersen, which is not yet in the Hofstede and Hall cultural dimensions, namely immediacy. In addition, it also utilizes findings that indicate this cultural dimension will produce a high-low contact culture and a long-short-term time orientation. In addition, the researcher also refers to Hofstede (2010), who adds a dimension, namely Indulgence/Restraint. Thus, in this research, eight (8) cultural dimensions will be used, namely Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, High/Low Power Distance, High/Low Uncertainty Avoidance, Indulgence/Restraint, High/Low Context, High/Low Contact, and Long/Short Term Orientation.

The websites examined in this research are those of music festival organizers in Asia. According to Dissanayake (1998), communication theory studies are still dominated by Western theories. In contrast, research with Asian cultural characteristics has been conducted by researchers in Japan, China, and India from an Eastern perspective. Therefore, this research utilizes the websites of the Fuji Rock Festival (Japan), the Sunburn Festival (India), and the Beijing Music Festival (China) as research objects to investigate how audiences from various countries perceive communication messages conveyed through these websites. This research also includes the website of We the Fest, one of the festivals held in Indonesia, where this research was conducted.

This study uses these four websites because they represent music festivals in the Asian region that can reflect the character of Asian culture. In addition, the four festivals also have a reasonably long history, with more than 10 years of consistent festivals. The four festivals have relatively different music genres. Fuji Rock Festival has been around since 1997 and is a rock music genre; Sunburn Festival has been around since 2007 and is an EDM (Electronic Dance Music) genre; Beijing Music Festival has been around since 1998 and is more of a classical music genre; and We The Fest has been around since 2014 and is a pop, R&B (Rhythm & Blues), hip-hop, electronic, and alternative music genre.

These cultural dimensions will be used to analyze the festival website's message content at the textual level. The purpose of this study is to determine the characteristics of the messages from the Fuji Rock Festival (Japan), Sunburn Festival (India), and Beijing Music Festival (China) and We the Fest Indonesia websites based on the modification of the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall, and Peter A. Andersen. The second objective is to determine whether there are differences in the characteristics of the cultural dimensions of these websites based on the differences in location (country) where the festival is held.

This research employs five theories to analyze the characteristics of messages that incorporate cultural dimensions on music festival websites. These theories are Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Globalization Theory, and Transculturation Theory. This research focuses on cross-cultural communication.

The audience perspective utilizes the theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). This theory is used to examine how audiences interpret cultural meanings on music festival websites. The interaction between website content and individual interpretations is based on the audience's cultural background. Furthermore, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) can be used to analyze how music festivals adapt their website design strategies to appeal to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. This can be used to examine the audience's influence on communication changes on music festival websites. The message conveyed through the

website will be received by the audience based on their perceptions, one of which is their cultural background. The audience's acceptance of the communication messages conveyed by the music festival organizers will determine whether the audience will behave in a convergent or divergent manner.

In this study, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory is employed to explain how websites, as a digital medium for communication, influence the cultural perception of music festivals. Audience interaction with digital content is a form of computer-mediated communication. Meanwhile, globalization theory is employed to understand music festivals as global products that incorporate elements of both local and international cultures. The digitalization of music festivals has led to the spread and adoption of culture. Globalization and the cultural diversity of the target audience necessitate that festival organizers carefully consider the development of communication messages to ensure they are understood and accepted by the audience. One factor that must be considered in developing communication messages is the cultural background of both the festival organizer and the audience. Similarities in cultural background between festival organizers and audiences facilitate the understanding of the communication messages. However, differences in cultural backgrounds can trigger festival organizers to translate messages. Transculturation itself refers to the process by which multiple cultures produce hybrid cultural elements that cannot be traced to a single originating culture.

This understanding of transculturation is employed to analyze how the cultural fusion of music festivals is reflected in website design. From the audience's perspective, the transculturation approach can also be used to understand how audiences from different countries accept and understand cultural mixing.

2. Method

This research will use a quantitative content analysis method. Content analysis is adopted to generate descriptive information about the content of previous research (Silverman, 1997). This involves reading and rereading the material, making notes when relevant information is encountered. The research was conducted following seven classic steps: (a) formulating the research question to be answered; (b) selecting the sample to be analyzed; (c) defining the categories to be applied; (d) planning the coding process and training coders; (e) implementing the coding process; (f) determining trustworthiness; and (g) analyzing the coding results (Kaid, 1989).

Data collection was conducted by filling in the data based on a coding sheet prepared to analyze the cultural dimensions that appeared on the music festival website.

The reliability testing technique uses the Hoslti formula (Eriyanto, 2011). Based on Holsti's formula, the minimum required reliability is 0.7 (70%). The reliability test results in this research showed a score above 74%.

The content analysis process requires coders. The content analysis process requires coders. Two coders were selected for this research: a lecturer in Communication Studies, specifically with expertise in Intercultural and/or Cross-Cultural Communication, and a festival organizer with experience organizing international music festivals and understanding the use of websites and information technology as media for marketing communications for their festivals. They were asked to fill out the coding sheet provided while reviewing the pages on the four websites. The following table contains the units of analysis, categories, and sub-categories used in the coding sheet.

Table 1: Table of Analysis Units

No	Unit of analysis	Category	Sub-Category
1.	Website	1. Fuji Rock Festival/ FRF (Jepang)	
		2. Suburn Festival (India)	

		3. Beijing Rock Festival (China)	
		4. We The Fest (Indonesia)	
2.	Individualism/Collectivism	Individualism (IN)	1. Personalization of the experience 2. Focus on personal preferences 3. Promotion of uniqueness and exclusivity 4. Emphasis on individual autonomy 5. Promotion of a single artist or band 6. Flexible event options 7. Customized personal experiences 8. Areas for creative expression 9. Possibility of involvement in the creative process 10. Respect for individual uniqueness
		Collectivist (COL)	1. Focus on Shared Experiences 2. Emphasis on Community and Social Connections 3. Promotion of Harmony and Unity 4. Respect for Tradition and Togetherness 5. Local Community Involvement 6. Promotion of Local Artists 7. Education and Development Programs 8. Volunteer Involvement 9. Friendly and Welcoming Atmosphere 10. Respect for Collectivity 11. Interactive Online Content
3.	Masculine/Feminine	Masculine (MAS)	1. Emphasis on Achievement and Success 2. Focus on Energy and Action 3. Rewarding Strength and Courage 4. Competitive Features and Challenges 5. Food and Beverage Offerings 6. VIP Packages and Additional Services 7. Fun and Entertainment Themes 8. Choice of Activities and Experiences 9. Atmosphere and Decor 10. Presence of Luxury Brands 11. Social Interaction and Networking 12. Visitor Reactions and Responses
		Feminine (FEM)	1. Focus on Well-Being and Comfort 2. Emphasis on Interpersonal Connections and Collaboration 3. Promotion of Emotionally Engaging Arts and Creativity 4. Services and Facilities that Support Visitor Well-Being 5. Balanced Representation of Male and Female Artists 6. Promotion of Female Artists and Musical Groups 7. Recognition of Women's Contributions 8. Selection of Activities that Support Women's Involvement 9. A Welcoming and Empathetic Atmosphere 10. Respect for Traditional Women's Values 11. Partnerships with Women's Organizations 12. Promotional Content that Values Women
4.	Power Distance	High Power Distance (HPD)	1. Clear Hierarchical Structure of Access and Information 2. Promotion and Emphasis on Power 3. Limited Regulation and Access Based on Status 4. Unequal and Limited Information 5. Feedback and Evaluation

			6. Commitment to Tradition and Hierarchy 7. Differences in Access and Facilities 8. Respect for Authority Figures 9. The Role of Sponsors and Well-Known Brands 10. Promotional Content that Emphasizes Status 11. Respect for Status and Prestige
	Low Power Distance (LPD)		1. Information Transparency and Accessibility 2. Inclusive Design and Equal Access 3. Public Participation 4. Local Community Engagement 5. Equality-Based Content 6. Opportunities to Share Stories and Experiences 7. Diversity in Representation 8. Areas for Creative Expression 9. Opportunities for Involvement in the Creative Process 10. Respect for Individual Uniqueness
5.	Uncertainty Avoidance	High Uncertainty Avoidance (HUA)	1. Detailed and Clear Information 2. Structured Planning and Organization 3. Structured Guarantees and Policies 4. Visitor Communication and Support Features 5. Accurate Schedules and Plans 6. Clear Terms and Conditions 7. Preparedness for Possible Disruptions 8. Structured Activity Options 9. Commitment to Production Quality 10. Feedback and Evaluation
		Low Uncertainty Avoidance (LUA)	1. Flexibility and Variety in Offerings 2. Unconventional Website Design 3. Less Structured Information 4. Freedom in the Festival Experience 5. Public Participation 6. Local Community Engagement 7. Equality-Based Content 8. Opportunities to Share Stories and Experiences 9. Diversity in Representation 10. Respect for Individual Uniqueness
6.	Context	High Context (HCX)	1. Context and Relationships in Communication 2. Implicit and Unspoken Messages 3. User Experience and Interaction 4. Social Relationships and Status 5. Emphasis on Story and Narrative 6. Use of Symbols and Metaphors 7. Community Engagement and Local Traditions 8. Interpersonal Interactions and Relationships 9. Use of Distinctive Language and Terminology 10. Content Designed for Emotional Engagement 11. Emphasis on Togetherness and Solidarity 12. Involvement in Interpretation
		Low Context (LCX)	1. Clarity and Explicit Communication 2. Website Design and Structure 3. User Experience 4. Language Use 5. Engagement and Interaction 6. Flexible Event Options 7. Customized Personal Experiences 8. Areas for Creative Expression

			9. Opportunities for Involvement in the Creative Process 10. Respect for Individual Uniqueness
7.	Contact	High Contact (HCT)	1. Personal Interaction and Communication 2. Social Media Presence and Networking 3. Closeness and Intimacy 4. Emotionally Connected Event Experiences 5. Sharing and Community Experiences 6. Use of Social Media 7. Interactive Features 8. Discussion Forums or Chat Rooms 9. Live Streaming or Webinars 10. Sharing and Comment Features 11. Partnerships with Influencers or Fans 12. Personal and Individual Communication 13. Content That Invites Direct Action
		Low Contact (LCT)	1. Level of Formality in Communication 2. Use of Visual Media and Content 3. Level of Personalization and User Engagement 4. Presence of Asynchronous Features 5. Minimal Contact Options 6. Emphasis on Privacy 7. Clear Written Content 8. Self-Service Offerings 9. Online Ticketing and Registration Management 10. Self-Available Information 11. Independence from Direct Communication 12. Self-Contained Content Offerings
8.	Term Orientation	Short-Term Orientation (STO)	1. Fast Interaction and Responsiveness 2. Engaging Design and Visualization of Fun 3. Emphasis on Instant Opportunities and Benefits 4. Last-Minute Ticket Sales 5. Latest Program Announcements 6. Focused Promotional Content 7. Active Use of Social Media 8. Easy Ticket Purchasing Features 9. Short Program Engagement 10. Digital Content Offerings 11. Commitment to Flexibility 12. Last-Minute Ticket Sales 13. Latest Program Announcements 14. Focused Promotional Content 15. Active Use of Social Media 16. Easy Ticket Purchase Features 17. Short Program Engagement 18. Digital Content Offerings 19. Commitment to Flexibility
		Long-Term Orientation (LTO)	1. Emphasis on Quality and Detail 2. Early Ticket Availability 3. Promotion of Future Programs 4. Rewards for Long-Term Participation 5. Long-Term Partnerships 6. Education and Development Programs 7. Permanent Fan Supporters 8. Commitment to Cultural Heritage
9.	Indulgence /Restraint	Indulgence (IND)	1. Focus on Entertainment and Fun 2. Social and Recreational Activities 3. Giving Prizes and Awards

	4. Emphasis on Personal Experience
	5. Content that inspires enthusiasm
	6. Food and Beverage Offers
	7. VIP Packages and Additional Services
	8. Theme of Fun and Entertainment
	9. Choice of Activities and Experiences
	10. Atmosphere and Decoration
	11. Presence of Luxury Brands
	12. Social Interaction and Networking
	13. Visitor Reactions and Responses
Restraint (RES)	1. Self-Control in Content and Design
	2. Focus on Information and Practicality
	3. Content that Avoids Overindulgence
	4. Implementation of Rules and Guidelines
	5. Measured User Experience
	6. Health and Well-Being Options
	7. Rules and Guidelines
	8. Non-Alcoholic Options
	9. Activities that Support Self-Control
	10. Environmental Commitment
	11. Respect for Limitations
	12. Regulation of Technology Use
	13. Feedback and Evaluation

Source: Researchers' modifications based on Sing, S., & Matsuo, H. (2004), Singh, S., Rhoads, K., & Haider, Z. (2005), Hofstede, G. (2010), Singh, N., & Kunnathur, V. (2005), Singh, N., Li, L., & Zhao, J. (2005) and Singh, J., & Matsuo, H. (2004).

The data analysis techniques used were frequency distribution and cross-tabulation. The results of the content analysis process will then be analyzed using frequency distribution to describe the research findings, namely, to explain the characteristics of global festival websites based on cultural dimensions. The results of the frequency distribution analysis per dimension were then cross-referenced with music festival websites. This analysis was used to obtain an overview of the cultural dimensions of each website.

3. Results

The following are the results of research on the characteristics of BMF, FRF, SBF, and WTF websites, based on content that incorporates cultural dimensions.

Based on the results of content analysis, the messages on the Beijing Music Festival (BMF) website can be described in terms of 8 cultural dimensions, as shown in figure 1. The results show that the BMF website tends to emphasize content with collectivist dimensions (COL) but is balanced between masculine (MAS) and feminine (FEM) dimensions, with a greater emphasis on low power distance (LPD) and low uncertainty avoidance (LUA) dimensions. The BMF website employs cultural dimensions of low context (LCX) and low contact (LCT), which are associated with a long-term time orientation (LTO). It utilizes content as a form of restraint (RES).



Figure 1: Paired Cultural Dimensions on the Beijing Music Festival Website

Source: Researcher's work, 2025

Based on the results of content analysis, the messages on the Fuji Rock Festival (BMF) website can be described in terms of 8 cultural dimensions, as shown in Figure 2. The results show that the content in the FRF website tends to contain cultural dimensions of individualism (IN), masculinity (MAS), low power distance (LPD), high uncertainty avoidance (HUA), low context (LCX), low contact (LCT), short-term time orientation (STO), and restraint (RES).

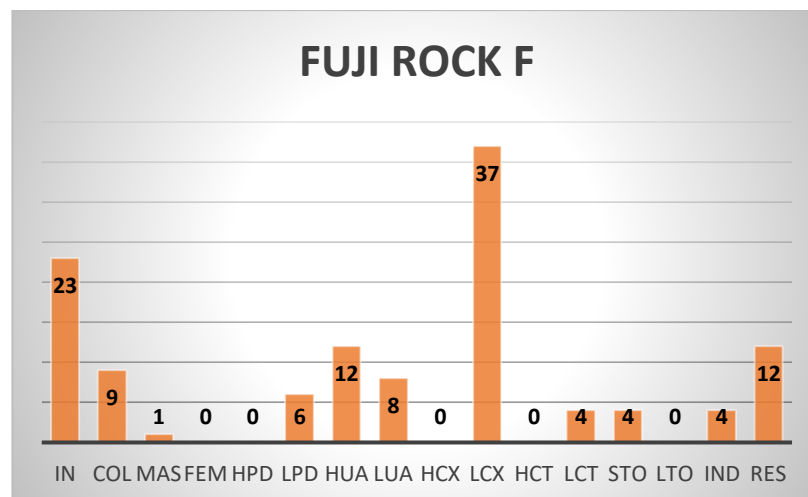


Figure 2: Paired Cultural Dimensions on the Fuji Rock Festival Website

Source: Researcher's work, 2025

Based on the results of the content analysis, Figure 3 shows that the content containing the more dominant cultural dimensions in pairs is the collectivist (COL), masculine (MAS), high context (HCX), and detachment (IND) dimensions, while the short-term and long-term time orientations are relatively the same.

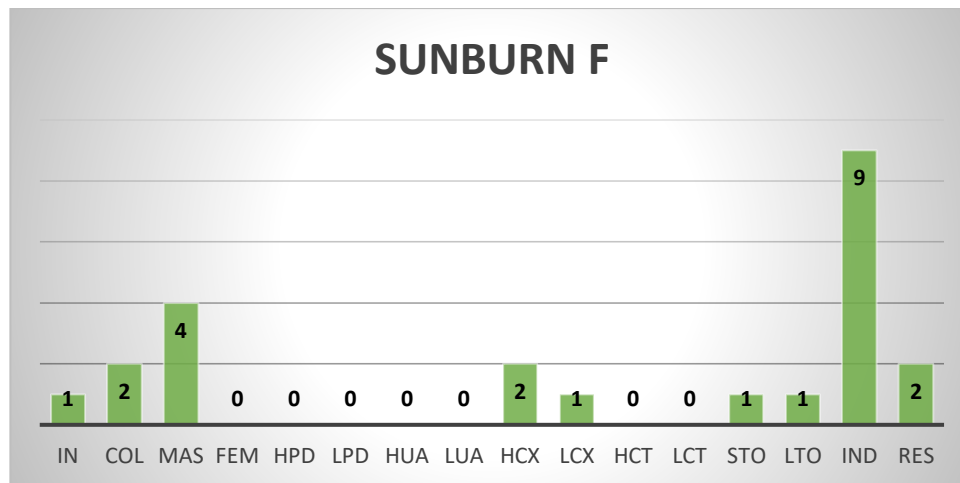


Figure 3: Paired Cultural Dimensions on the Sunburn Festival Website

Source: Researcher's work, 2025

Based on the results of the content analysis that has been conducted, the WTF website contains content of cultural dimensions in pairs, the more dominant of which are collectivism (COL), femininity (FEM), low power distance (LPD), low uncertainty avoidance (LUA), low context (LCX), high contact (HCT), short-term time orientation (STO) and restraint (RES). This is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

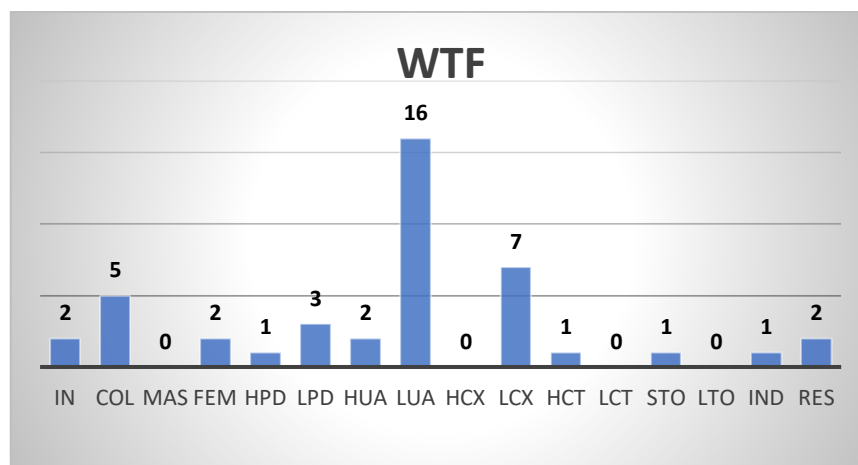


Figure 4: Paired Cultural Dimensions on the Sunburn Festival Website

Source: Researcher's work, 2025

After describing the content containing cultural dimensions from each of the four websites individually, we will then compare the content across these websites. Table 2 shows a comparison of the content for each cultural dimension on the BMF, FRF, SBF, and WTF websites.

Table 2: Comparison of Cultural Dimension Content Across Websites

No		BMF	FRF	SBF	WTF	Number of Indicators
A.	Number of website pages	6	20	12	7	
B.	Cultural Dimension					
1.	Individualism	4	23	1	2	10
2.	Collectivism	6	9	2	5	8
3.	Masculin	3	1	4	0	8
4.	Feminin	3	0	0	2	12
5.	High Power Distance	3	0	0	1	11

6.	Low Power Distance	5	6	0	3	6
7.	High Uncertainty Avoidance	1	12	0	2	9
8.	Low Uncertainty Avoidance	2	8	0	16	8
9.	High Context	1	0	2	0	9
10.	Low Context	8	37	1	7	5
11.	High Contact	1	0	0	1	9
12.	Low Contact	2	4	0	0	10
13.	Short Time Orientation	0	4	1	1	10
14.	Long Time Orientation	4	0	1	0	7
15.	Indulgences	3	4	9	1	12
16.	Restraint	7	12	2	2	8
Jumlah		53	120	23	43	142

Source: Researcher's work, 2025

Based on the number of pages, the FRF website has the most pages, with 20, followed by SBF with 12, WTF with 7, and BMF with only 6. Furthermore, examining the cultural dimensions that appear most frequently on each website, the BMF website features the low context (LCX) dimension, with eight appearances. In contrast, the FRF website exhibits a significantly higher number of appearances, with 37. The SBF website features the most content related to the cultural dimensions (9). In contrast, the WTF website has the most prominent content in the low uncertainty avoidance (LUA) dimension, with 16 appearances.

Referring to the table, it can also be seen that on the BMF website, only the cultural dimension describing short-term time orientation (STO) is missing. On the FRF website, five cultural dimensions are missing: femininity (FEM), high power distance (HPD), high context (HCX), high contact (HCT), and long-term time orientation (LTO). Meanwhile, the SBF website does not display the seven cultural dimensions, namely feminine (FEM), low and high-power distance (HPD & LPD), low and high uncertainty avoidance (HUA & LUA), and low and high collectivism (HCT & LCT). The cultural dimensions of masculine (MAS), high context (HCX), low context (LCT), and long-term time orientation (LTO) are four cultural dimensions that are not found on the WTF website.

4. Discussion

The characteristics of the four music festival websites, based on the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, Hall, and Andersen, can be described as follows.

4.1. Beijing Music Festival Website - China

The characteristics of the Beijing Music Festival-China, Fuji Rock Festival-Japan, Sunburn Festival-India, and We the Fest-Indonesia websites based on the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall, and Peter A. Andersen will be analyzed using the theories of Coordinated Management of Meaning, Communication Accommodation Theory, Computer-Mediated Communication, Globalization, and Transculturation.

Using the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory, the BMF website presents explicit and formal content, characterized by clear and direct communication (Low Context). The emphasis on collectivism and long-term orientation is reflected in content that emphasizes community harmony and cultural continuity. Audiences are invited to construct meaning through shared knowledge of cultural traditions, shared values, and respect for authority (Low Power Distance). The communication context is formal and structured, supporting consistency of meaning through a neat, hierarchical website structure. Audiences are expected to understand meaning within the context of Chinese culture, which emphasizes politeness and respect.

Using assumptions from Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), it is demonstrated that the BMF website adapts its communication style to cater to a broad and diverse audience. This is evident in the use of clear and

formal language, as well as the direct and accessible presentation of information, effectively accommodating cultural differences and communication preferences. The website, as a digital medium, enables interactive and flexible long-distance communication. BMF utilizes this medium to convey explicit messages and ensure freedom of navigation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of information dissemination in a global society. This analysis is based on the theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

From a Globalization Theory perspective, BMF reflects the process of globalization through its English-language content, the fusion of traditional and modern cultural values, and its openness to international audiences. The festival serves as a space that connects local culture with the global world. Meanwhile, from a Transculturation Theory perspective, the website showcases the interplay between cultural integration, where local culture is preserved alongside global innovation. As a music festival, BMF demonstrates the fusion of diverse cultural values, creating a new identity within a global context.

4.2. Fuji Rock Festival Website-Japan

The types of meaning and meaning construction based on CMM theory indicate that the FRF website conveys meaning through concise, efficient, and individualistic language, aligning with Japanese cultural values of masculinity and individualism.

Audiences become active participants, and meaning is constructed through rapid and informative interactions (Low Context and High Uncertainty Avoidance). Great attention to certainty and technical details shapes the structured meaning of communication. Communication is low context but enriched with comprehensive and short-term information, reflecting a culture that values discipline and efficiency.

Audiences act as individual decision-makers, informed by detailed information. A Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) analysis revealed that the FRF website exhibited strong communication adaptation efforts for multicultural audiences by employing explicit, straightforward language and a well-organized information structure. Intuitive design and navigation made it easy for visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds to access information. The FAQ and ticketing pages stood out as prime examples of communication adaptation, providing systematic and easy-to-understand information. The emphasis on personalizing the user experience through individual options and preferences on specific pages was a unique characteristic that supported CAT theory. This created flexible and responsive communication to the needs of specific audiences.

The FRF website effectively facilitates asynchronous communication, enabling users to access information at any time and from anywhere. Its responsive and fast-loading design supports a comfortable and self-paced user experience. Contact information, a location map, and an interactive event calendar enhance the communication bridge between organizers and attendees, eliminating the need for face-to-face interaction. These features are based on the theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). The website's ability to provide real-time updates through an interactive event calendar and rich digital media integration reflects a modern adaptation to traditional festival operations.

An analysis of globalization theory reveals that the website embodies the integration of global and local cultures by showcasing collaborations between international musicians and local Japanese musicians. The use of English as the primary language also demonstrates awareness of a global and inclusive audience. Frequently updated news content highlights cross-cultural interactions and the dynamic exchange of artistic values. The festival and its website serve as a space for active cross-border cultural dialogue, presenting traditional Japanese music and culture alongside popular international genres, demonstrating the multifaceted dimensions of globalization.

Transculturation Theory illustrates that the FRF website communicates a dynamic cultural identity through a blend of traditional Japanese elements with modern innovations. The preservation of local festival norms and traditions is explicitly maintained yet presented in a contemporary and interactive digital format. This indicates a simultaneous cultural transformation between tradition and modernity. The use of modern features on the website

to communicate the conservation of tradition demonstrates a harmonious blending of cultures, which is not merely a static representation of culture but also a space for adaptation and innovation.

The Fuji Rock Festival website showcases a complex and rich cultural dimension, incorporating the values of individualism, masculinity, low context, and short-term time orientation typical of modern culture. Through communication style adjustment (CAT), digital communication facilitation (CMC), global-local cultural integration (Globalization), and dynamic cultural transformation (Transculturation), the website conveys an inclusive, clear, and culturally rich message.

4.3. Sunburn Festival Website -India

The CMM theory for analyzing the SBF website reveals a communication style rich in contextual meaning (High Context), with an emphasis on collectivism and expressions of masculinity. Meaning is constructed through content that emphasizes shared experiences, intense entertainment sensations, and emotional engagement. Audiences are invited to participate in a dynamic and aesthetically pleasing community. The communication context contains many implicit and symbolic elements reflecting the culture of Indulgence and High Context. Meaning is constructed not only through words but also through visual nuances and emotional interactions.

CAT theory can explain that the SBF website emphasizes its ability to accommodate audience needs by utilizing diverse communication styles, namely: 1) Using different language and visuals for local and international audiences; 2) Flexibility in delivering messages that can be direct (low context) or implicit (high context); 3) Adapting content to various age groups and musical preferences; and 4) Emphasizing shared experiences (collectivist) while also highlighting individual features (artist profiles).

Computer-Mediated Communication Theory (CMC) suggests that the SBF utilizes an interactive digital platform that enables asynchronous communication through newsletters and updates, real-time information on schedules and new artists, multimedia messaging (including video, images, and text), a dynamic and responsive digital festival experience, and flexible, self-directed user engagement.

Based on Globalization Theory, the festival blends local culture with global expression: featuring international artists alongside local ones, sponsoring global brands with a local touch, displaying a strong masculine culture while maintaining traditional values, and using English as a lingua franca with local language elements.

Based on Transculturation Theory, the SBF website serves as a medium for digital cultural blending: a blend of masculine, collective, and high-context values, a modern and interactive communication style, a hybrid cultural identity that values shared norms, a modern and global image with local roots, and cultural symbols that undergo digital reinterpretation.

4.4. We the Fest Website-Indonesia

The types of meaning and meaning construction based on CMM theory indicate that the WTF website exhibits flexible, open, and creative communication, characterized by low context and high contact. The emphasis on collectivism and femininity is reflected through community interaction and active audience involvement. The audience and local community become co-constructors of meaning through interactivity and participation in the content. In the context of communication, the style is relaxed and unconventional, adapting to the dynamics of the young audience. The interactive context creates an empowering collaborative meaning space for the audience.

The assumptions in CAT can be used to explain that the WTF website adapts to both collectivist and individualist audiences with a flexible and adaptable communication style, enhancing visitor comfort and engagement. Meanwhile, CMC theory suggests that the website's media is designed to be interactive, with multimedia features, dynamic updates, and content that encourages digital participation, providing a vibrant and communicative digital experience.

Globalization theory can explain that We the Fest presents a fusion of local and international cultures through inclusive language and balanced collaboration between global and local artists and cultures. Transculturation theory, meanwhile, suggests that the website functions as a space for cultural exchange and blending, harmoniously blending local and global cultural symbols, values, and expressions.

The festivals studied were held in China, Japan, India, and Indonesia. Festivals in China and Japan tended toward more formal, structured, and order-oriented communication, reflecting East Asian cultures with their high values of discipline and distinct time orientations (LTO in China, STO in Japan). Festivals in India and Indonesia emphasized high-context, interactive, and emotive collective experiences, with more symbolic nuances and creativity in communication. These differences reflect the influence of local cultures and social values unique to each country, particularly in terms of communication context (high vs. low), power distance, and uncertainty avoidance.

Reflections on CMM theory reveal that each festival constructs meaning within distinct local cultural contexts, as reflected in the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, Hall, and Andersen. Communication on the website serves as a medium for conveying meaning, combining personal, relational, and community perspectives, allowing audiences not only to receive information but also to participate in shaping the festival's meaning. Variations in communication context (high vs. low context), communication structure (formal vs. flexible), and audience participation (active vs. passive) shape the unique ways in which meaning is constructed for each festival.

Analysis using CAT revealed that all four websites tailor their communication styles to the uniqueness of their respective cultural audiences. FRF employs a more individualistic communication style, encouraging self-expression and open dialogue. Meanwhile, BMF and SBF encourage collective communication and community participation, and WTF emphasizes flexibility in a digital communication style with high interactivity.

CMC theory suggests that all websites utilize digital media as their primary communication channel, albeit with varying levels of interactivity. WTF and FRF utilize interactive multimedia features and dynamic content updates to increase engagement, while BMF and SBF emphasize information-rich content that combines local and global cultural elements.

Globalization underpins festival websites, showcasing a blend of local and global cultures. FRF and WTF are particularly strong in integrating global and local elements, as evidenced by their campaigns for international and local artists. BMF emphasizes strong Chinese traditional values with a long-term approach. SBF emphasizes a global culture, including EDM and a free-spirited lifestyle.

Transculturation Theory can further explain that all websites provide a space for active cultural exchange and a blending of local and global cultural symbols. Their uniqueness is evident in how each festival packages its cultural narratives in distinctive language and symbols that are easily understood by its audience.

The general conclusions that can be drawn from this research are: 1) International music festival websites display cultural characteristics firmly rooted in local cultural values, yet undergo a process of transculturation, enabling resonance with a global audience through accommodating and coordinated communication; 2) Differences in festival culture and website characteristics reflect variations in communication strategies adapted to local cultural contexts and international target audiences; 3). Reception by cross-national audiences confirms that cultural diversity influences the interpretation of meaning, even though the framework of meaning constructed is sufficiently inclusive and adaptive, and 4). The integration of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Globalization theory, and Transculturation theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how cross-cultural online communication can be more effective and dynamic.

Based on the review of the research results, further implications and suggestions related to theoretical implications can be explained, namely: 1). Strengthening the understanding of the Coordinated Management of Meaning theory in a global digital context, with an emphasis on the role of the audience as an active participant in the construction

of meaning; 2) The need to develop a more specific communication accommodation model for the ever-evolving media of cross-cultural music festivals; 3) Combining the concepts of transculturation and globalization as a powerful lens for understanding the dynamics of online cultural communication, and 4)—implications in Intercultural Communication and Global Marketing. A successful music festival website can establish a globally resonant cultural identity, primarily through an emphasis on fun and entertainment as a universal language. The website's content emphasizes the cultural hierarchy and the value of tenderness. FRF and WTF are examples of festivals that demonstrate the need for communication segmentation that considers the audience's specific cultural values. In addition, website design and message must be able to bridge cultural differences, thereby encouraging engagement and loyalty among international audiences without causing cultural dissonance.

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Meanwhile, the practical implications that can be explained are: 1) International music festivals need to adjust their website communication strategies to accommodate the diversity of cross-cultural audiences by paying attention to the context of different cultures of origin and reception; 2). The use of interactive elements, symbolic visuals, and digital platforms must be optimized so that audiences can actively participate in building the festival experience online; 3). The management team must prioritize cross-cultural dialogue and continuous evaluation of the message and design of the site to ensure it remains relevant, inclusive, and effective. Finally, the methodological implications of this research require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in digital cross-cultural communication research to capture the dynamics of reception and complex construction of meaning. In addition, multi-country and multi-platform research such as this is needed to provide a more holistic picture of the development of international cultural communication theory and practice.

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The Dynamics of Citizenship Politics in Democracy: Challenges of Dual Citizenship Regulation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of citizenship politics in the context of the Indonesian diaspora's struggle for dual citizenship recognition following the passage of Law No. 12 on Citizenship in 2006. It employs a qualitative approach, drawing on Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth's theoretical framework of recognition and redistribution, as well as the principles of Pancasila Democracy, to identify how diaspora demands lead to contestation between globalist, nationalist, and primordialist groups in Indonesia's public policy and legislative political spheres. The study's findings indicate that the quest for dual citizenship recognition confronts significant hurdles, both normatively in terms of national loyalty, security, and state sovereignty, and practically owing to a lack of political agreement in the legislative body. Pancasila Democracy, which emphasizes discussion and consensus, appears incapable of bridging the conflicting interests of social groupings on this subject. This study demonstrates that Indonesian citizenship politics are complicated and inextricably linked to state ideology, fluctuating diaspora identities, and ever-changing global forces. Empirically, a deliberate and inclusive approach is necessary to develop legislation that meets the needs of the diaspora while upholding the fundamental principles of Indonesian identity.

Keywords: Citizenship Politics, Dual Citizenship, Democracy, Recognition, Redistribution

1. Introduction

Citizenship is the fundamental foundation of the relationship between individuals and the state, encompassing civil, political, and social rights (Sosnowski & Klem, 2023). In the context of dual citizenship, tension arises between an individual's right to remain connected to their country of origin and the state's principle of single loyalty (Peters & Vink, 2024). This research is necessary because it highlights the unequal recognition of diaspora identities that feel alienated from their citizenship rights. In the era of globalization, an increasing number of Indonesians live, work, or marry across borders (Dewansyah, 2019). They experience the reality of multiple citizenships, while the Indonesian legal system still adheres to the principle of single citizenship.

This research problem concerns fundamental issues in the relationship between the state and its citizens. In the Indonesian context, the recognition or rejection of dual citizenship is not merely an administrative issue, but reflects the dynamics of power, identity, and political loyalty (Lazuardi, 2020). Empirically, millions of Indonesian diasporas live abroad and face citizenship dilemmas due to regulatory limitations that do not accommodate social realities (Antikowati et al., 2023). They desire to remain connected to their homeland, but are hampered by a legal system that adheres to the principle of single citizenship (Andriani & Prasetyo, 2023). This situation highlights a gap between the needs of citizens and the state's stance, which often prioritizes maintaining the status quo in the name of national sovereignty and security.

The theoretical approach of recognition and redistribution in this study enriches the study of citizenship politics by demonstrating that the struggle for citizenship recognition is not solely a matter of legal rights, but also concerns identity, loyalty, and social justice (Fraser, 2020). Within the framework of Pancasila Democracy, the study also examines the extent to which the principles of deliberation and social justice are able to address the differing interests of citizens (Basit, 2023). Thus, it has theoretical and practical significance for encouraging more inclusive and democratic policy reforms in citizenship management in Indonesia. This situation suggests that negotiations between the state and its citizens remain incomplete, particularly in the case of the Indonesian diaspora.

This study makes a theoretical contribution, particularly by combining Honneth's theory of recognition (Honneth, 2004) and Fraser's theory of redistribution (Fraser, 2020) to explain socio-political conflicts over citizenship rights. This is crucial for broadening the concept of citizenship politics in the context of developing countries, which possess unique characteristics such as the Pancasila ideology and a long history of debates over citizenship (Dewansyah, 2019). The study also has a close relationship with various previous studies in the field of citizenship, particularly those focusing on the issue of dual citizenship, while also presenting significant differences and developments in terms of location, approach, and theoretical focus.

The aim of this study is closely related to efforts to understand and explain citizenship politics in the context of the push for recognition of dual citizenship in Indonesia, based on the theory of recognition and redistribution. This objective stems from the theory of political recognition, which views citizenship as a form of social relations that demands recognition of identity, and the theory of redistribution, which emphasizes the importance of economic justice and access to fundamental rights. By examining conflicts and differences in position between groups, this study explains how efforts to recognize dual citizenship are not only a legal matter, but also involve socio-political struggles over recognition and social justice.

Most previous studies, such as those by Gustafson in Sweden (Gustafson, 2002), Yanasmayan in Western Europe (Yanasmayan, 2015), and Kovács in Hungary (Kovács, 2006), have focused more on dual citizenship in the context of immigration, the integration of minority identities, or state responses to ethnic diasporas, with a focus on European countries. Knott examines the case of Moldova as an extreme case of dual citizenship. In Moldova, the majority of the population can acquire (or reacquire) Romanian citizenship based on descent from former Romanian citizens (Knott, 2019). Poethig conducted research in Cambodia on the debate surrounding the 1996 Dual Citizenship Law. Opponents of dual citizenship argued that it would undermine cultural purity, that dual loyalty was detrimental to fragile democracies, that it threatened political stability, and that it eroded a clear national identity (Poethig, 2006). Research in Africa was conducted by Whitaker, for example, who examined dual citizenship in Senegal, Ghana, and Kenya. The results showed that the drivers of dual citizenship can come from both society (bottom-up) and the state (top-down). This condition is driven by political, economic, and security reasons (Whitaker, 2011). Sejersen collected data from 115 countries and found that nearly half now recognize dual citizenship, compared with only a handful in the 1950s. This study highlighted regional differences, with acceptance of dual citizenship lower in Asia and higher in Europe and the Americas (Sejersen, 2008). These studies tend to view dual citizenship as a logical consequence of global mobility and multiculturalism, as well as a more adaptive and liberal strategy for socio-political integration. In contrast, this study positions Indonesia as a prime case, empirically demonstrating that a Southeast Asian country that has not experienced large waves of immigration, yet has a significant and politically active diaspora, is the primary actor in pushing for the recognition of dual citizenship.

Previous research in Indonesia is generally focused on the legal and formal aspects of citizenship (Nurmawati & Suantra, 2020). Yet, this study specifically examines the political dimension of citizenship, focusing on how various social groups namely, globalists, nationalists, and primordialists interact and negotiate in their efforts to either fight for or reject the recognition of dual citizenship. In this way, this research broadens the approach from one that is primarily legal and administrative to one that is critical-political and socio-philosophical.

Furthermore, the main development in this study is the time and its political context. This research focuses on the period after Law No. 12 on Citizenship in 2006, which marked a significant milestone in the history of Indonesian citizenship regulation (van Klinken, 2018). Overall, this study not only fills the gap in citizenship studies in Indonesia but also develops a richer conceptual approach to understanding citizenship politics as an arena for contestation of identity, power, and justice amidst the currents of globalization and demands for democratization. Practically, this study has strategic value as input for policymakers, particularly in developing regulations that are more responsive to the needs of the Indonesian diaspora. The findings regarding various social groups that support and oppose dual citizenship can inform the government and the House of Representatives (the national parliament) in designing fair, realistic, and sustainable policies. It also provides a deeper understanding of diaspora groups and civil society organizations, enabling them to develop effective advocacy strategies, craft compelling narratives, and establish constructive communication with decision-makers.

Furthermore, the study can be utilized to enhance public understanding of the importance of citizenship as a fundamental aspect of human rights and political participation. By systematically presenting facts and analysis, it encourages the public to understand better that the debate over dual citizenship is not merely a legal issue, but also reflects a struggle over fundamental values in national life. The study is expected to contribute to the advancement of science as well as the strengthening of democracy and the development of inclusive public policies in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to understand the dynamics of citizenship politics in the push for the recognition of dual citizenship as a legal status in Indonesia. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies and content analysis of various sources, such as laws and regulations, official government documents, speeches by political figures, mass media coverage, archives of diaspora congresses, and interview results related to citizenship issues. Additionally, the study reviews relevant academic literature and journal articles to compare the Indonesian context with other countries in terms of dual citizenship policies. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, comparing data from various types of documents and information sources to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). The analysis was conducted in stages through a process of issue categorization, actor mapping, and identification of political narratives developing in the debate on dual citizenship (Guest et al., 2014).

3. Results

Following the enactment of Law No. 12 of 2006 on Citizenship, a new dynamic emerged in Indonesian citizenship politics. This regulation reinforced the principle of single citizenship and only provided limited opportunities for dual citizenship for children of mixed marriages (Lazuardi, 2020). However, with increasing global mobility and the number of Indonesians living abroad, demand for recognition of dual citizenship has grown (Antikowati et al., 2023). This issue has created tension between the individual's right to remain connected to their country of origin and the state's concerns about dual loyalties (Wulansari et al., 2021).

The constellation of three social groups on the issue of dual citizenship does not reflect the political dynamics emerging in the legislative realm. The dominant groups emerging to negotiate are globalists and nationalists, while primordialists have not significantly responded to the dual citizenship issue. Empirically, these three groups have different perspectives on citizenship. *First*, the globalists represent the Indonesian diaspora living abroad. They advocate for the recognition of dual citizenship as a form of recognition of human rights, global mobility, and emotional attachment to the homeland. Their primary rationale is to facilitate contributions to national development without having to relinquish legal and economic rights in the country of residence. For them,

citizenship is a form of legitimate dual membership in both the global and national communities (Harijanti et al., 2018). *Second*, the nationalists emphasize the importance of single loyalty to the state. They reject dual citizenship because they believe it can weaken sovereignty, open up opportunities for legal abuse, and create problems in defense and political leadership. This view reflects concerns about the state's weak control over citizens who hold two national affiliations simultaneously (Afifi Elfinur, 2021). *Third*, primordialist groups are rooted in local ethnic, customary, and cultural ties. They view dual citizenship as a threat to national identity and ownership of local resources, particularly land rights. They believe that recognizing dual citizenship will facilitate foreign domination of local land and the economy, which has historically led to inequality and social conflict (Permana, 2021).

Amid differing views from various social groups, the national parliament has taken steps to discuss the issue in legislative forums and include it in the National Legislation Program. However, there has been no significant progress in the regulatory process. Weak political commitment, competing interests among factions in the House of Representatives, and the dominance of security and nationalist discourse have contributed to the stagnation of this issue. The parliament has not yet functioned as a deliberative arena capable of inclusively absorbing citizen aspirations as idealized in democracy. This situation demonstrates the difficulty in establishing new agreements and the tendency to prioritize the status quo, due to the minimal potential for conflict (Dator, 2001).

Within the unique democratic framework of Indonesia, known as Pancasila Democracy, state decisions should be made through deliberation and prioritizing consensus (Wisnaeni & Herawati, 2020). However, in practice, the dual citizenship policy has become an arena for ideological debate that struggles to find common ground (Bauböck, 2021). Democracy, which should offer a compromise, has instead become mired in differing views between groups defending their respective views (Eckersley, 2020). This demonstrates that deliberative democracy in the Indonesian context still faces serious challenges in responding to the diversity of civic aspirations.

Other findings indicate that diaspora groups face gaps in two primary dimensions: identity recognition and the redistribution of citizenship rights (Banting, 2023). Although the diaspora plays a significant role in remittances, cultural diplomacy, and Indonesia's international image, they remain denied full recognition as citizens if they choose or hold another citizenship. This inequality highlights the limited application of the principle of social justice, which is integral to the state ideology (Fedina & Povalena, 2023). However, suppose the state provides access to dual citizenship recognition. In that case, this situation will impact the redistribution of citizenship rights that already apply under the principle of single citizenship, leading to an ideological and cultural shift in the understanding of nationality and statehood (Dean, 2024).

The research findings show that citizenship politics in Indonesia, particularly regarding dual citizenship, is an arena for negotiating interests between social and political groups. The policy-making process is not merely a legal or administrative matter, but also involves values, identity, and perceived threats to the nation (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2024). In this context, dual citizenship is not merely a legal status, but a symbol of the struggle between global openness and national protectionism.

4. Discussion

This study found that citizenship politics in Indonesia, related to the issue of dual citizenship, occurred during negotiations between social groups, specifically globalists, nationalists, and primordialists. Although the primordialist group paid less attention to the issue of dual citizenship, negotiations occurred. These three groups have different constructions of meaning regarding the concept of citizenship and national interests, which in turn influence their positions in the dual citizenship discourse.

Globalists, largely drawn from diaspora communities, advocate dual citizenship based on human rights, global mobility, and the desire to continue contributing to Indonesia while maintaining their civil and economic rights in their home countries. Globalists in Indonesia share a similar view to those in Britain, they want the state to adopt a more flexible and transnational approach to citizenship to recognize the changing identities of citizens in the global era (J. Scotto et al., 2018). Meanwhile, nationalist groups reject the concept of dual citizenship, deeming it detrimental to political loyalty, defense, and the integrity of the nation's sovereignty (Kozyrev, 2016). They believe

that citizens must have a single commitment to Indonesia and consider dual citizenship a form of identity uncertainty, as well as a potential threat to domestic policy, particularly in the political, legal, and agricultural sectors. Primordialist groups, on the other hand, are based on traditional values and local tribal or ethnic identities. They tend to view dual citizenship as a threat to cultural heritage, customary lands, and the social structure of rural communities. In their view, dual citizenship policies could open up opportunities for foreigners to access exclusive rights of local communities, such as land ownership and economic resources (Hutton, 2022).

This study finds that parliament, as a democratic arena, has not been able to effectively act as a deliberative space in responding to calls for the recognition of dual citizenship (Irving, 2019). Although dual citizenship has been included in the National Legislation Program for over a decade, formal discussions on revising the Citizenship Law have not yet resulted in a decision, due to the intense tug-of-war between factions and the weak political will of state actors. From a theoretical perspective, this study demonstrates that recognition and redistribution cannot stand alone in explaining the dynamics of citizenship politics in Indonesia. Recognition of the diaspora's identity as citizens is not always accompanied by a fair redistribution of rights (Wulansari et al., 2021). On the other hand, demands for economic justice from the diaspora often clash with nationalist concerns about losing control of national resources. This reflects the limitations of Western theory, which needs to be contextualized within the political and ideological realities of the Indonesian state (Saraswati, 2021).

The political reality of citizenship, driven by calls for recognition of dual citizenship legal status in the legislature, demonstrates that the principle of deliberation and consensus has not been able to substantively resolve differing views. Rather than providing a space for consensus, citizenship politics has become an arena for resistance and policy deadlock (Lee & Romano, 2013). This demonstrates that democracy in Indonesia still faces challenges in managing the diversity of citizens' aspirations in a deliberative and inclusive manner, particularly on sensitive issues that touch on identity, loyalty, and constitutional rights.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the issue of dual citizenship in Indonesia is part of a complex dynamic of citizenship politics, marked by competing interests. In a democratic context, the push for dual citizenship recognition is not merely an administrative or formal legal issue; rather, it reflects a conflict of values, identities, and political orientations among social groups. Three leading opposing positions exist: globalists, who push for recognition based on the principles of human rights and global connectivity; nationalists, who reject it on the grounds of sovereignty and single loyalty; and primordialists, who view this issue as a threat to the collective identity and rights of local communities. This suggests that citizenship is not a neutral concept, but a contested political terrain. In practice, the state has not been able to bridge these differences in a deliberative manner. Parliament, as a representative of democracy, has yet to produce a substantive policy on dual citizenship. Yet, the need to respond to the reality of an increasingly globally connected diaspora is becoming increasingly urgent.

The study also reveals the inequality in recognition and redistribution of rights for the Indonesian diaspora. Despite their significant economic contributions and international reputation, they remain on the fringes of the citizenship structure because the state has not fully recognized their status. This suggests that the principle of social justice in democracy has not been fully realized in citizenship policy. However, granting dual citizenship has the potential to change the legal structure, cause social unrest, and shift national identities. Therefore, recognition and redistribution in the context of dual citizenship pose a dilemma. This situation indicates that citizenship politics in Indonesia still faces challenges in managing the plurality of citizens' aspirations democratically. Recognition of dual citizenship requires not only regulatory changes but also a shift in political paradigm, from an exclusive and defensive approach to one that is inclusive, deliberative, and oriented towards social justice.

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Visual Communication Strategies in Conveying Laboratory Data by the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory, Bali Province, to Stakeholders

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Abstract

Effective laboratory data presentation is crucial for public health decision-making, yet conventional methods employed by the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) still face limitations in accessibility, clarity, and engagement for stakeholders. This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach, involving in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, to explore visual communication strategies that can overcome these challenges. Findings indicate that the Klungkung District Labkesmas, operating at Level 1, traditionally presents data using lengthy narrative descriptions, standard graphs, and charts, hindering rapid understanding and evidence-based decision-making by stakeholders across various governance levels. To address these limitations, this study proposes a visual communication strategy leveraging visual elements and design principles in infographics, implementable through readily accessible digital platforms like Canva. Infographics can simplify complex health information, making it more accessible to audiences with varying health literacy levels, and enhance the appeal of the conveyed information. Visualizations for case studies such as obstetric complications, tuberculosis prevalence, and safe drinking water quality testing demonstrate how integrated infographics with icons, illustrations, color coding, typography, and spatial layout can improve comprehension and facilitate more timely, evidence-based decisions. This strategy empowers the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and visual appeal of its public health data dissemination.

Keywords: Communication Strategy, Visual Communication, Laboratory Data, Public Health Laboratory, Klungkung District

1. Introduction

1.1 The Role of Public Health Laboratory in Klungkung

The Bali Province Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) plays a crucial role in disease prevention and control as well as in the improvement of public health. As an institution that conducts clinical specimen examinations and sample testing, the Bali Province Public Health Laboratory adheres to the standards established by the World Health Organization (WHO). This laboratory not only focuses on the microbiological, chemical, and physical analysis of biological samples, but it also contributes significantly to health surveillance and research on community health issues. With its multiple functions including disease diagnosis, health monitoring, and the development of evidence-based interventions the Bali Province Public Health Laboratory stands at the forefront of enhancing community health in the region. In line with the 14 core functions recognized by WHO, one key aspect of the laboratory's mandate is to collaboratively develop plans, programs, and budgets with local stakeholders such as regional governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities (Minister of Health, 2023). The execution of health laboratory examinations is carried out in a participatory manner to ensure that the results are reliable and relevant to the needs of each regency, namely Badung, Bangli, Buleleng, Gianyar, Jembrana, Karangasem, Klungkung, Tabanan, and Denpasar. Among these, Klungkung Regency serves as a model for the Bali Province Public Health Laboratory due to several factors that support the enhancement of public health in the area.

Klungkung, renowned for its rich culture and history, faces unique public health challenges that make it an ideal location for implementing and testing various public health programs. The regency meets the Level 1 Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) standards, as evidenced by the readiness of human resources and the availability of adequate health equipment to perform laboratory functions in accordance with WHO guidelines. The human resources in Klungkung have been trained and possess the necessary competencies to conduct clinical specimen examinations and sample testing, including in the context of disease surveillance and emergency response. Moreover, the health equipment available in the regency meets the operational standards required to support laboratory activities, such as microbiological testing and health data analysis. With sufficient facilities and strong collaboration between the public health laboratory and related institutions, Klungkung has the potential to become a model for other regencies in Bali in terms of effective and sustainable public health program implementation. This not only enhances early disease detection capabilities but also strengthens the overall health system in the region.

The presentation of data generated by the functions of the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory has traditionally been executed using conventional methods. The approach typically involves the distribution of data in the form of documents or spreadsheet files (e.g., Microsoft Excel). Although this method has become standard practice, its effectiveness is frequently questioned particularly regarding ease of access, the speed of information delivery, and its capacity to support data analysis. These limitations indicate the need for innovation in data presentation systems that are more efficient, transparent, and capable of meeting the data-based decision-making needs of stakeholders. Data visualization has become an integral part of the digitalization process. Digitally, data visualization can employ dashboards where text, patterns, and previously undetected correlations are visualized (Irfanullah et al., 2023). This approach enables complex data to be simplified and presented in a more comprehensible manner, thereby expediting faster and more accurate data-based decision-making. In addition to application-based dashboards, this study explores an alternative approach to communicating laboratory data through visual communication strategies that leverage widely accessible digital technologies. These tools can be utilized by technical health personnel working in public health laboratories (Labkesmas), enabling more effective and engaging data dissemination beyond conventional methods.

1.2 Importance of the Problem & Research Question

The urgency of this research lies in the need to develop a more effective communication strategy in the presentation of data by the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory. Conventional methods, which involve the distribution of data in document or spreadsheet format, present significant limitations in facilitating rapid and in-depth stakeholder understanding. These limitations may impede timely and evidence-based decision-making. By designing an innovative communication strategy focused on data visualization and clear presentation, data dissemination can become more intuitive, engaging, and supportive of enhanced comprehension. This research is

vital for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public health information communication, which, in turn, can contribute to elevating the quality of health services in Klungkung Regency.

Research Questions (RQ):

1. How does the conventional data presentation method employed by the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory meet the needs of its stakeholders?
2. What challenges are faced and what impacts do these have on stakeholder understanding and the accessibility of laboratory data presented by the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory?
3. What visual communication strategies can be developed to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and visual appeal of laboratory data presentation at the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory?

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

Research related to the presentation of public health laboratory data and visual communication strategies has shown significant potential in enhancing the effectiveness of information delivery to stakeholders. The following is a review of three key studies that form the foundation of this research:

- a. *The Use of Infographics in Health Promotion* A study by Smith et al. (2020) demonstrated that infographics can simplify complex health information, making it more accessible to audiences with varying levels of health literacy. The research found that combining visual elements such as icons, charts, and strategically selected colors not only improved comprehension but also increased the appeal of the information being conveyed. However, this study was limited to the context of general health promotion and did not explore the application of infographics in the presentation of laboratory data in depth.
- b. *The Role of Visual Communication in Understanding Health Messages* by Yulius Y. (2016) explored how visual communication tools such as posters and short videos can enhance the understanding of health-related messages. The study showed that clearly designed visual elements focusing on key messages significantly improved communication effectiveness. Nevertheless, this research primarily focused on one-way communication through print and digital media and did not examine the data visualization targeted specifically at stakeholders.
- c. *Visual Narratives in the Digital Era for Health Communication* by Sabri S. and Adiprabowo V.D.A. (2023) emphasized the importance of carefully crafted visual narratives for the effective delivery of health information. Their study identified challenges, particularly in selecting visual narratives that align with local contexts, often due to limited knowledge among local health teams. However, the research did not address the application of visual elements or design principle for presenting medical data to stakeholders in the context of data-driven decision-making.

1.4 Problem-Solving Approach and Their Correspondence to Research Design

Although prior studies have highlighted the effectiveness of visual tools such as infographics and narratives in enhancing public understanding of health information, they have not sufficiently addressed how such methods can be adapted for laboratory data presentation within regional public health institutions. Furthermore, the existing literature reveals a limited exploration of how visual communication can overcome specific challenges related to stakeholder comprehension and data accessibility issues that are central to the current practices of the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory. These gaps underscore the importance of investigating how conventional methods currently serve stakeholders (RQ1), identifying the associated limitations and their effects (RQ2), and ultimately developing a visual communication strategy that enhances the efficiency, clarity, and visual appeal of data dissemination in this context (RQ3).

To address the limitations of conventional data presentation methods used by the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas), a visual communication strategy utilizing digital technology based on visual elements and design principles in infographics can be implemented. Infographics serve as an effective tool for conveying critical public health information, enabling audiences with diverse educational backgrounds to understand consistent messages. They are widely utilized in health education and public outreach to simplify complex medical data into clear and accessible visual formats (Wilkerson, 2023). This approach enables the transformation of

complex information into a more structured, engaging, and easily understood format for stakeholders. Infographics employ a combination of visual elements such as icons, illustrations, color coding, typography (visual text), and space layout to simplify data, thereby accelerating information comprehension. As a result, this method improves the accessibility and timeliness of critical public health information delivery.

Furthermore, challenges related to data accessibility and comprehension among stakeholders can be mitigated through the use of iconography or illustrations that emphasize key points in laboratory data. Illustration and iconography are effective tools in graphic design that translate complex ideas into simple, easily recognizable visuals to enhance message delivery. By emphasizing simplification, clarity, and legibility, these visual elements help audiences quickly understand and interpret the intended information (Dewey, 2023). These visuals assist audiences with varying levels of data literacy in quickly grasping the core message without needing to delve into complex technical details. By offering intuitive visualizations, this method supports stakeholders in making timely and evidence-based decisions. As a complementary element of health media communication, illustrations are essential to enhance textual content, as the public generally finds information presented with images or visual aids more appealing and easier to understand (Yulius, 2016).

Health communication is a systematic approach aimed at creating a positive impact on health practices at the population level. Its primary goal is to improve public health status through behavioral change and better health outcomes (Paramasari & Nugroho, 2021). In this context, visual communication plays a significant role by simplifying complex health information, making it more accessible to diverse community groups. The use of image and data visualization platform such as Canva can support effective message delivery and enhance both the appeal and reception of information among heterogeneous audiences. Canva was selected as an example of a platform due to its ease of access, even for users without a background in design.

The visual communication strategy developed in this study integrates visual elements and design principles with digital technologies to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and visual appeal of data presentation. This allows stakeholders to directly engage with data through visuals such as infographics. The strategy is designed to promote greater clarity and efficiency, while also providing a more inclusive user experience. Through this innovation-based approach, the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory can maximize the impact of data presentation on the effectiveness of public health programs.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the visual communication strategies used by the Klungkung Regency Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) in delivering laboratory data to health stakeholders. The method involves data collection through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis related to the types of visual communication implemented, such as charts, diagrams, and supplementary illustrations. The collected data are systematically analyzed to examine how laboratory information is presented to stakeholders. The challenges and gaps identified in the field serve as the foundation for the development of a visual communication strategy proposed by the author, utilizing digital platforms and implementing visual elements and design principles. This strategy is intended as a recommendation for technical personnel in the field to support the preparation of visually oriented laboratory reports.

In-depth interviews were conducted with four key informants: two from the Klungkung District Health Office, including senior officials responsible for public health policy and disease prevention, and two from the Bali Provincial Health Office, one of whom was the Head of the Public Health Governance Working Team at the Bali Provincial Health Office. These informants were selected due to their strategic roles in the communication and use of laboratory data within the health system, making them directly relevant to the study on visual communication strategies employed by the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory in conveying laboratory data to stakeholders.

3. Results

3.1 Level and Functions of the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory

The Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) operates at Level 1, corresponding to the community health center (puskesmas) level. As a Level 1 laboratory, it performs several essential functions: (1) conducting clinical specimen testing, environmental sample analysis, and laboratory-based disease surveillance within the puskesmas service area; (2) managing and analyzing laboratory data at the community health center level; (3) communicating laboratory findings with program managers and relevant stakeholders; and (4) serving as a Local Area Monitoring Unit for public health laboratories within its jurisdiction. These core functions ensure that the laboratory contributes directly to the operational needs of primary health services and facilitates evidence-based public health responses at the local level.

In addition to these technical functions, the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory plays a supportive role in several key public health programs at the district level, particularly in the areas of family health, disease control, and environmental health. In family health, the laboratory provides testing services for pregnant women and children under five, including early detection of anemia, nutritional assessments, and reproductive health screenings, while also supporting community-based services such as Posyandu and maternal-child health programs. For disease control, it contributes to the diagnosis and surveillance of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, dengue fever, malaria, hepatitis, and COVID-19, and facilitates timely reporting and response to confirmed cases. In the domain of environmental health, the laboratory conducts analysis of environmental samples to assess drinking water quality, monitor sanitation, and detect potential environmental contaminants. These contributions reinforce the laboratory's role in integrating laboratory evidence into public health planning and decision-making.

3.2 Laboratory Data Presentation and Stakeholder Roles

Based on the 2023 Klungkung District Health Profile published by the Klungkung District Health Office, data presentation was carried out in a conventional format, primarily using extended narrative descriptions, graphs, and charts. Referring to the previously described roles of the district public health laboratory (Labkesmas), three thematic areas can serve as examples of existing laboratory data that are currently in use: first, family health, represented by obstetric complications; second, disease control, illustrated by reported cases of pulmonary tuberculosis (TB); and third, environmental health, demonstrated through water quality testing for safe consumption.

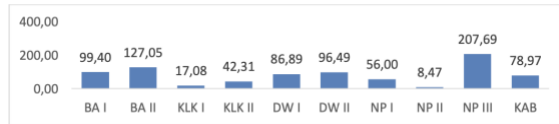
Table 1: Labkesmas Data Presentation

Thematic Area	Study Case	Data Presentation
Family Health	Obstetric complications	Bar chart, pie chart
Disease Control	Pulmonary tuberculosis (TB)	Line chart
Environmental Health	Water quality testing for safe consumption	Bar chart

Source: 2023 Klungkung District Health Profile

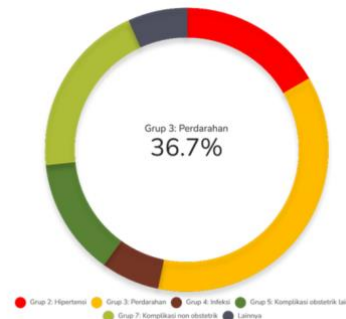
Table 1 shows that obstetric complications are used as a case study in presenting Labkesmas data, as these data highlight deviations from normal conditions that directly contribute to maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. Based on interview results, field data are typically processed manually using spreadsheets and then entered into an application called MPDN (Maternal Perinatal Death Notification), which is provided by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia. However, access to this application is currently unavailable due to ongoing development and integration processes. Figure 1 illustrates how obstetric complications are presented in the form of a bar chart, while Figure 2 displays a pie chart of the suspected causes of maternal mortality, obtained from the MPDN application. In the MPDN application, the pie chart is generated automatically based on the inputted data.

Figure 1: Bar chart of Obstetric Complication Management Coverage in Klungkung Regency



Source: Public Health Division of the Klungkung Regency Health Office (2023)

Figure 2: Pie Chart of Suspected Causes of Maternal Mortality



Source: MPDN Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2023)

The second case study presented in Table 1 is Tuberculosis (TB), which was selected because it is one of the top three priority programs aligned with the quick-win targets of the President of the Republic of Indonesia. This program aims to reduce TB incidence by up to 50%. Figure 3 presents a line chart illustrating the prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) per 100,000 population in Klungkung Regency from 2019 to 2023.

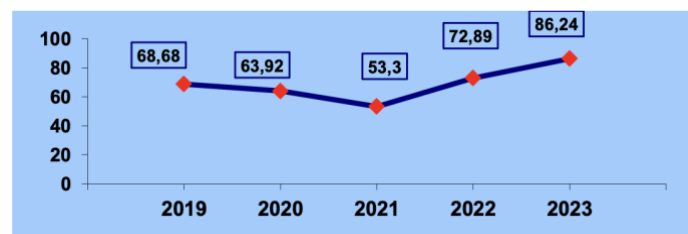


Figure 3: Line Chart of TB Prevalence per 100,000 Population in Klungkung Regency from 2019 to 2023

Source: P2P Division, Klungkung District Health Office (2023)

The third case study presented in Table 1 is water quality testing for safe consumption, which was selected because drinking water quality testing is critically important, as water consumed directly has an immediate impact on human health, particularly in public or communal settings such as restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other similar facilities. Figure 4 presents a bar chart showing the percentage of safe drinking water facilities that met the standards in Klungkung Regency in 2023.

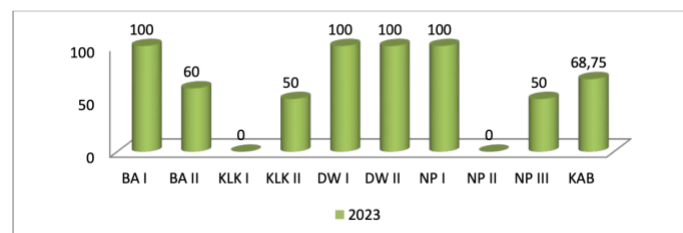


Figure 4: Bar Chat of Percentage of Safe Drinking Water Facilities Meeting Standards in Klungkung Regency in 2023

Source: Public Health Division, Klungkung District Health Office (2023)

The health data presented in the Klungkung District Health Report plays a critical role in shaping stakeholder decisions and guiding follow-up actions at the field level. Table 2 presents the hierarchical structure of stakeholders according to their administrative jurisdiction, the individuals involved in decision-making, and the specific functions or roles they perform within the health governance framework. The table below maps the roles of relevant stakeholders across the three selected case studies.

Table 2: Roles of Stakeholders

Governance Level	Key Actors	Case Studies	Roles
Village or sub-district (kelurahan/desa)	village heads, midwives, and kaders (community health volunteers)	- Obstetric Complication - Tuberculosis (TB) - Water quality testing for safe consumption	- Facilitate antenatal screening and laboratory examinations for pregnant women at the community level. - Refer suspected TB cases to primary health centers (Puskesmas) for laboratory confirmation. - Disseminate laboratory findings to the community with practical health advice.
Sub-district (kecamatan)	health center (puskesmas) managers, surveillance officers, and environmental health staff	- Obstetric Complication - Tuberculosis (TB) - Water quality testing for safe consumption	- Monitor and evaluate maternal health and obstetric complication programs. - Coordinate case finding and contact tracing across villages. - Organize systematic sampling and coordinate with villages for water testing.
District (kabupaten)	The Klungkung District Health Office	- Obstetric Complication - Tuberculosis (TB) - Water quality testing for safe consumption	- Allocate resources and logistics for laboratory services during antenatal care (ANC). - Allocate resources and logistics for diagnostics and treatment. - Conduct confirmatory testing and risk assessments on community water sources.
Province	The Bali Provincial Health Office	- Obstetric Complication - Tuberculosis (TB) - Water quality testing for safe consumption	- Formulate provincial policies for addressing obstetric complications based on lab data. - Develop provincial-level TB control strategies and allocate budget support. - Support development of regional water safety plans and emergency response protocols.

Source: Field data from interviews conducted by the authors (2025)

Based on data collected through in-depth interviews and a literature review, it can be concluded that the presentation of laboratory data by the Klungkung District Public Health Laboratory remains outdated. No significant innovations have been introduced to transform traditional data visualization formats into more creative or user-oriented designs. Enhancing the creativity of data presentation is considered essential to support stakeholders in responding more rapidly and effectively to specific public health cases, particularly within the thematic areas of family health, disease control, and environmental health. An analysis of stakeholder roles across

different levels of governance reveals the complexity of responsibilities assigned to each actor. Findings from interviews indicate that the lack of visually engaging data presentation hinders timely decision-making, as non-communicative visualizations obstruct effective data integration and cross-sectoral collaboration in case management.

4. Discussion

4.1 Limitations of Conventional Data Presentation

Field observations indicate that the laboratory data dissemination methods employed by the Public Health Laboratory (Labkesmas) in Klungkung Regency are still conventional in nature, predominantly utilizing static tabular formats (e.g., Excel printouts), narrative-heavy reporting structures, and standard chart types such as pie, line, and bar graphs. Due to its ongoing development, the application provided by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia remains temporarily inaccessible. This has posed significant challenges for data integration across various levels of governance, thereby necessitating the continued use of manual methods for data processing and presentation. If this condition persists, it may hinder data accessibility for relevant stakeholders. Manual or conventional data presentation methods present several limitations in terms of access, as the data is often restricted to internal staff, primarily paper-based or in PDF format, and difficult to interpret for non-technical stakeholders. In terms of clarity and engagement, conventional data presentation tends to be dense and highly technical, with limited visual appeal due to the minimal use of color, icons, or visual hierarchy. As a result, it becomes difficult for users to quickly extract key messages or insights.

Limitations in terms of format, accessibility, clarity, and engagement significantly influence stakeholder reception. Conventionally presented data is often misunderstood or overlooked, requires extensive verbal explanation, and hinders timely decision-making. These shortcomings may lead to poor intersectoral coordination, delays in budget allocation or policy implementation, and the underestimation of critical public health risks. These conditions highlight three main challenges: the lack of user-oriented data presentation tools, limited interoperability between information systems, and insufficient capacity in data visualization at the local level. Without addressing these barriers, efforts to improve cross-sectoral decision-making will remain constrained. Strengthening digital infrastructure and stakeholder-specific data communication strategies is therefore imperative.

4.2 Visual Communication as a Strategic Response

The challenges associated with conventional data presentation such as limited accessibility, reduced clarity, and low engagement have demonstrated significant implications for health data interpretation and policy responsiveness. In the context of Klungkung Regency, where laboratory data is still predominantly disseminated through static tables, text-heavy reports, and basic charting, there is a pressing need for innovative approaches that can bridge the gap between data producers and decision-makers. Visual communication strategies offer a compelling and multidimensional solution to these constraints. By utilizing intuitive design elements such as color coding, iconography, and hierarchical structures, data can be translated into formats that are more readily understood by both technical and non-technical stakeholders. These formats include infographics with simple illustration, icons, and strategically selected color schemes to accelerate information comprehension.

Based on interview findings, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia is currently developing an integrated application aimed at facilitating data processing and presentation, in which intuitive design elements are expected to be embedded automatically. However, healthcare workers including stakeholders at the local level, such as those in Klungkung Regency, the context of this study, cannot afford to wait for the completion of this development. Independently, key actors responsible for data communication to stakeholders must bridge this gap by leveraging accessible technologies. Tools such as Canva or other platforms that allow for the integration of data and visuals may serve as practical solutions to enhance both the aesthetic quality and effectiveness of data presentation. These applications are generally user friendly and can be operated by health officers or technical staff with minimal training. The following is an example of data presentation through infographics that implements fundamental design principles to create a more approachable form of visual communication. The visualization was

developed by the one of researchers in the capacity of a graphic designer using the Canva platform for three study cases discussed in previous section.

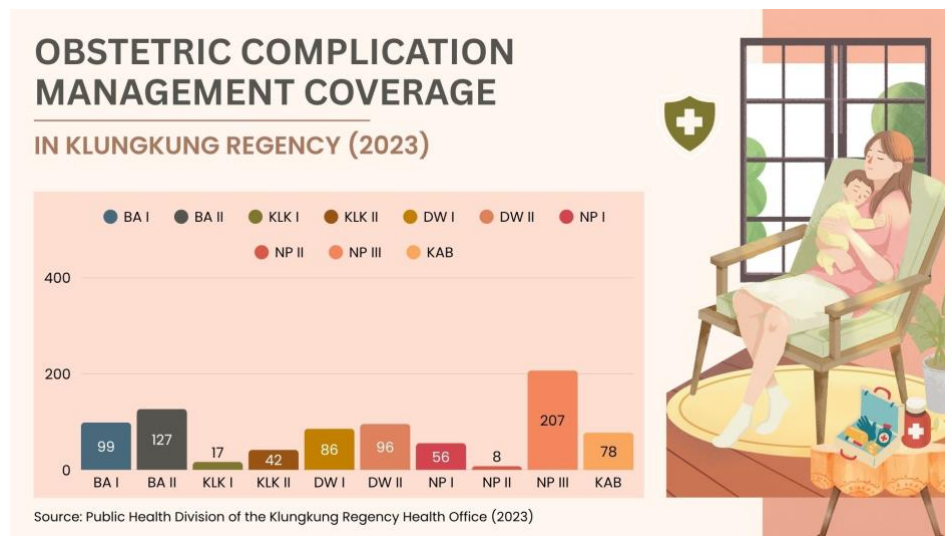


Figure 5: Infographics in The Presentation of Obstetric Complication Data in Klungkung Regency in 2023

Source: Created by the authors using Canva (2025)

Figure 5 presents data through infographics, where visual elements such as icons, illustrations, color coding, typography (visual text), and space layout are integrated with an existing bar chart. The researcher utilized Canva for its development, as the platform provides readily available visual elements that can be directly used. In addition, it offers a range of recommended templates that can be easily selected by technical staff with limited design experience. Five core design principles were implemented in the above data presentation, namely visual hierarchy, contrast, alignment, proximity, and simplicity. These principles are second nature to visual communication designers in the process of designing visual materials. However, with consistent and progressive practice, even individuals without a formal design background can gradually develop the ability to present data effectively using visual communication strategies.

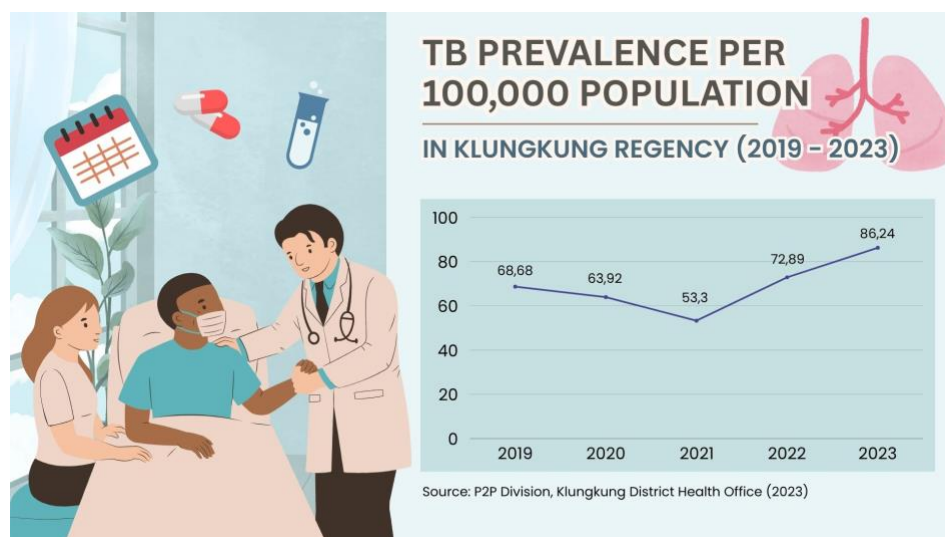


Figure 6: Infographics in The Presentation of TB Prevalence per 100,000 Population Data in Klungkung Regency from 2019 to 2023

Source: Created by the authors using Canva (2025)

Figure 6 is an infographics which implement visual communication strategy through the use of visual elements in data presentation for the tuberculosis (TB) case study in Klungkung. The visual icons used include a calendar to

represent the long term nature of TB treatment, a pill icon to indicate medication and therapeutic regimens, and a test tube icon to signify sputum testing or laboratory diagnosis. These icons were selected intentionally, with the understanding that data processors must comprehend the associative meaning of TB related keywords. This is essential, as icons function as visual representations to help stakeholders quickly form a conceptual understanding of the topic being presented. Likewise, the lung illustration in the title serves to guide the reader toward the idea that the data pertains to pulmonary health, in this context tuberculosis. The illustration of a patient wearing a mask conveys the communicable nature of the disease, while the doctor figure symbolizes the readiness of healthcare professionals to support the patient's recovery process.

The color coding applied utilizes repeated shades of blue, selected for its calming properties. Consistency in the use of color hues is critical, as an excessive variety may cause confusion for the reader. Therefore, variations in brightness and saturation within the same color range were employed to introduce diversity while maintaining visual harmony. Typography in Figure 6 is limited to two font styles, one for the title and another for the descriptive text, chosen for their high readability to facilitate fast information processing. The use of multiple font types is discouraged, as clarity takes precedence over decorative variety in data presentation. The layout of Figure 6 was designed with a deliberate emphasis on data, allocating more space to the data visualization components than to decorative or supplementary elements, reinforcing the principle that data remains the central focus of communication. End the Discussion section with a reasoned and justifiable commentary on the importance of your findings.

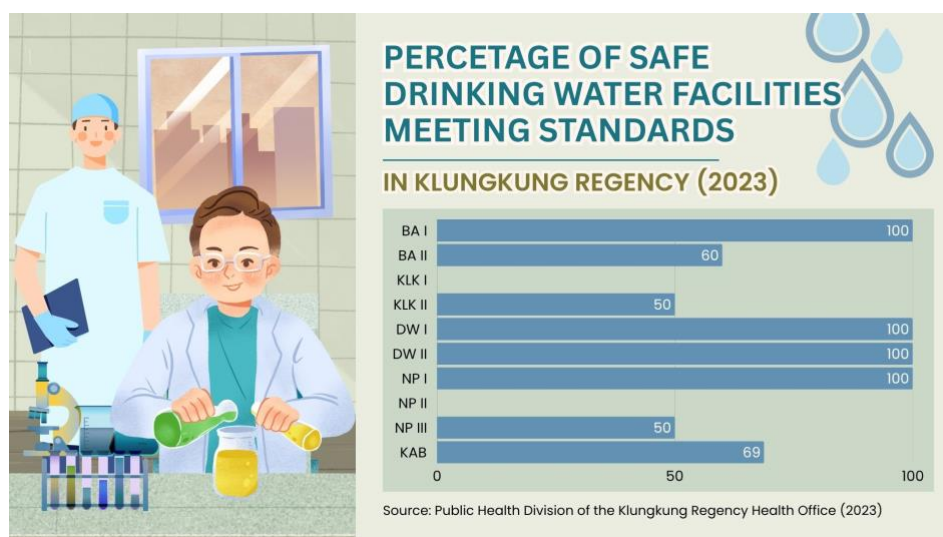


Figure 7: Infographics in the Presentation of Obstetric Complication Data in Klungkung Regency in 2023

Source: Created by the authors using Canva (2025)

Figure 7 presents data related to environmental health through infographics, specifically a case study on water quality testing for safe consumption. The visual strategy applied follows five core design principles: hierarchy, contrast, alignment, proximity, and simplicity. The hierarchy in this data presentation is structured to attract the attention of readers, particularly stakeholders. The illustration of a laboratory worker serves as the initial point of interest, followed sequentially by the bar chart, title, water icon, and data descriptions. This visual hierarchy is deliberately designed to guide readers, allowing the main topic to be communicated clearly and efficiently. The second principle, contrast, is achieved by the proportional balance between the illustration and the bar chart, as well as through the selected color coding. Effective contrast supports readers in visually categorizing information in a more structured manner. The alignment applied in Figure 7 uses a left justified layout for both the title and bar chart. Proper alignment enhances readability by allowing the eye to follow the structure of information more comfortably. In a design composition, the alignment of individual elements with one another plays a crucial role in establishing visual unity and coherence. This structural harmony enhances both the aesthetic appeal and the perceived stability of the overall design. Moreover, alignment serves as an effective visual guide, directing the viewer's attention through the layout in an intentional and organized manner (Lidwell et al., 2010). Proximity is

addressed by managing the spacing between visual elements. For example, there is a deliberate gap between the laboratory worker illustration and the bar chart, enabling readers to differentiate between each component. Simplicity is implemented by minimizing the use of visual elements. The only icon employed is a water droplet, which is directly associated with the topic of drinking water facilities meeting safety standards. Simplicity is further reinforced by the choice of color coding using green and blue tones symbolizing environmental themes, nature, and water.

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that visual communication strategies play a vital role in the presentation of laboratory data by the Public Health Laboratory Labkesmas in Klungkung Regency. Technical gaps such as the unavailability of a fully operational integrated application provided by the central government can be addressed independently through the use of digital tools such as Canva and other graphic data processing platforms. Limitations in design skills may be overcome by utilizing freely available templates, which can also be complemented through basic training sessions or continuous practice. Visual elements and design principles are integral to an effective visual communication strategy. Both aspects can be learned independently, as visual sensitivity is developed through repeated application and consistent refinement. Therefore it is essential for technical personnel responsible for data processing and presentation to remain updated on digital platforms that increasingly facilitate efficient workflows. Finally the presentation of public health laboratory data to stakeholders is crucial for field level case management, as key actors across different levels of governance carry distinct roles that are interdependent. In this context visual communication in data presentation emerges as a promising solution to enhance the clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness of health information delivery which ultimately contributes to the sustainability of inclusive public health quality.

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Democracy and Traditional Bantu Governance: Towards a New Paradigm of Economic and Social Development in Africa

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Abstract

This study attempts to demonstrate the limits of Western participatory democracy, with a view to proposing Bantu-inspired political governance consistent with African cultures. For the past ten years, people have been rising up in Western countries to denounce the failings of their democratic systems: democracy has become an autocracy or a plutocracy. However, Western governments continue to impose their political model in Africa, while failing to meet the vital needs of their people. It is therefore urgent to think of a new type of political governance, much more concerned with the lives of citizens. Traditional Bantu governance constitutes a model to be revisited and updated, in a world where citizens feel exploited by governments. Our objective is to propose a political theory based on consensual governance and the well-being of citizens, in accordance with the traditions of ancient Africa. It is necessary to affirm that the solution to the problems posed by current Western democracy can only come from alternative political models, experienced by other traditions in the world, notably by the Bantu traditions in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Participatory Democracy, Traditional Bantu Governance, Socio-Economic Development

1. Introduction

The 21st century, with the proliferation of media, is strongly marked by political debates surrounding the future of participatory democracy. Among politicians and political scientists, the question of social governance is now central. However, the issue of the best political system is locked into the management of public opinion by the media, without an analysis of governance models and alternative political regimes. Political governance has become an entity of quest and conquest of political power, that is to say, a closed vicious circle in which powers are organized and exercised, in institutional and practical forms, far from concern for the well-being of the people. This is a psychopathology of power (Ronald E. Puhek, 2025). Among the researchers who critically analyze Western democracy, Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels (2016) propose an alternative and provocative perspective based on the human nature of democratic citizens. Several scholars also attempt to deepen democratic theory by proposing different models of democracy (Warren, 2017). However, these debates are increasingly less productive. Model-based strategies encourage theorists to overgeneralize the place and functions of ideal and

typical features of democracy, such as deliberation and elections.

This study of social philosophy aims to rediscover the African sources of people's governance. We propose a political theory based on consensual governance and the well-being of populations. Faced with the exhaustion of the current model of democracy, inherited from the modernity of power in the West, it is salutary to think, with a fresh eye, of an alternative model of political governance to the models officially practiced by the nation-states of the world today. This is the Bantu aristocracy, which we define as the political regime of competent servant-governors, that is to say, the regime of people (Bantu) capable of governing in a consensual manner, and of leading the governed to their well-being, beyond the game of political. The Bantu chief is a servant-ruler, characterized by the primacy and priority he gives to serving others. It is as a servant that he is elevated to the rank of political leader.

2. Methodology

Our methodology is that of the comparative study of political systems. We attempt to compare two systems of political governance, namely Western democracy and the traditional Bantu system of governance, based on studies of political science.

Comparative politics is one of the major sub-disciplines of political science, using comparison as its central analytical tool. It is one of the fields of political study that relies heavily on the comparative method to explore politics within and between countries. Comparative politics emphasizes comparison and case studies as its methodology.

Compared to other sub-disciplines of political science, comparative politics is defined by its methods and methodologies. This is clearly demonstrated by Arendt Lijphart, who states that “comparative politics is the only sub-disciplinary field, among the many disciplines that usually make up political science, to have a methodological rather than a substantive dimension” (Lijphart, 1971, p. 682). Comparativists agree that comparison is the fundamental objective of studies in this field. The goal is to examine, classify, and sometimes even select political institutions, structures, and processes from a range of existing alternatives. The main interest of comparative politics lies in the fact that it allows for a comparative understanding of the diversity of ways in which political institutions operate.

Thus, the main objective of comparative politics lies in “understanding and explaining differences between countries’ policies” (Kopstein and Lichbach, 2014, p. 2). It is evident that, despite the challenges facing comparative politics, this field of study remains the most reliable source of objective, systematic, comparative and reliable description of the political processes at work in the countries of the world. The role of comparativists is to process and interpret the various data generated by putting them into context.

The comparative analysis resulting from this work allows us not only to understand, but also to improve and evolve existing political institutions, procedures, and systems. Comparative politics is a dynamic, responsive field that reflects the fluidity of political boundaries. It has evolved to also incorporate the analysis of the informal dimensions of politics, thus enriching political science.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Limits of participatory democracy

Many academics define participatory processes as a tool for strengthening democracy and legitimacy. As we know, actors in participatory processes have mutual expectations regarding their roles. However, political actors, once established, often fail to meet these expectations.

The list of studies presented here is not exhaustive, but it takes into account research on the critique of Western participatory democracy. Recent studies on democracy show that this political model is losing ground, in particular

in its Western variants. Certainly, the crisis of participation is inherent in the institutionalization of democracy (Laski, 1933). But Western democracy is today the center of fundamental criticism from researchers and popular protests. Zakaria (1997) already spoke of the "rise of illiberal democracy." Colin Crouch (2004) calls it "post-democracy" and Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) "counter-democracy."

Basically, the main problem of participation in the democracy is its very nature. It is now It has been established, with the uprising of Western peoples, that electoral victory is not a reliable indicator of democratic quality. The "yellow vest" protest movement launched in France in November 2018 remains the most beautiful illustration of this. For years, this movement has been calling for a citizens' initiative referendum and an improvement in taxation. This movement challenges the neoliberal system held by the ultra-rich, who control democratic change and the judicial system. The question that arises at this level is the following: how to measure the qualitative reliability of a participatory democracy?

A study by Foa and Mounk (2016) on democratic practices in several countries showed that popular support for democracy is declining. Some studies show that The United States is a "defective democracy." Alexis de Tocqueville (1965), in *Democracy in America* (1835), already spoke of the American government in terms of a "dictatorship of the majority." According to Ronald E. Puhek (2025: 13), the pathology of power affects the current US president, his team, and Republicans in Congress to varying degrees: "*The goal of too many candidates is not to hold office, but to exercise power, the power to decide. Making decisions appeals to them less than the power they feel in making them.*"

The crisis of democracy is not limited to Western countries, but is emerging in Japan (Yazawa, 2015) as well as in the Philippines, a former American colony. The term "people's democracy", Who is the concept from former socialist countries (North Korea, Vietnam, China), is characterized by a single party. Among these countries, China is undoubtedly the most important. It is not only the most populous country, but also, soon, the world's largest economy, while it opposes the Western model of democracy.

Today, there "dictatorship of the masses" (Coin & Lim, 2016). This phenomenon indicates that, unlike military dictatorships, it is not pure oppression by consent of the majority, but of the survival of the system. As we can see it, THE debate on participatory democracy is rich in paradoxes. David van Reybrouck (2016) defends the idea of an anti-electoral democracy; Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) and Jason Brennan (2016) argue for a counter-democracy. And the arrival of the Internet And its media social has leave alone believe that everyone who accesses to the information should promote participatory democracy. But it quickly became clear that social media is controlled by a few giant multinationals, whose main interest is to generate profits, or even to lead to a form of user addicted, as well as to the control of peoples. Therefore, social media, which were supposed to overthrowing authoritarian regimes only makes those regimes more authoritarian and paranoid (Gayo-Avello, 2017). The gradual weakening of representative democracy has opened the way to alternatives, offering citizens more opportunities for political engagement (Peter, 2011). If citizens suspect corruption in the political decision-making process, legitimacy is eventually lost. Thus, if citizens perceive their influence on policymaking to be low, their legitimacy may also be low. In democracies, elections should be the key mechanism for ensuring citizen participation. However, they rarely provide citizens with effective opportunities to influence policymakers. They aim to allow them to choose between several intermediaries who promise to come together and represent their interests.

How, then, can the presence of direct democracy impact the perception of a regime's legitimacy? This question refers to the fundamental aspects of personal identity (values, rights and freedoms, sovereignty) which require major changes in the Company.

James Scott (1999) argues that four conditions are necessary for an authoritarian state, and, disregarding the analysis just conducted, we can say that democracies in the West are now autocracies. First, his original subject of study: "the administrative organization of nature and society." Modern technology and activist government make this subject readily accessible. Second, there is an "ultramodernist ideology": a belief in progress through science, technology, and governance. This is consistent with progressive ideology, including its anti-populist bent and ease

in using democracy to seize power. Third, there is an authoritarian state willing to use the weight of the state to impose its vision of life. The growth of the state makes this increasingly likely, as does Scott's fourth condition: a weakened civil society (family, religion, and civic organizations) is beneficial to the state wishing to implement its plans.

3.2. Traditional Bantu governance

The term "Bantu", derived from the word for "people" in several so-called Bantu languages, was first proposed by Bleek, who In 1851 laid the foundations for the comparative study of Bantu languages. This term has been universally used since (Greenberg, 1999). Why this return to the African past? Charles Darwin was the first scientist to publish a modern theory of the evolution and origin of humanity. He was also the first to designate Africa as his place of origin. Over the past hundred years, research has demonstrated his accuracy, confirming many aspects of Darwin's seminal work (Leakey, 1999).

Here we present the organization of Bantu societies of the past, according to anthropological studies conducted, in order to demonstrate its relevance today. The aim is to defend the idea that this political organization is superior to participatory democracy, insofar as it operates according to consensus.

After nearly a century of linguistic and archaeological studies, it is established that the distribution of Bantu languages is the effect of population growth (generally called Bantu expansion) that began in the Benue Valley, between the south East of Nigeria and western Cameroon (Johnston, 1919; Bakel, 1981; Vansina, 1984, 1995). This is mainly supported by the fact that Bantoid languages, considered to be ancestor of Bantu languages, are currently spoken in this region (Greenberg, 1949; Guthrie, 1962; Lwanga-Lunyiigo, 1976). Relatively new population growth and the colonization of new territories are still accepted by most scholars as the most reasonable explanation for the geographical dispersion and relative homogeneity of Bantu languages (Schoenbrun, 2001). It has also been suggested that the first stages of migration have followed two main paths, which have been defined as "western" and "eastern" flows (Vansina, 1984, 1995; Schoenbrun, 2001).

Year alternative scenario was proposed by Guthrie (1962). While agreeing with Greenberg and others we the center of origin of the Bantu languages, he proposed the Katanga region, located in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in tea middle of tea equatorial forest, as tea region from which Bantu-speaking populations were spreading. However, some authors have highlighted the reductionism of thesis assumptions we tea basis of has single large population migration related to language propagation and molecular ecology has emphasized the relevance of local migration processes (Lwanga-Lunyiigo, 1976; Ehret, 2001; Schoenbrun, 2001). Population genetic studies have clarified the dynamics underlying the current distribution of Bantu populations at the regional and sub-continental levels (Mitchell, 2010).

Proto-Bantu were ruled by leaders and spiritually by minister-diviners. They recognize a unique, powerful, but distant God of human destiny. HAS Bantu village is a chieftaincy. And this one can include under its authority several hamlets. Clan and village are related, as are lineage and tribe. Thus, the inhabitants of a village consider themselves almost all as parents. A good leader is necessarily a historian of the clan tradition, ethnic. It is up to the leader who is often doubled by a diviner to say, as a sign of celebration and eulogy, the story of the deified ancestors who are also leaders. We can therefore understand the permanent symbiosis that exists between the world of the living and that of the dead by the effect (action, word, ceremonies) of the recognized and crowned leader. The basic elements of Bantu politics are provided by the kinship system and the system of intermarriage: the lineage leader is virtually erased from the leader of the lineage group. Each leader has a human group, and the eminent chief is precisely the chief of the earth or of all the ethnic, national land.

Authority is in has sense crystallized into defined characters that command specific groups: the socio-political life is constituted by tea total life of the group. This life integrates directly any economic, artistic, religious or social activity of each member of the group. The people speaking the Bantu languages, coming out of prehistory, following long migrations due to an increase in the population, the mastery of agricultural and metallurgical techniques, have created social entities more or less wide to perpetuate life. As much as myths and legends

represent Bantu' genesis in time and space, their ideas, their beliefs, all the riches of their intelligence, so social structures are the living expression of their external, political organization.

The Bantu were divided into tribes: each tribe ended up occupying a particular location, without intermingling with the other tribes. The Bantu tribes (duala, fang, kikuyu, teke, kongo, mbochi, sena, sotho, zulu ...) are the result of the ancient migrations of the Bantu people in central, eastern and southern Africa. A Bantu tribe is therefore a portion of the Bantu people, having a definite establishment after long migrations, having its political and spiritual leaders, its judges who form a council, its special individuality, adoring protective deities. In pre-colonial black Africa, the emergence of states did not destroy social, cultural, economic and political importance of families and tribes.

Everywhere in the Bantu world, we find the same basic system of households (enclosures whose different boxes house members of the same family: children from the same father and a wife or wives of it and the possible wives of the children), of lineages, of clans, of tribes, with heads of family, lineage, clan and tribe. The models of which different, but the clannish system (groups several clans by integrating them with the tribes) does not miss anywhere: it is the cement even of any Bantu tribe. In Bantu societies, the fundamental units are constituted and directed by groups of descent.

In the Bantu world, there are three types of political structures, namely the states with a central government, small states organized in village-communities, under chiefs, clans and tribes without leaders, but led by councils: class of age and seniors. We know that the colonial order has used traditional chiefdoms to impose itself, notably by creating the "Indigenous Justice". It is also known that the Ujamaa, the basis of socialism in Tanzania, put the community, solidarity and democratic spirit of the traditional African society, in which everyone worked and everyone lived by their own canvas.

In the tribe, each group, each community, each village has its leader. When a community grows, it splits in turn into small communities, with their respective leaders. Thus, the chieftaincies are independent of each other, politically. However, they remain linked by kinship ties (clans, lineages, families). There is therefore no central authority with a highly structured administrative and judicial apparatus as in royalty. The chief's roles are: the direction of religious ceremonies, the arbitration of palavers, the conduct of war, the organization of commerce. The tribe comprising several thousand people was the largest political unit among the Sotho and Nguni (Zulu, Ndebele, Xhona...) of Southern Africa. In these two groups (Sotho and Nguni), the leader was all-powerful, but an overly authoritarian leader quickly became unpopular: he was abandoned to go to another leader more lenient and more just.

Two councils assisted the chief in his functions: a small council and a wider council or assembly. The first council included the chief's confidants: they helped him in his daily tasks of material and cultural management of the country. The Assembly was composed of all the subordinate chiefs, though of some importance. Problems affecting the entire nation were discussed, and any adult man could participate freely. The leader could be criticized during the assizes of the Assembly.

The Sotho or Nguni leader was considered the symbol of national unity, tribal: he personally directed all religious, judicial, administrative and military affairs. We could also talk about the Bemba (20 political units) or Songo chiefdoms.

A chieftaincy is a much more flexible political organization than a kingdom with hierarchical and centralized government structures. From the cultural point of view, a chieftaincy is no less "civilized" than a vast kingdom. The chieftaincy is a complete political organization. Chieftaincy and kingdom are two distinct forms of government in their nature and not in essence: the chieftaincy is a small state, while the kingdom is a much broader state.

In pre-colonial times, the Kongo had created a vast political entity: the Kongo Kingdom. The Bemba, they were politically organized within a multitude of separate head units, on the tribal territory. Aim here and there, there

was an administration, an economy, leaders of lineage and clan, especially the national consciousness to perpetuate, through the structures put in place, the glory of distant ancestors.

4. Discussion

As we have shown, modern democracy is less and less able to solve the problems of social peace. And the organization of traditional society among the old Bantu seems to be a model for thinking about a new post-democratic political regime. We call this model *Bantucracy* (Boundja 2021), which is based on traditional Bantu governance. Tea Bantu political system is based on four levels of relationship: tea relationship of man with God and ancestors, the relationship of man to the world, the relationship of man with other human beings, and the relationship of the man with himself. Political leaders take these four forms of relationship into account.

According to several accounts that trace tea origins of the Bantu tribes, God relatively conferences power to men through alliances. The initiative of the covenant with men comes from God. We are not talking about any social constraint or any collective or individual demand that may have led God to take the initiative. God is truly the real source of power. He alone has chosen the men he calls to power. No strength or cunning interfered with the choice. The reasons for the choice belong only to him; we can only understand the consequences. The will of God is translated into a dream. The dream is thus revealed to be an effective means of revealing, in matters of power, the will of God. The call, although addressed to men, is essentially individual. Each future leader receives his message, and each message is surely special, tailored to each personality. The initiative and the choice of God do not eliminate the risk dimension in the Bantu power. It often involves going beyond oneself and one's society.

What does the action of the ancestors represent? The ancestors appeared in the dreams of men are the apparent sign of the will of God. They reassure future leaders: they believe because they know their ancestors and their wisdom. The ancestors are, in fact, the effective link of the invisible world with the visible world. They represent the idea of lineage and succession that fundamentally inspires Bantu power. Election alone is not enough. To perfect the election, God and the ancestors submit future leaders to three days' training. The week in several African traditions lasts four days: the three days of work and a day of rest. The exercise of Bantu power is conditional on an "election" and Bantu formation.

The unity of the Bantu peoples, it must be remembered, is based on the ancestral language called proto-Bantu. They must refer to a common kinship exemplified by the term "people" (Samwiri, Lwanga-Lunyiigo, & Jan Vansina, 1999, p. 65). It can thus be said that the place of "people" or Bantu is central to the social and political organization of the Bantu peoples.

In Bantu languages, there is no equivalent word to the concepts of kingdom or Republic. There is only one word for power. Power is called Bokonzi in Lignala, Bumfumu in Kikongo and ubukhosi in Zulu, for example. Bantucracy is not a kingdom or a republic, but a power. The definition of power in a society context highlights two elements, namely tea rulers and the governed as actors, and tea different relations of governance that they maintain between them. These two elements are perceptible through the degree of communication between actors and the impact of decisions on each other. It's about recognizing that power is a set of systems whose elements interact.

Tea relationship of power does not come under tea control of tea periphery by tea center, goal it consists in the capacity, by the governor, of a decision which concerns his means of action. It is from the decision of the governor that one can assess the autonomy or dependence of the governed in other power relations, relative to the well-being of all. In other words, a relationship is of a political nature only to the extent that it is likely to be evaluated, after the fact, as a chain of social welfare impacts.

As a result, power relationships in Bantucracy are subject to two requirements, namely, connectivity, which means that conditional connections of power reach all participants in the community, and that of cohesion, which requires that participants are grouped into clusters whose internal power links are positive and the external links are negative. These are the two requirements that constitute community coordination. The requirement of

connectivity refers to the flow of powers from one participant to another, while the requirement of cohesion refers to the regrouping of participants in power, from one pole to another. Both require act between them. The flow of power affects the grouping of participants and the latter, on the path of power.

The learning place of governance is probably the common house. In almost all the traditional Bantu villages, the common hut, built by all the inhabitants in the center of the village, is the place where the “old” as well as the young people put to share their stories, their knowledge of the country and the world, the food too. Living together in the common space was characterized by respect for the other, the exchange of knowledge, the sharing of assets and the reception of foreigners. The common house was the soul of the village.

The new Bantu political system that we propose therefore has as a basic principle, the consideration of the country as the common house, which federates all the human energies of all citizens towards the well-being of each and everyone; he is “all in one”. As a soul of the new country, he lives only by the breath of each and everyone: “he is a par and in all”. The death of a citizen weakens it, the birth of a child or even the naturalization of a stranger vivifies it. The idea of common house, a common box of Bantu (people), disqualifies exclusions, eliminates barriers, institutes nonviolence and dialogue as a system structuring relations between its members.

This proposed new system is based on five key ideas: 1) reconciliation; 2) a leader (Mfumu) instituted in accordance with tradition, mentality and traditional spirituality, which symbolizes unity, he reigns, but does not rule; 3) governance according to modern democratic norms, acquired from the evolution of the world, while promoting participatory consensus, the traditional Bantu-indigenous mode of management of men; 4) respect for the personality of human entities; 5) the reframing of citizen political expression in a system that guarantees political freedom, citizen participation, unity and solidarity of people, non-violence and the life of the country.

These five key ideas of the Bantucracy system are highlighted in the Code of the Alliance, a true national pact, which takes the place of constitution. The Bantucracy system induces a new approach at the institutional and territorial level, the common house federal economic, the common house economic (tea Solidarity Economy), and in terms of international relationships (openness to tea world), with tea head tea Chief.

4.1. Tea Chief (Mfumu)

The Bantu Chief follows divine right, natural law, civil laws and custom. It is these four normative pillars that give the African prince his credibility. Claude Tardits rightly points out:

“All African rulers, whether they were at one time or another qualified as divine or not, have an obligation, that of acting so that the population and the livestock of which it lives are fruitful, so that the watered lands keep their fertility and that starvation is averted. They fulfill these obligations by recourse, direct or indirect (...) the failure, whatever the age of the king, can entail its elimination (Tardits, 1990, p. 38).

It is in the articulation between divine right and natural law that the essential role of the sovereign in traditional Africa must be located. Tea obligation of tea sovereign, concretely, is to promote and defend life, so that the growth of its power is proportional to the multiplication of births. In other words, each new birth is considered to increase the power of the ruler, and conversely, all death is a diminution of his power. A.I. Richards (1959) and his collaborators conducted a survey in 1952-1953 on the study of all the problems posed by chieftaincy in Africa.

This study focused on the political systems of fourteen populations in Uganda and Tanganyika that occupy a continuous territory stretching from northern Lake Albert to Lake Tanganyika: the eight chiefdoms of Bantu, namely Buganda, Busoga, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole, Buhaya, Buzinza and Buha, Busukuma, which is a federation of 47 small chiefdoms, and five polysegmentary societies: Amba (under Toro guardianship since the beginning of the century), Gisu, Kiga, Alur and the Lugbara. The Alur have an intermediary organization between the poly-segmental society in the strict sense and the multi-kingdom. The investigators employed two methods: the classic descriptive method and the questionnaire survey of chiefs. For all oven categories of distinguished chiefs (county chiefs, sub-county chiefs, parish chiefs, headmen), 1156 questionnaires were completed, which provide information on the education, career and status of chiefs. AI Richards, who presents the survey and draws the

conclusions, gives an analysis of the political systems of the Bantu Inter-lacustrine which, from a historical point of view, are actually pre-feudal and must be compared to the European political systems of the 9th and 10th centuries, rather than those of the Middle Ages proper. By analogy with the facts of Europe, African systems that have their equivalent in a still “tribal” Europe are considered feudal.

From tea point of view of social philosophy, tea question that arises at this level is: why this unwavering link between political power and life?

The answer to this question allows us to identify the fundamental point on which all political philosophy is built in the Bantu context. It is recognition of the fact that human beings, animals, plants, minerals, as well as sovereign power itself, come from the same divine source. And, more deeply, life in its entirety comes from this source or from an invisible elsewhere, so that the role of the sovereign is to govern the living in the sense of their natural return to the common source. It must be said that political philosophy in the indigenous Bantu context is based on metaphysics of life.

It is logical that the head of the nation, comes from the common box, and established by him. He represents the nation. It derives its legitimacy from ancestral powers, the state and religious moral authority. He is enthroned according to ancient and religious rites. He is sworn on a religious text. It does not exercise executive power, except in tea matters hereafter specified and recognized by the Code of the Alliance and the constitutional laws. It acts, in this case, by ordinance.

It invests by ordinance the Federal Chancellor, following his election by the Federal Parliament; he invests, always by ordinance, the governors of the counties. Mfumu raises high military jobs and appoints senior magistrates on the proposal of the High Council of the Judiciary. It promulgates the laws and treaties in the twenty days following the transmission to it, either by the office of the federal parliament or by the office of common house, according to the nature of the law. In case of reservation on his part, he appeals to the constitutional court for a check of the conformity of the law or the treaty. If the constitutional court declares compliance, Mfumu promulgates the said law or the treaty. Mfumu guarantees tea solidarity of traditional peoples and counties. It may, when tea circumstances so require, declare a state of emergency either nationwide or over a county. Mfumu can also put federal governance and finances under federal tutelage in case of threat by said county of national unity and solidarity.

It ensures and guarantees the national unity. Also, it is outside the political games. His institution and his exercise of power escape tea struggles and criticisms of politics parts. Hey cannot lend his support, or his moral or financial contribution to a political association. His political responsibility cannot be sought in any national jurisdiction. On the other hand, his criminal responsibility can be committed for assassinations, war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide.

As soon as he is enthroned, he cannot, for the rest of his life, pursue any other professional activity. It enjoys full support of common house.

4.2. Tea Purpose of Bantu Power: To Secure People's Lives

Bantu power is in its essence word. The word of a person is the person himself. As such, it suggests engaging the whole person as a being and acting. The Bantu word is in its essence word-action. The consequences arising from this word-action have a known origin, the person who is the source of the word. In what does the word-action of the prince differ from another? The word-act of the prince is marked. Thanks to the sign on his forehead, the authority of the prince is now in the eternal river of power, with that of the other princes.

Said word-action is granted by God to tea elect to create and guarantee tea life of tea Bantu. Indeed, the prince, without being founder of the power, participates and pursues the act of creation by restoring, in the time and the geographical space, the harmony and the balances of the principality, all this in order to guarantee the life of men and ensure their perpetuation.

The purpose of power is, in a simple way, taught to any successor appointed in interviews with his old master in power.

5. The challenges of traditional Bantu governance

The issue of good governance of peoples is topical today. Current events, in a sense, express what escapes expiration. But the current state of governance is, in many ways, a celebration of the decline of political and economic liberalism, a funeral celebration of mercantile democracy. In such a context, where the governance of men, like currency, is subject to the fluctuating speculation of stock market values and the probabilistic play of financial markets, humanity has slipped far from its essence, to vegetate in moral recession. From now on, the world seems to be gathered in a new order, namely that of the inability of rulers to curb crises of all kinds. It is a unanimity of incompetent politicians, a unanimity matched only by the usurping luxury of couch grass. With the media dramatization of political and economic crises, artificially-appearing pandemics, armed conflicts and their attendant funerals, it would be more accurate to say that the dawn of the Western model of society is behind us. Being realistic today would mean accepting the liquidation of liberalism and capitalism, in order to open up to a governance of good people, for the good of the people.

We posit the Mbongui (the Common House), as the political and economic system, for the renewal of the Congo and the world. Whether the State and the Nation are conceived in terms of Mbongui or Common House, this supposes that living well together is based on the sharing of knowledge and assets, that individual well-being resides in the fact of giving and, therefore, of giving oneself. In this way, the Common House is not the addition of individual goods, but the participation of individuals in the Mbongui, as in a work of community interest, and this participation is a gift of self. The Common House is therefore the measure, understood as the intersection of the quality of the quantity of an action in which the citizen gives himself for the collective good. It is in this measure that the articulation between the universal and the particular should be situated: an individual act can have a universal and ethical scope, when it is oriented towards the Common House, towards the gathering in the One of living well together. The universality of human development, in the Mbongui, is realized as a particularity in the social action of individuals, as a singularity removed from selfish determinations centered on the individual, and carried towards the common good. The singularity of an individual action, by aiming at the common good, refers to the community interest. The Common House is, in this way, the space where each citizen can exist in an ethical manner, in the primary sense of a habitual stay of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions. A human act is ethical, when it aims at the common good, and allows the best integration of citizens in a community of shared life.

Sharing assets and knowledge, by giving oneself, is the movement towards novelty, which can only enter into social effectiveness if it is assumed by a renewed humanity. The renewal of humanity, advocated by the mbongui system, comes about through new actions to be taken, in the face of new possibilities of existence that open up to us. The man who enters into the posture of a new humanity (Kimuntu), recognized as an index of human development, adopts a specific way of acting. He declines his identity where his historical action and the truth of what he is are articulated. This articulation is the criterion that allows the recognition of the development process. The ethical novelty in man, Kimuntu, is not the fruit of an ontological transformation, but it comes from the new way of rooting oneself in the firm ground of traditional values, of actualizing the possibilities of action not exhausted in the ancestral past, with a view to extending them into a future bringing well-being by all and for all. It is, fundamentally, a way of living, which is rooted, at every moment, in the commitment to bring about a desired and desired world, starting from us. Indeed, human development, in its full form, the integrative figure of all better life, will not happen without us. Its future, as it is inscribed in the promise carried by our wish-images of a good life, is entrusted to our active consent, to the commitment of our freedoms: human development is our task and our praxis. Thus understood, the mbongui, as an appropriate framework for human development, follows the movement of a certain humanization of man, so that any understanding of human development and any understanding of the humanity of man takes place within the historical framework determined by cultural identity, territorial singularity and social praxis. The meanings of the human being are organized, from the point of view of development, in a structural field where they are ordered to the idea that one has of man, and to the purpose that

one gives to his existence. To develop means, in this sense, to grow and humanize oneself, that is to say to move towards what one considers to be the ethical and moral realization of oneself, within a human community. Consequently, renewal, here, suggests the idea of a *creatio ex vetere*, of an actualization of ancestral wisdom, in the domain of the governance of men. What characterizes the *mbongui* as a new system of governance consists, precisely, in the fact that it brings to modernity and to the concrete universality of the Nation-State, the model of traditional governance of the indigenous Bantu peoples.

This governance, in its very essence, is centered on the person of the Chief (Mfumu A Congo), who is the embodiment of justice and truth, the guardian of the land and the lieutenant of the creative power of Nzambé. Indeed, since the creation of the world and to deploy his governance over men, Nzambi A Pungu entrusted to the men he freely chose, this power over the land, so that the Mfumu A Congo institution is founded on authority, both as a vision and as a practice. Mfumu A Congo, without being a governor, is the guarantor of divine law, natural law, civil laws and custom. It is these four normative pillars that give the Mfumu A Congo institution its credibility and legitimacy. The obligation of the Mfumu A Congo, concretely, is to promote and defend life. In other words, each new birth is considered by him as something that increases the thickness of the Mbogui's life and, conversely, every death is a diminution of life. But why this unbreakable link between political power and life?

It is the recognition that human beings, animals, plants, minerals, as well as sovereign power itself, come from the same divine Source. And, more profoundly, life in the universe comes from this Source, from Nzambé or from the invisible elsewhere, so that the role of the Sovereign is to govern the living in the sense of their harmonious return to the common Source. Consequently, before being consecrated, the chosen one of Nzambé and the ancestors, the Mfumu A Congo, first undergoes initiatory training. Initiation into the *bomfumu* is the way and the time by and during which the chosen one scrutinizes the depths of the eternal river of the *bomfumu*, and acquires the capacity to wash there, and to swim there for life. The Bantu-indigenous power, granted by Nzambé and the ancestors to their chosen one, is speech; this speech means, in its essence, speech-action. The Mfumu's speech-action is the Mfumu's entire life. Initiation consists of revealing to the chosen one the *bomfumu* code of speech, centered on mastering the art of "speaking" and judging, and mastering the conduct of one's own life as a Mfumu. However, Nzambé, who has conceded power to the Mfumu, remains master of the reality and effectiveness of the Mfumu's power. The Mfumu's speech-action (and therefore his life and power) only brings positive results when it remains in harmony with the will of Nzambé and the ancestors. His speech-action must have two traits: it creates life and continuously establishes itself as a shelter for his people. For this reason, Mfumu strives to remain in harmony with Nzambé and the ancestors. Thanks to this rigorous ethic, he elevates himself and becomes the intermediary between Nzambé and his people. Furthermore, the *mbongui*, as a Nation and State, is constituted by the Code of the alliance. Every society, as we know, constructs the imaginary of its reference, on which a sustainability can be based, not material and physical, but symbolic. Life and the reproduction of life are linked to the constitution, by society, of a discourse of supra-political legitimacy, which founds life and the reproduction of life. And the identity foundation of a civilization is directly inscribed in a vital cycle, the preservation of which is essential to social and political balance. The *mbongui* therefore unites, in the code of the alliance, the spheres of being and duty, of nature and society, of the cosmic order and the human (ethical) order. The *mfumu* offers its content to the ancestors and to Nzambé, so that they maintain it in its place, among men. Everyone must respect the code of the alliance in their relationships with others and with the world. It is not a question of belief, but of a deeply implicit conviction. It is through experiences that a conviction is translated. It is a lived meaning and not a conceived one. As a principle of the *mbongui*, the code of the alliance defines, at the origin, the ethical and moral ideal of the relationship between man, the ancestors and Nzambé. The code of the alliance, by its symbolic value, is the constitutional pillar of the Theo-political order of the *mbongui*: the *mbongui* is there so that the code of the alliance is realized; the code of the alliance must be realized so that the world is habitable in harmony.

6. Conclusion

The Bantu political system that we propose is a form of governance by the people, from the bottom up. In Bantucraty, the prince is the protector of the people. The protective function of the prince has its origin in the "shelter" character of the Bantu power. The primary mission of a prince is to protect life, to perpetuate it; God and the ancestors, who gave them that power, did the same to them. As soon as a prince is enthroned, he becomes

the leader of all the people, including thieves, liars and assassins. It does not operate a selection between good and bad, those to keep and those to reject. The protection it affords to all cannot be equated with any complicity with the perpetrators; protection is related to life. When an assassin, even if caught we tea spot, is threatened in his life and enters tea prince's residential court, his life is safeguarded and now protected. This guarantee does not amount to an amnesty; the culprit remains liable to judgment and punishment, except those which are prejudicial to his survival.

The protection of the Bantu prince also covers human rights. It has the authority to determine and specify the rights of each, the authority to defend the rights and to sanction violations. The Bantu princes structured this authority, gave it body by tea establishment of tea judicial institution. Within the Bantu institutional power, the body of administrators assumes, among others, the judicial function.

It is established that the “shelter” character of the people of Bantu power has generated the judicial system. In order to be closer to the people, the judicial system has been structured and decentralized; he has thus meshed the Bantu territory. Any decision of justice pronounced in the principality can be the object of a last resort before a prince. He examines the appeal and pronounces his decision without further appeal. In practice, being close to the concerns of the population, mfumu (chiefs of territorial constituencies) play the role of last resort.

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Critical-Decolonial Perspective on the Construction of China and the Legacy of Fúxī

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Abstract

The research aims to investigate the construction of the Modern Chinese State from a critical-decolonial perspective, highlighting the cultural and symbolic influence of the myth of Fúxī and the Eight Trigrams – the latter symbolizing a worldview centered on harmony and self-organization, values that contributed to the social and political structuring of China, shaping a model that sought to resist coloniality and preserve cultural autonomy. The analysis aims to understand how China incorporated aspects of its traditional worldview, reflecting a resilient identity and a system of values that guided the country in its rise as a global power. The research method used was qualitative and critical-decolonial, with deductive method, historical and documentary analysis. And it revealed that, unlike the Western model of modernization that imposes a break with traditions in favor of the adoption of exogenous institutional structures, the Chinese integrated tradition and modernity. In this sense, these are not just cultural symbols of the past, but structuring pillars of contemporary governance.

Keywords: Modern Chinese State, Critical-Decolonial Perspective, Cultural Autonomy, Political Science

1. Introduction

This study begins with the central problem of how the mythology of *Fúxī* (伏羲) and the Eight Trigrams (八卦, *bāguà*), as cultural and philosophical pillars, influenced the formation and consolidation of the Modern Chinese State, both in the construction of its political identity and in the integration of ancestral values in a contemporary context. The main objective is to analyze how those mythological and philosophical elements acted in strengthening social cohesion and in preserving a worldview that supports the political, cultural and spiritual foundations of modern China.

The relevance lies in the impact that traditional Chinese mythology and philosophy have had on the construction of a resilient and unique political identity, a heritage that reinforces the sense of historical continuity, legitimizing the unity and political power of the State before its people and the international community. Therefore, the choice of the theme is justified by the need to understand how ancestral cultural and philosophical elements, such as the myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams, continue to play a fundamental role in the structuring of Chinese political and social thought.

China, as one of the oldest civilizations in the world, has a rich mythological and philosophical tradition that permeates not only its history but also its contemporary political organization. In this sense, the mythology of *Fúxī*, considered the first of the Three August Ones and one of the founders of Chinese civilization, offers a unique window into how ancestral values were reinterpreted and integrated into the modernization project of the Chinese state. The Eight Trigrams, in turn, represent a symbolic system that transcends the realms of philosophy and religion, influencing areas such as politics, economics, and social organization.

The relevance of this study also lies in the context of International Relations and Law, areas in which China has played an increasingly prominent role. Understanding the formation of the modern Chinese state and its political identity is essential to analyzing its actions on the global stage, especially at a time when the country seeks to reaffirm its position as a world power. Chinese mythology and philosophy are not just elements of the past, but active tools in the construction of a national narrative that sustains the legitimacy of the state and its international projection. That said, the study contributes to a deeper analysis of the foundations that underpin contemporary China's political and strategic decisions.

Regarding the methodological aspects, the applied approach was qualitative and critical-decolonial, with deductive method, historical and documentary analysis. The study includes a review of Chinese and Western theoretical and historical sources, seeking interpretations of the *Fúxī* myth in the context of the formation of Chinese political thought. The decolonial perspective will serve to highlight the cultural and political resistance to Western influence throughout China's development. This approach is particularly relevant given that China seeks to reaffirm its cultural and political autonomy in the face of Western domination, especially in the field of International Relations and International Law.

The article is structured in three main sections. The first presents the philosophical and cultural foundations of the myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams, exploring its origins and symbolic meaning in Chinese tradition. The second section discusses the historical and political relevance of this mythology in the formation of the Modern Chinese State, highlighting its influence on the construction of national identity and the legitimization of state power. Finally, the third section addresses the contemporary implications of this cultural heritage, analyzing how ancestral values continue to influence China's domestic and foreign policy. The conclusion reflects on the importance of revisiting founding myths as a tool for understanding the relationship between culture, politics, and identity in states with long historical traditions.

The choice of the theme is also justified by the need for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates Law, International Relations and political philosophy; seeking to understand how Chinese mythology and philosophy influenced the formation of a legal and political system that, although modern, maintains strong ties with its cultural tradition. This perspective is essential for a more comprehensive analysis of China's role on the global stage.

Finally, this study contributes to the academic debate on the relationship between culture, politics, and identity in the context of International Relations and Law. The analysis of the mythology of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams offers a unique perspective to understand how China has constructed a political identity that simultaneously preserves its ancestral roots and projects itself as a global power. In this sense, the study not only enriches the field of International Relations but also offers valuable insights into the understanding of Law and politics in a globalized context.

2. The Myth Of *Fúxī* And The Eight Trigrams

The myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams plays a fundamental role in the construction of the traditional Chinese worldview, underpinning cultural, philosophical and social aspects that profoundly influenced the formation of the Modern Chinese State. In Chinese mythology, *Fúxī* is considered the first of the Three Legendary Ones (三皇, *sān huáng*), mythological figures responsible for teaching the foundations of human civilization.

The Chinese philosophical tradition has a structuring basis in the conception of cosmic order, in which the Eight Trigrams occupy a central role. Originating from the Book of Changes (*I Ching*), the trigrams are symbolic representations of natural forces, serving as a foundation for understanding universal dynamics. Chinese writing and thought systems have been profoundly influenced by myths and cosmological patterns, including the trigrams, which unfold from the interaction of the fundamental principles of *Yīn* and *Yang*ⁱ (Bauer, 2009).

Fúxī was credited with creating the Eight Trigrams and teaching human's various arts, such as reflecting on the world and observing nature; for example, imitating a spider would make it possible to produce a net for fishing and hunting. As the First Emperor, *Fúxī* is remembered for his ability to observe nature and interpret the principles of the universe, creating the basis for systems such as cosmogony, writing, medicine, and philosophy (Marquéz, 2020, p. 15-18).

The states of change represented by the trigrams would explain the order of the universe, the laws that govern it, the phenomena of nature and even the human being itself. In the Book of Changes, the *Yang* principle would be represented by a continuous line (—), while the *Yīn* by a discontinuous line (– –); their combinations lead to the Eight Trigrams. These would be composed of three continuous or discontinuous lines, which correspond to natural phenomena and symbolize the eight fundamental states of change in nature (Bauer, 2009).

The trigrams and the elements of nature are: a) ☰ (乾, *qian*) sky; b) ☱ (兑, *duì*) lake; c) ☳ (震, *zhèn*) thunder; d) ☲ (离, *lí*) fire; e) ☷ (坤, *kūn*) earth; f) ☶ (艮, *gèn*) mountain; g) ☵ (坎, *kǎn*) water; and h) ☴ (巽, *xùn*) wind. The connection between the trigrams and the natural elements reflects the holistic vision of Chinese philosophy, which sees the human being as an integral part of a greater whole, governed by the same universal laws (Bauer, 2009).

These fundamental principles of cosmic order are intrinsically linked to the Taoist worldview which, described in the Book of Changes, holds that the world is governed by two dialectically opposed and interdependent forces, namely *Yīn* and *Yang*. Acting in a complementary and harmonious manner, these forces would keep the cosmos in a constant process of change; the imbalance of either would cause extinction because one gives rise to and develops the other (Bauer, 2009).

It is therefore believed that the universe would be composed of infinite cyclical changes, such as from dawn to sunset, from night darkness to daylight, from birth to death. This basic understanding would be applied to all existence, since the only 'constant' would be the change. Various traditions of thought in Asia hold similar notions to this, because the fundamental principle of any existence is impermanence – also advocated by the Buddhist tradition.

The Brazilian saying “a river never passes through the same place twice” has the same origins as Heraclitus' philosophy, which can be summarized in the idea that “no one steps into the same river twice” due to the constant

transformation of humans and the world, and also found in the Tibetan Book of Life and Death, which mentions a popular saying that it would be “impossible to wash the same dirty hand twice in the same river”; given this conception of constant change (Marquéz, 2020, p. 15-18).

The structure of trigrams, composed of continuous or broken lines, reflects the cyclical patterns of the universe and establishes profound relationships between natural phenomena and aspects of human life. This symbolism, rooted in Chinese philosophy, reveals a holistic view of the world, in which each trigram represents an essential element of nature, such as sky, earth, fire, water, wind, thunder, mountain and lake. These elements are not just static symbols but represent dynamic and interconnected forces that govern balance and transformation in the cosmos (Bauer, 2009).

The logic underlying the trigrams is deeply influenced by the dialectic of *Yīn* and *Yang*, which describes the complementary and contradictory interaction between opposing but interdependent forces. This dialectic is widely explored in Chinese strategic thought, where harmony between opposites is seen as essential for balance and prosperity (Chin *et al.*, 2018).

In the context of strategic thinking, the application of this dialectical framework allows for interpretations that go beyond traditional philosophy, extending to contemporary political and legal systems. For example, the notion of balance between opposing forces can be applied to conflict management, where the search for harmonious and complementary solutions is preferred over confrontational approaches. In the political sphere, the idea of *Yīn* and *Yang* can be used to understand the dynamics between centralization and decentralization of power, or between state authority and individual autonomy. In the legal field, the trigram framework can inspire a more flexible and contextualized approach, where laws are interpreted and applied in a way that balances conflicting interests, rather than adopting a rigid and binary view (Chin *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, the holistic and cyclical view of trigrams offers a unique perspective for strategic decision-making, where constant change and interdependence between elements are seen as natural and inevitable. This contrasts with more linear and causal Western approaches, highlighting the importance of adaptability and resilience in a constantly changing world. Therefore, the trigram framework, combined with the dialectic of *Yīn* and *Yang*, not only enriches philosophical understanding, but also offers valuable tools for analysis and practice in contemporary political, legal, and organizational systems (Chin *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, their interpretation goes beyond the merely symbolic character and acquires an epistemological dimension, serving as a model for the organization of traditional Chinese thought. According to Kissinger (2011)ⁱⁱ, China’s political and diplomatic structure often reflects the fluid and adaptive logic derived from this cosmological vision, differentiating itself from Western Cartesian thought. The trigrams would therefore operate as a categorization system that structures everything from astrology and traditional medicine to the formulation of military strategies. These symbols are closely related to the construction of Chinese cultural identity, which values harmony between man and the cosmos.

Therefore, beyond this philosophical role, the myth of *Fúxī* also has a cultural and symbolic dimension that shaped Chinese identity, as he is described as a civilizing hero who taught humans essential skills such as fishing, hunting and the use of tools. His figure transcends mythology, as he is revered as a symbol of ancient wisdom and the human capacity to live in harmony with nature. Often depicted with a serpent’s body and a human torso, *Fúxī* symbolizes the integration between the human and natural worlds.

Temples dedicated to *Fúxī* in places such as *Tiānshuǐ* (天水) and *Huáiyáng* (淮阳) attest to the cultural and spiritual importance of this myth. These structures not only celebrate a cultural hero, but also serve as spaces for the preservation and transmission of values and traditions associated with the Chinese worldview; where reverence for *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams demonstrates how mythological elements connect to practical aspects of social and political organization, contributing to the formation of a resilient cultural identity that has persisted throughout history, even in the face of challenges such as colonialism and modernization.

The influence of the Eight Trigrams on the Chinese worldview is manifested not only in its traditional philosophy but also in modern conceptions of governance and International Law. Zhang (2023) argues that China's rise in the international system is guided by principles that revive traditional notions of balance and interdependence, in line with the idea of the trigrams as dynamic representations of reality. Similarly, contemporary Chinese legal theory, by adopting the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, resonates with the logic of the trigrams, as it seeks harmony in International Relations through complementarity and interdependence (Su, 2014).

By exploring the myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams, it becomes clear that these cultural and philosophical pillars played a significant role in cementing values such as harmony, interdependence and resilience. These foundations have been put into practice by the Chinese government through diplomacy, where the fundamental principle is harmony, expressed by the idea of "Building a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity" (人类命运共同体, *rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngtǐ*).

These values have not only shaped China's worldview but have also influenced the structuring of its state model, which integrates ancient traditions with the demands of modernity. In this way, the myth of *Fúxī* offers a unique lens through which to understand how China has preserved its cultural autonomy and shaped its historical trajectory, grounded in a distinct worldview deeply rooted in its cultural past.

3. The Formation Of The Modern Chinese State

The formation of the Modern Chinese State was a complex process marked by significant historical events that redefined the country's political, social and economic structure. Among the main events that contributed to this transformation are the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), the *Xinhai* Revolution (1911), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the various forms of resistance to Western and Japanese imperialism throughout the 20th century.

The Opium Wars symbolized the beginning of China's so-called "Century of Humiliation," when the Qing Empire was forced to sign unequal treaties, such as the Treaty of Nanking, which resulted in the cession of Hong Kong to Britain and the forced opening of ports to foreign trade (Chang, 2014; Carvalho, 2024). This situation exposed the fragility of the Qing government and fueled a sense of popular dissatisfaction, culminating in the *Xinhai* Revolution of 1911.

To understand the formation of the Modern Chinese State, it is essential to analyze it within the context of International Law, especially from the perspective of the relationship between imperialism and sovereignty. As Antony Anghie (2005) argues, modern International Law emerged in a context in which colonial powers used legal norms to justify the domination of non-European territories. China, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, was directly affected by this Eurocentric legal structure, in which sovereignty was granted unequally to the states of the so-called "Third World".

The unequal treaties imposed on China, such as the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), exemplify Anghie's argument that International Law functioned as an instrument of legitimacy for the subordination of non-Western states. These legal impositions removed from China control over its trade, economy and part of territory, placing it in a position of dependence on the European powers and Japan (Anghie, 2005, p. 196).

The *Xinhai* Revolution was a landmark in Chinese history, as it resulted in the fall of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen. However, political instability persisted, leading to a series of civil wars and foreign interventions. During the 20th century, China underwent profound sociopolitical reforms, including the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The trajectory of the People's Republic of China is marked by profound contradictions between rupture and continuities, especially regarding the role of culture and tradition in the construction of the modern state and the pursuit of development. Since its founding in 1949, under the leadership of Mao Zedongⁱⁱⁱ, China has undertaken a radical transformation of its social, economic, and cultural structures, aiming to free itself from colonialism, feudalism, and imperialism, asserting as an independent socialist power (Kissinger, 2011; Carvalho, 2024).

Since the 1949 Revolution, the Chinese government has adopted policies of nationalizing strategic industries and establishing state control over key sectors of the economy. These measures ensured that the country's modernization occurred under conditions that preserved its autonomy, avoiding excessive dependence on foreign capital. Later, with Deng Xiaoping's reforms from the 1970s onwards, China began to integrate market elements into its economy, but without giving up state control over strategic areas, which differentiated it from other post-colonial countries that, by accepting structural adjustment programs from the IMF and the World Bank, reinforced their economic dependence on the West (Kissinger, 2011; Mignolo, 2017).

China's struggle to regain its sovereignty was not only in the military and political fields, but also in an attempt to reformulate the norms of International Law that kept it in a subordinate position. The rise of the Chinese Communist Party and the founding of the People's Republic of China represented not only a break with the previous government, but also an effort to redefine China's position within the international system. Non-acceptance of the authority of Western powers and rejection of foreign interference became fundamental principles of Chinese foreign policy, reflecting the search for full sovereignty, in contrast to the condition of "limited sovereignty" imposed by colonialism and traditional International Law (Anghie, 2005, p. 199).

In the early decades of the People's Republic, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), there was a systematic rejection of Chinese cultural traditions – Confucianism, religion, customs, and symbols associated with imperial China were labeled 'outdated' and treated as obstacles to revolutionary progress. This denial of cultural roots was not merely symbolic: thousands of intellectuals, artists, and religious figures were persecuted, works of art and temples were destroyed, and the classical heritage was replaced by a revolutionary socialist aesthetic^{iv} (Carvalho, 2024).

This process, although justified to break with structures of internal and external domination, can be critically interpreted as a form of cultural self-denial, embedded in a modernization project that sought equivalence with Western development parameters, even while placing itself in ideological opposition to the capitalist West. Thus, the first phase of Chinese socialism prioritized class struggle and ideological mobilization, to the detriment of valuing the history and ancient culture of Chinese civilization itself.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the rise of Deng Xiaoping to power in 1978, a new phase in China's trajectory began. Although the focus shifted to economic modernization – through the Four Modernizations (industry, agriculture, science, and defense) – there was also a gradual rehabilitation of cultural and historical aspects that had been marginalized. The state began to recognize that traditional culture could be a strategic resource in building a cohesive national identity, especially in the face of the challenges of globalization (Carvalho, 2024).

The reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s marked a period of economic openness and modernization, consolidating a development model that mixed elements of socialism with market strategies, guaranteeing China unprecedented economic growth and greater autonomy from Western influence^v (Kissinger, 2011). Under the leadership of Deng and, later, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping, official discourse began to emphasize "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in 1982, a formula that revives elements of the imperial past, Confucianism, and classical Chinese philosophy, articulating them with the development project (Carvalho, 2024). The role of culture was elevated to an essential component of Chinese soft power and its international prominence.

The current aspect of China's modernization did not mean a break with its traditional values, but rather the integration of ancient philosophical and cultural elements into the development of the modern state. Confucianism,

Taoism and Legalism continued to play fundamental roles in the formulation of national policies and in the structuring of Chinese society^{vi} (Kissinger, 2011).

The principles of cosmic harmony, present in Confucianism and Taoism, influenced Chinese politics by emphasizing the search for balance between rulers and ruled, the need for meritocratic administration and the maintenance of social order. During the period of economic reforms in the 20th century, the Chinese government used these values to justify policies that combined state planning with economic pragmatism, allowing the country to grow without compromising its national identity.

China has been promoting a policy of “cultural renaissance,” reviving elements of the Confucian tradition and investing in the valorization of its history and cultural heritage as a way of strengthening its sovereignty. The preservation of its own tradition is reflected in the Chinese state model, which presents itself as an alternative to Western hegemony, while at the same time seeking to consolidate its position as an autonomous and independent global power.

The relationship between traditional values and the construction of an independent state model is visible in China’s own foreign policy, which emphasizes sovereignty, mutual respect between nations and non-interference in internal affairs. This approach reinforces China’s position on the world stage as a state that resists colonialism and seeks to assert its autonomy in relation to Western powers. Currently, initiatives such as the New Silk Road and China’s presence in multilateral organizations are strategies to consolidate an autonomous development model that is less dependent on the rules established by traditional powers.

In this regard, each of China’s great leaders contributed significantly to the development of the modern Chinese state. Xi Jinping has been heinously promoting an increasingly explicit cultural nationalism, incorporating traditional and religious elements into the Communist Party’s discourse. Under his rule, there is an effort to construct a continuous and organic historical narrative of China – from Empire to socialism – consolidating the idea of a unique, resilient, and autonomous civilization.

China’s trajectory highlights a dialectic between denial and repurposing of its cultural roots. From a critical and Global South perspective, this experience reveals how modernization projects can initially reject local traditions in the name of a universal, often Eurocentric ideal, but also how these traditions can be rescued and reinterpreted as the foundations of an alternative development model. Contemporary China, by integrating culture, history, and political project, challenges the hegemonic logic of the West and proposes plural paths for strengthening states in the Global South.

4. Coloniality And The International System: The Impacts Of The Myth Of *Fúxī* In Modern China

The relationship between coloniality and the structure of the contemporary international system cannot be dissociated from the historical legacy of Western domination. Although formal colonialism was overcome through the independence processes of nations in the Global South, its marks remain in the persistence of asymmetrical power structures that subordinate diverse regions epistemologically, politically, and economically to Western influences. This phenomenon, as Quijano (2009) highlights, transcends territorial occupation, reflecting itself in the imposition of paradigms of knowledge and development that marginalize alternative visions and delegitimize non-Western worldviews.

Coloniality, therefore, is not limited to the past, but manifests itself in the present through subtle mechanisms of control and domination, which perpetuate the global hierarchy established during European colonial expansion. This is intrinsically connected to ‘modernity’, exposed by Mignolo (2017) as its darkest side, affecting different locations in different ways.

The maintenance of Chinese autonomy in the face of colonialism is linked, among other factors, to its ancient culture and the resilience of its worldview. In the West, the formation of the modern state was often associated with the overcoming of tradition and the adoption of an Enlightenment rationalism. In China, however, the state

model developed in continuity with its ancestral foundations, incorporating philosophical and mythological principles rooted in its history (Kissinger, 2011). In this context, the myth of *Fúxī* emerges as a central element in the construction of Chinese political identity and in the affirmation of its cultural sovereignty. *Fúxī*, as a mythological figure associated with order and civilization, represents the harmony between the past and the present, symbolizing China's ability to reinterpret its modernity based on its own references.

Unlike the colonizing logic, which delegitimizes the traditions of dominated peoples and imposes a Eurocentric vision of progress, China reinterpreted its modernity based on its own references. Its history echoes the notion of a self-sufficient China, whose epistemological foundations were preserved even in the face of colonial pressures. This capacity for cultural and political resistance allowed China to develop a distinct model of modernization, which did not submit to Western prescriptions, but rather adapted and reinterpreted them according to its needs and values (Brandauer; Huang, 1995).

In this vein, decolonial thinking emphasizes the need to break away from the intellectual and institutional constraints inherited from colonialism (Quijano, 2009; Fanon, 2005). In China, this process has taken shape in the reaffirmation of its own political and economic system, in opposition to Western prescriptions (Carvalho, 2024). While Latin American, African, and Asian nations have been forced to adopt foreign administrative and legal models – including the establishment of foreign military bases on national soil^{vii} (Carrion, 2016) – China has consolidated its governance from an internal perspective, without giving up its civilizational tradition. This autonomy has allowed the country to develop a model of economic and political development that, although it has incorporated elements of global capitalism, has remained aligned with its national interests and cultural identity.

Regarding the Chinese vision of the international order in the contemporary era, multilateralism, state sovereignty and rejection of the hegemonic Western model are highlighted. Positioning itself in defense of International Law, based on the UN Charter, and criticizing the imposition of Western norms on countries of the Global South, China seeks to consolidate a more just global order, resisting the unipolar influence of the United States and promoting the self-determination of peoples (Ma, 2024). This stance reflects a profound critique of the coloniality of power, which manifests itself not only in economic and military domination, but also in the imposition of values and norms that marginalize non-Western perspectives.

Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China promotes infrastructure and global connectivity projects that seek to integrate different economies and cultures, highlighting the importance of cooperation rather than confrontation. Official discourse emphasizes mutual respect for national sovereignty, cultural values and development paths, reinforcing the idea of peaceful coexistence.

Resilience is promoted through China's proactive stance on global issues such as climate change, pandemics, and economic crises. In the environmental context, China positions itself as a leader in the energy transition and sustainable development, investing in renewable energy and proposing carbon neutrality targets by 2060 (EEAS, 2020). Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government adopted "health diplomacy", providing vaccines, medical equipment, and technical assistance to developing countries, demonstrating its ability to deal with global challenges collaboratively (Porto, 2021).

Interdependence is promoted through economic and multilateral initiatives that reinforce the interconnection of countries. Organizations such as BRICS^{viii}, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization^{ix} (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are examples of platforms where China leads or influences, promoting models of multilateral cooperation based on joint development. In the cultural sphere, the Chinese government uses Confucius Institutes to promote the Chinese language and culture, bringing other nations closer to the values of harmony and cooperation that underpin traditional thought.

Therefore, it is possible to understand the cultural foundations and influence of teachings such as those of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams on Chinese decision-making and vision of global governance. Philosophical principles inherited from Confucianism and Taoism, which emphasize the search for harmony and balance, both at the

individual and collective levels, are translated on the international scene into an opposition to unilateralism and the defense of a multipolar global system, where nations must be interdependent and respect each other.

Promoting Chinese culture abroad has thus become a key strategy, as through international events such as films, art exhibitions and educational partnerships, China aims to create a positive narrative that reinforces its values. The opening of events such as the Beijing Olympics (2008 and 2022) is an example of how the Chinese use cultural symbolism to convey the idea of historical resilience and harmony in their interactions with the world. In this way, they disseminate pillars of harmony, resilience and interdependence; and project an image of responsible global leadership based on values that reflect their long cultural and philosophical history.

Therefore, China's rise as a global power is not just an economic phenomenon, but a milestone in the fight against coloniality. By preserving its epistemological autonomy and reaffirming its founding myths, China challenges Western hegemony and demonstrates that modernity can be built on multiple trajectories, without the need for submission to a single, imposed model. The Chinese experience therefore offers an important counterpoint to Western hegemonic discourse, showing that it is possible to achieve development and modernization without giving up cultural identity and national sovereignty.

However, it is important to emphasize that the critique of coloniality should not be interpreted as an uncritical defense of China or any other nation. The struggle against coloniality should be understood as an ongoing process of deconstructing the power structures that perpetuate domination and subordination, both internationally and domestically. In this sense, the Chinese experience offers valuable insights, but it also raises important questions about how to reconcile economic development with social justice, national autonomy with international cooperation, and tradition with innovation.

In short, the relationship between coloniality and the structure of the contemporary international system is complex and multifaceted. China, with its history of resistance to imperialist domination and its ability to reinterpret modernity from its own perspectives, offers a powerful example of how it is possible to challenge Western hegemony and build a more just and pluralistic global order. However, the struggle against coloniality is not limited to national resistance, but also involves the construction of epistemological, political and economic alternatives that can promote the emancipation of all subordinate peoples and nations.

In the case of China, coloniality was expressed in a unique way. Unlike nations that suffered direct domination, China faced centuries of attempts at imperialist subjugation, from the Opium Wars, foreign occupation of strategic ports, and imposition of unequal treaties (Brandauer; Huang, 1995). However, unlike what happened with several nations in the Global South, which were fragmented and incorporated into the colonial system, China preserved its identity and resisted Western assimilation. This process of resistance occurred in the military, economic, cultural, and epistemological spheres.

5. Final Considerations

This research sought to demonstrate how the construction of the Modern Chinese State is intrinsically linked to its cultural and philosophical heritage, highlighting the fundamental role of the myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams. The analysis revealed that, unlike the Western model of modernization, which often imposes a break with traditions in favor of the adoption of exogenous institutional structures, the Chinese trajectory is characterized by the integration of tradition and modernity. This process reflects a strategy of cultural resistance and sovereign affirmation.

Throughout the study, it is argued that the philosophical and cosmological elements originating from traditional Chinese thought not only influenced the formation of its state model but continue to play a fundamental role in the formulation of its domestic and foreign policies. China's resilience in maintaining its cultural identity, even in the face of historical challenges such as the Opium Wars and unequal treaties, demonstrates its capacity for adaptation and preservation of its epistemological autonomy. In this sense, the myth of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams are not only cultural symbols of the past but constitute structuring pillars that support contemporary Chinese governance.

The research contributes to critical and decolonial studies by challenging the Eurocentric conception of modernity and development, which has historically imposed a single model based on Western premises. The Chinese experience offers an alternative to this logic, demonstrating that it is possible to consolidate a strong and sovereign state model without the need to submit to external standards.

Furthermore, the analysis reinforces the importance of a pluriversal approach in understanding international relations, where multiple paths to modernity coexist, challenging the hegemonic narrative that marginalizes epistemologies from the Global South. China's resilience in preserving its worldview and structuring it as the basis of its governance serves as an example of resistance to coloniality, contributing to the valorization of historically subalternized political and philosophical models.

The permanence of traditional values in China's political organization indicates that its cultural heritage is not just a symbolic reference, but an active instrument in the formulation of policies and the construction of its global identity. Principles such as harmony, interdependence and resilience continue to guide its diplomatic strategies, reflected in initiatives such as the New Silk Road and its multilateral stance in international politics.

Internally, the influence of Confucian and Taoist thought is still evident in the structure of the state, in the management of the balance between authority and local autonomy, as well as in the formulation of economic and social policies that seek to avoid extreme conflicts and promote stability. This continuity shows that, beyond a nationalist discourse, China maintains its philosophical tradition as a practical tool of governance. Given the reflections presented, it is possible in future research to deepen the impact of the Chinese philosophical heritage on contemporary policies, exploring how ancestral values shape strategic decisions in the economy, diplomacy and International Law.

That said, it is important to analyze how China's rise influences decolonial thinking in other regions of the Global South, investigating whether its experience can serve as a reference for countries seeking to strengthen their cultural and epistemological identities in the international system. Another point of investigation would be a comparative study between the Chinese experience and other civilizations that also resisted coloniality, evaluating the different paths taken by states that, like China, sought to modernize without giving up their cultural traditions.

Ultimately, this study shows that modernization does not have to be synonymous with cultural homogenization and that the Chinese trajectory offers a concrete alternative to the Western model of development. China's resilience over the centuries demonstrates that multiple modernities are possible and that the preservation of cultural identity can, contrary to what colonialism advocates, be a factor in strengthening the State and not an obstacle to progress.

Thus, understanding the legacy of *Fúxī* and the Eight Trigrams transcends a mere mythological analysis and proves essential to understanding contemporary China and its insertion in the globalized world. By challenging the epistemic hegemony of the West, the Chinese experience reinforces the need to rethink the paradigms that structure the international system and to recognize the validity and relevance of different philosophical matrices in the construction of the global future.

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ⁱ See Chapter “*Adicionaes al Libro de Las Mutaciones y los Libros de Chenwei*” [Additions to the Book of Mutations and the Books of Chenwei] (p. 142), on the book “*Historia de la filosofía china*” [History of Chinese Philosophy] by Bauer (2009).

ⁱⁱ For more information see the Chapter “Concepts of International Relations: Impartiality or Equality?”, on the book “On China” by Kissinger (2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information, see the topics “The Boxer Uprising and the New Era of Warring States” (p. 95) and “Mao's Continuous Revolution” (p. 99), on the book “On China” by Kissinger (2011).

^{iv} For more information, see the topic “4- *A República nascente: o declínio dos conservadores e a ascensão dos reformadores e revolucionários*” [4- The nascent Republic: the decline of conservatives and the rise of reformers and revolutionaries] (p. 77-94), on the book “*China: tradição e modernidade na governança do país*” [China: tradition and modernity in the country's governance] by Carvalho (2024).

^v Covered in the topics “Deng's First Return to Power” (p. 307) and “Deng's Ascendancy – ‘Reform and Opening Up’” (p. 315), on the book “On China” by Kissinger (2011).

^{vi} Exposed in “The New Millennium” (p. 455), on the book “On China” by Kissinger (2011).

^{vii} As historian Raul Carrion (2016) explains, the United States maintains military bases in the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Diego Garcia (Indian Ocean), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Curaçao, Guadeloupe, Aruba, Belize, Barbados, Martinique, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba (Guantanamo), Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, French Guiana, Suriname, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina (Falkland Islands) and Chile. In Europe, they are present in Germany, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Greece, Albania, Kosovo, Hungary, Turkey, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

^{viii} BRICS is an acronym of the founding countries of this socio-economic bloc – which currently has Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran as members and Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan as partner countries (Brasil, 2025).

^{ix} The SCO has the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan and Iran as member's states; Afghanistan, Mongolia and Belarus as observer states; and Türkiye, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Nepal, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar as dialogue partners (Türkiye, 2022).

The Impact of Immigration Digitalization on National Resilience: A Case Study the Use of Electronic Visas and Autogates at Soekarno-Hatta Airport, Indonesia

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Abstract

The digitalization of the immigration system through the implementation of electronic visas (e-Visa) and Autogate was a strategic way for Indonesia in facing the increasingly complex challenges of international mobility. The digitalization in the immigration sector has been widely studied, research specifically analyzing its impact on Indonesia's national resilience is still very limited. This study aimed to analyze the impact of the implementation of e-Visa and Autogate at Soekarno-Hatta Airport on national resilience from a security, economic, and socio-political perspective, and to identify implementation challenges. This study used a qualitative method with a library research approach, analyzing various regulations, official documents, and related academic studies for the period 2020-2025. The results showed that the implementation of e-Visa and Autogate significantly accelerates the immigration administration process, strengthens border control, improves service efficiency, and supports the national economy by increasing tourist visits by 15%. There were many challenges such as cybersecurity risks, personal data protection, and maintaining technological infrastructure, which are serious obstacles. This research was important for providing strategic policy recommendations to ensure the effectiveness of the immigration digitalization system and strengthen national resilience in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Immigration Digitalization, e-Visa, Autogate, National Resilience, Soekarno-Hatta Airport

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the global immigration system. As human mobility between countries increases, many countries are adopting digital technology to improve efficiency and security in border management (Kriswibowo et al., 2023). Digitizing the immigration system aims to speed up the inspection process, improve national security, and reduce the potential for misuse of travel documents (Glouftsiou, 2020). The application of technologies such as electronic visas (e-visas), autogates, biometrics, and artificial intelligence (AI) are innovative solutions that enable governments to more effectively control the movement of foreigners.

One of the major trends in immigration digitalization is the implementation of electronic visas, which allow applicants to submit visa applications online without having to physically visit an embassy or immigration office. This system has been implemented in various countries, such as the United States with the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), Australia with eVisitor, the European Union with the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS), and Singapore with eVisa (ICAO, 2023). The main advantages of this system are ease of access for tourists, businesspeople, and foreign workers, as well as efficiency in the identity verification process through a centralized database.

Furthermore, the implementation of autogates as part of the border control system has transformed the way immigration checks are conducted at various international airports. In this technology era, passengers can pass through borders simply by scanning their biometric passports and fingerprints without the need for direct interaction with immigration officers, thereby reducing long queues and increasing travel comfort (Putra, 2025). Soekarno-Hatta Airport in Indonesia has implemented an autogate system to facilitate a faster and more efficient immigration process. According to data from the Directorate General of Immigration, as of April 2024, 168 autogates were operational at Soekarno-Hatta Airport and I Gusti Ngurah Rai Airport in Bali, which can be used by Indonesian citizens (WNI) and foreign nationals (WNA) holding electronic passports, e-VoA and eVisa Indonesia (Kompas.com, 2024).

The implementation of electronic visas (e-visas) and autogates at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport is a strategic step by the Indonesian government to improve the efficiency and security of the immigration process. This technology adoption aligns with the global trend of leveraging digitalization to facilitate international mobility and strengthen border controls.

The implementation of the e-visa is based on Regulation of the Minister of Immigration and Corrections of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2025, which regulates visas, residence permits, facilities and conveniences, and immigration supervision for the diaspora (Permenimip, 2025). This system is expected to support national economic recovery by providing convenience for tourists and foreign workers wishing to enter Indonesia.

In addition to e-visas, the government is also developing an autogate system at several international airports to expedite immigration clearance. This system was first tested at Soekarno-Hatta Airport in 2018, before being expanded to other airports, such as I Gusti Ngurah Rai Airport in Bali. Initially, the implementation of autogates was regulated in Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 44 of 2015, which regulates the entry and exit inspection mechanism at Immigration Checkpoints (TPI) through a technology-based system. However, along with technological developments and the need for a more adaptive system, this policy has been updated with the issuance of Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 9 of 2024 concerning procedures for immigration inspections of people entering or leaving Indonesian territory. This new regulation adapts immigration inspection procedures to the latest technology, including the wider use of autogates for Indonesian citizens, electronic passport holders, and certain foreign citizens, such as holders of Limited Stay Permits and Permanent Stay Permits (Permenkumham, 2024). Until 2024, the government continues to increase the number of autogates as part of the "Smart Border Control" policy, which aims to strengthen the border surveillance system through digital technology.

E-visa system allows foreign citizens to apply for visas online before entering Indonesia. Through the official platform, applicants can complete forms, upload supporting documents, and make payments online. Once approved, the electronic visa is sent via email and can be printed or saved on an electronic device to present upon arrival (Oroh et al., 2023). This process not only simplifies travel but also reduces the workload of immigration officers and minimizes queues at airports.

In addition, autogates have been operational to expedite the immigration clearance process. The use of autogates is not limited to Indonesian citizens but has also been extended to foreign nationals holding Limited Stay Permits and Permanent Stay Permits. This policy is effective start in November 2024, it aims to improve the efficiency of immigration services for frequent travelers. As of September 2024, approximately 3.51 million foreign nationals

were recorded as entering and leaving Indonesia through autogates, or approximately 390,000 per month (Kompas.com, 2024).

Digitalization of the immigration system is a strategic step in improving the efficiency of border administration and strengthening national resilience. The implementation of technologies such as electronic visas (e-visas) and autogates at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport reflects Indonesia's efforts to adopt global innovations to speed up immigration inspection processes, reduce queues, and improve border security (Putra, 2020). However, despite all the benefits offered, this system also faces various challenges, there are including the risk of cybercrime, digital identity misuse, and the potential for system exploitation by irresponsible parties. Furthermore, the effectiveness of policies and the readiness of Indonesia's digital infrastructure are crucial factors in determining the success of immigration digitalization.

This study aims to analyze the impact of immigration digitalization on national resilience through a case study of the use of e-visas and autogates at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) evaluate the effectiveness of e-visas and autogates in accelerating the immigration process and increasing the efficiency of border services; (2) identify challenges and potential threats arising from the digitalization of the immigration system, including aspects of cybersecurity and digital identity fraud; (3) analyze the role of digitalization in strengthening border surveillance to prevent threats to national stability; and (4) provide policy recommendations that can support the optimization of the application of digital technology in the Indonesian immigration system to improve the security and efficiency of immigration services in a sustainable manner.

2. Literature Review

Digitalization in the immigration system aims to improve the efficiency of border administration and strengthen national resilience through technologies such as e-visas, autogates, biometrics, and artificial intelligence (AI). Countries such as the United States, the European Union, Australia, and Singapore have implemented these systems to accelerate tourist inflows and improve border surveillance. Indonesia adopted this system through its Smart Border Control policy, hoping to improve security, reduce queues, and optimize identification of foreign nationals' movements (Alam et al., 2023). In analyzing the impact of immigration digitalization on national resilience, several key theories are used as the basis for this research.

National resilience theory is a multidimensional concept encompassing security, economic, social, and political stability. In the context of immigration, digitalization plays a crucial role in enhancing border security, preventing transnational crime, and expediting immigration administration processes (Nugroho et al., 2025). With technology-based systems such as e-visas and autogates, the government can more easily track and analyze the movement patterns of foreign nationals, thereby minimizing potential threats to national security.

Border management theory refers to the ways in which a country's borders are managed through the integration of policies, technological infrastructure, and cross-agency coordination to effectively and efficiently control the movement of people, goods, and services (Haddal, 2010). This theory emphasizes the importance of technologies such as e-visas and autogates as strategic instruments to improve oversight and expedite border inspection processes, thereby supporting safe and efficient international mobility.

The e-visa is an innovation that allows applicants to apply for a visa online without having to visit an immigration office. This system was implemented in Indonesia through Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2025, which aims to expedite the immigration administration process (Permenimip, 2025). Several countries have successfully implemented similar systems, such as ESTA in the United States and ETIAS in the European Union. While more practical and secure, this system still faces challenges such as data security, the risk of cyberattacks, and the potential for electronic document forgery, making strengthening data protection regulations crucial.

Autogate is an automated immigration inspection system first tested at Soekarno-Hatta Airport in 2018. This system was initially regulated by Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 44 of 2015 and updated with Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 9 of 2024, which expanded the use of Autogate to

Indonesian citizens holding electronic passports and foreign nationals holding Temporary Stay Permit and Permanent Stay Permit. This technology has been proven to speed up the immigration process and improve border security, but still faces challenges such as system maintenance, the risk of cybercrime, and the need for better digital infrastructure (Santoso, 2020).

This study analyzes the impact of immigration digitalization on national resilience, focusing on the implementation of e-visas and autogates at Soekarno-Hatta Airport. The implementation of this digital technology is expected to improve immigration efficiency and oversight, but still faces challenges in terms of data security and infrastructure readiness. The results of this study will provide policy recommendations for optimizing the immigration digitalization system to strengthen Indonesia's national resilience.

3. Method

This study uses a library research method with a qualitative approach to analyze the impact of immigration digitalization on national resilience, through a case study of the implementation of e-visas and autogates at Soekarno-Hatta Airport. This method was chosen because the research focuses on policy evaluation through an in-depth analysis of official documents, regulations, and related academic literature without direct interaction in the field. Soekarno-Hatta Airport was chosen due to the intensity of the implementation of the latest immigration digitalization technology in Indonesia.

The data sources are secondary data, including key government regulations such as the Minister of Immigration and Corrections Regulation No. 3 of 2025 concerning e-visas and the Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 9 of 2024 concerning immigration inspections (Autogate). Data collection techniques were carried out through document studies, including regulations, government reports, and academic research results from 2020 to 2025.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through policy analysis to evaluate regulatory effectiveness and thematic analysis to identify patterns and challenges in implementing the digital immigration system. The validity of the research was strengthened through triangulation of various academic sources, regulations, and government reports.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Implementation of e-Visa in the Indonesian Immigration System

E-Visa implementation is based on Border Management Theory which emphasizes the importance of technology integration in border management to increase efficiency and security (Haddal, 2010).

The implementation of electronic visas (e-Visas) is one of the Indonesian government's strategic steps in the digitalization of the immigration system, it aims at improving administrative efficiency and strengthening oversight of the mobility of foreign nationals. The basic regulations for the implementation of e-Visas are stipulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Immigration and Corrections Number 3 of 2025, which stipulates that visa applications no longer have to be made in person at immigration offices or embassies, but rather online through a special platform provided by the Directorate General of Immigration (Permenimipas, 2025).

Through this platform, visa applicants can complete digital forms, upload required documents online, and make electronic payments. Once the application is approved, an electronic visa will be sent directly to the applicant's email address, which can then be printed or saved digitally on a personal device and presented upon arrival at the Immigration Checkpoint. This process significantly speeds up processing times, reduces queues at international entry points, and reduces the workload of immigration officers at airports.

E-Visa has significantly improved service efficiency by mid-2025, with the average visa processing time decreasing from 3-7 business days to just 1-3 business days after receiving complete documents. Furthermore, the

use of this digital system has reduced administrative errors and increased transparency in the visa application process, as all activities are documented electronically. However, the implementation of e-Visa is not entirely without challenges. Several key issues that have emerged include cybersecurity, protection of applicants' personal data, and the potential for misuse of digital identities.

The implementation of e-Visa in the Indonesian immigration system has shown positive results in increasing the efficiency of immigration services, but still requires serious attention to aspects of cybersecurity and data protection as key requirements for the long-term success of digitalization.

4.2 The Role of Autogate in Immigration Inspection Efficiency

The use of Autogate in Indonesia's immigration inspection system represents a significant technological innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of services at international entry points, particularly Soekarno-Hatta Airport. Autogate was first piloted in 2018 and subsequently expanded gradually, regulated by Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 9 of 2024, which allows its use by Indonesian citizens with electronic passports, foreign nationals holding Limited Stay Permits, and Permanent Stay Permits.

The latest data from the Directorate General of Immigration shows that as of September 2025, 4.2 million people had used the Autogate facility at Soekarno-Hatta Airport. This number represents a 20% increase compared to the previous year, which recorded 3.51 million users in 2024. Immigration clearance through Autogate takes an average of only 15-25 seconds per person, significantly faster than the manual process, which can take 1-3 minutes per passenger. This has successfully reduced queues by up to 50%, significantly improving passenger comfort.

Operationally, Autogate utilizes biometric technology in the form of electronic passport and fingerprint scanning, along with facial recognition integrated directly with national and international database systems. This enables real-time and accurate passenger identity verification, minimizing the potential for human error and data manipulation. In addition to time efficiency, Autogate also helps reduce direct contact between immigration officers and passengers, indirectly increasing security and comfort during pandemics or other infectious disease outbreaks.

The implementation of Autogate also faces several major challenges. These include routine maintenance of technological devices, the risk of technical disruptions that could delay the inspection process, and the need for regular training for immigration officers on how to handle emergencies or technical errors that may arise.

Autogate has proven to be very positive in improving the efficiency of immigration inspection services in Indonesia. To maintain its long-term effectiveness, sustainable policies focused on technological development, improving the quality of supporting infrastructure, and enhancing the capacity of the human resources directly involved are needed.

4.3 The Impact of Immigration Digitalization on National Resilience

Analysis of the impact of digitalization on national resilience using the National Resilience Theory which emphasizes the importance of integrating various aspects such as security, economic, social, and political to create strong and sustainable resilience (Nugroho et al., 2025).

The digitalization of immigration through the implementation of e-Visa and Autogate has had a significant impact on Indonesia's national resilience. National resilience encompasses not only security aspects but also economic, social, and political dimensions. The implementation of digital technology helps strengthen border control, mitigate potential security threats, and enhance overall stability.

Firstly, digitalization strengthens national security by providing more accurate and real-time monitoring of foreign nationals' movements. The integration of biometric data and travel information into digital systems facilitates the

rapid identification of individuals who pose potential threats, such as criminals or terrorists. This is evidenced by a 30% decrease in document forgery and administrative violations since the implementation of digital systems.

Secondly, digitalization has a positive impact on the national economy. With increased efficiency in immigration services, Indonesia has become a more attractive destination for foreign investors and tourists. Data from the Ministry of Tourism in 2025 recorded a 15% increase in tourist visits compared to the previous year, contributing significantly to state revenue from the tourism sector.

Thirdly, digitalization also increases transparency and accountability in immigration administrative processes, thereby reducing the potential for corruption and data manipulation. Digital systems ensure that all processes are electronically documented, easily audited, and accessible to authorized oversight agencies.

However, these positive impacts are accompanied by challenges, particularly related to data security and the increasing cyber threats associated with digitalization. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to continuously improve its cybersecurity infrastructure and the technical capacity of its human resources in managing and protecting immigration data.

4.4 Policy Evaluation and Recommendations

An evaluation of the immigration digitalization policy shows that the Indonesian government has made substantial progress in improving the efficiency of immigration services and strengthening border security. However, several critical challenges remain to be addressed to maximize the benefits of digitalization and ensure its sustainability.

One important aspect that needs to be strengthened is the personal data protection policy for e-Visa and Autogate users. According to the ever-evolving cybersecurity risks, the government needs to regularly update regulations related to data protection and tighten digital system security standards.

Furthermore, regular maintenance and updating of technology infrastructure is a top priority to ensure systems always operate optimally. The government is advised to allocate a dedicated budget for routine maintenance and the development of new, more adaptive technologies.

Improving the capacity of human resources, particularly immigration officers, is also crucial. Regular technical and non-technical training is necessary to ensure officers are prepared to deal with various situations, including technical disruptions or cybersecurity threats.

In conclusion, the key recommendations include improving cybersecurity, continuing investment in technology and infrastructure, and developing the competency of immigration officers. Implementing these recommendations is expected to maximize the benefits of digitalization while maintaining long-term national resilience.

Based on research results, the implementation of e-Visa and Autogate at Soekarno-Hatta Airport has significantly improved the efficiency of immigration administration and oversight. This digitalization has reduced visa processing time by 1-3 business days and accelerated immigration inspections by 15-25 seconds per passenger. This digitalization also strengthens national resilience by improving border control and administrative transparency, and driving economic growth through a 15% increase in tourists. However, there are challenges such as personal data protection, cybersecurity risks, and maintaining technological infrastructure still require special attention.

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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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Beyond the Reintegration: The Role of Women in Preventing CAAFAG in North Darfur

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Abstract

The recruitment of children into armed groups remains a critical yet under-researched issue in North Darfur, Sudan. While disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts have historically focused on post-recruitment responses, this study explores the overlooked role of women-led, community-based prevention strategies. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on interviews, focus group discussions, and written narratives from 112 participants, including displaced women, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. The findings highlight the pivotal role of traditional female mediators—particularly the Hakamate—as cultural influencers who use oral storytelling to discourage recruitment and foster social cohesion. Despite their contributions, these women are systematically excluded from formal DDR frameworks and face structural barriers such as lack of funding, political marginalization, and security threats. This paper argues for a paradigm shift in child protection strategies: from reactive reintegration to proactive prevention, anchored in local knowledge and gender-inclusive policies. The study concludes that recognizing and supporting women's preventive roles is essential for sustainable peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions like Darfur.

Keywords: Women-Led Prevention, Child Recruitment, CAAFAG, Darfur, DDR, Feminist Peacebuilding, Community-Based Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the Problem

The recruitment and re-recruitment of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG)¹ remains a persistent humanitarian and security crisis in Sudan, including Darfur, (UN, 2023).

Despite sustained international attention on DDR, most interventions remain focused on reintegration after the damage is done, rather than preventing recruitment in the first place. This study argues that the current emphasis

¹ As defined by the Paris Principles (2007), CAAFAG refers to “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or for sexual purposes.

on reactive models overlooks the preventive work being conducted by women at the grassroots level—especially traditional mediators like Hakamate and women-led community organizations—whose roles remain largely undocumented and under-supported in policy and academic discourse.

Existing research and international frameworks, including the Paris Principles (2007), UNSCR 1325, and regional DDR strategies, have primarily addressed post-recruitment solutions, often through formal and state-centric lenses. While valuable, these approaches tend to marginalize informal, culturally grounded, and gender-responsive strategies that operate outside state institutions. This study builds on feminist critiques of DDR (Molloy, 2023), adding original field data from North Darfur to demonstrate how community-based female actors engage in proactive child protection—long before reintegration begins.

Originally conceptualized as a study of reintegration mechanisms for CAAFAG, the research evolved in response to the data collected during fieldwork from September 2023 to May 2024. Interviews and focus group discussions revealed that women were not just aiding reintegration, but actively preventing recruitment through traditional storytelling, negotiation, moral authority, and early identification of risks. This unexpected shift reshaped the study's objective: to analyze the preventive strategies led by women and the structural barriers they face, including exclusion from formal decision-making, limited funding, and security threats.

North Darfur presents a particularly critical case. The region has suffered from decades of armed violence, tribal conflicts, forced displacement, and entrenched patterns of marginalization. These dynamics have intensified child vulnerability and facilitated their recruitment by various armed factions (UNICEF, CHILDREN and Armed Conflict, Annual Report, 2023). While international peace agreements such as the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) have recognized the need for DDR (Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan, 2020), they often fail to integrate culturally grounded, gender-responsive prevention mechanisms that operate outside formal institutions.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how women-led initiatives contribute to the prevention of child recruitment in conflict-affected settings. A secondary objective is to examine why such efforts remain unrecognized in official DDR frameworks. These objectives are grounded in a feminist theoretical approach that values lived experience, cultural agency, and non-institutional forms of peacebuilding. The qualitative case study design is thus directly aligned with these objectives, allowing for an exploration of community-based narratives that are often excluded from security and child protection literature.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they challenge dominant DDR paradigms that center male combatants and post-conflict institutions while putting less attention on localization and prevention actors. Practically, they call for the integration of culturally relevant, women-led strategies into both national and international policy frameworks. By shifting focus from reintegration to prevention, this study argues for a more sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to child protection in armed conflict settings.

1.2. Importance of the Problem

The persistent recruitment of children into armed groups in North Darfur reflects a broader failure of international and national child protection frameworks to address root causes through preventive strategies (UN, 2023). While DDR programs have made strides in post-conflict reintegration, they often neglect culturally grounded, women-led interventions that operate before recruitment occurs. This gap is particularly urgent in contexts like Sudan, where state fragility, localized violence, and gender-based exclusion undermine formal responses (Turner, o.a., 2024). Current literature tends to sideline preventive models in favor of reactive ones, leaving a blind spot in both theory and practice. This study contributes to filling that void by analyzing community-rooted, female-led strategies that have received little academic or policy recognition. The purpose of this research is to advance the understanding of women's roles in protection and DDR policymaking in Darfur.

1.3. Describe Relevant Scholarship

Extant literature on DDR Programs often foregrounds disarmament and reintegration while giving limited attention to community-based prevention—particularly the role of women (Papworth, 2024). Although the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 underscores women’s involvement in peacebuilding, implementation remains weak in localized child protection systems (Kaptan, 2020). Studies by Molloy (2023) and Abbas & Tønnessen (2022) highlight how feminist contributions are often sidelined in peace processes and reintegration planning.

The Paris Principles (2007) provide important guidelines for addressing the needs of CAAFAG, yet they fall short of accounting for gendered, pre-recruitment interventions. This gap highlights the need for more contextual frameworks that integrate traditional actors and women-led organizations. In addition, literature on traditional mediation in Sudan (Tubiana, Tanner, & Abdul-Jalil, 2012) supports the legitimacy of customary practices in community governance but rarely links them directly to child recruitment prevention.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on culturally embedded, women-led prevention mechanisms—an area largely neglected in both academic literature and policy discourse.

1.4. State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

This study is guided by the central research question: How do women-led community initiatives in North Darfur contribute to the prevention of child recruitment into armed groups? The primary hypothesis is that women in conflict-affected communities engage in culturally grounded, proactive strategies that significantly reduce the risk of child recruitment—despite lacking formal recognition and support. A secondary, exploratory hypothesis is that structural barriers—such as gender exclusion from decision-making, lack of funding, and security threats—undermine the effectiveness and visibility of these efforts.

These hypotheses are informed by feminist peacebuilding theory and critiques of DDR frameworks that center post-conflict reintegration over prevention. The study’s qualitative case study design, based on interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, is well-suited to capture community narratives, identify patterns of informal intervention, and explore the socio-political context in which these women operate. The design allows for in-depth inference, grounded in lived experiences, to assess the validity to the stated hypotheses and offer practical policy recommendations.

2. Method

The study employed a qualitative case study design and was conducted between September 2023 and May 2024. Due to the ongoing conflict in North Darfur, fieldwork was conducted remotely through digital interviews, voice calls, and secure messaging platforms. Participants included 112 individuals selected through purposive sampling: displaced women, community elders, youth leaders, ex-child soldiers, and representatives of civil society.

Data collection methods included:

- Documentary Review: DDR guidelines, UN publications, and relevant legal and policy frameworks;
- Focus Group discussions (FGDs): One with girls and their guardians; one with civil society actors;
- Written Narratives: Including the recall method and open-ended questionnaires.

Ethical approval and informed consent were secured, including assent and guardian consent for minors. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and participation was voluntary. The research was guided by feminist and intersectional ethics, emphasizing emotional safety and participant agency.

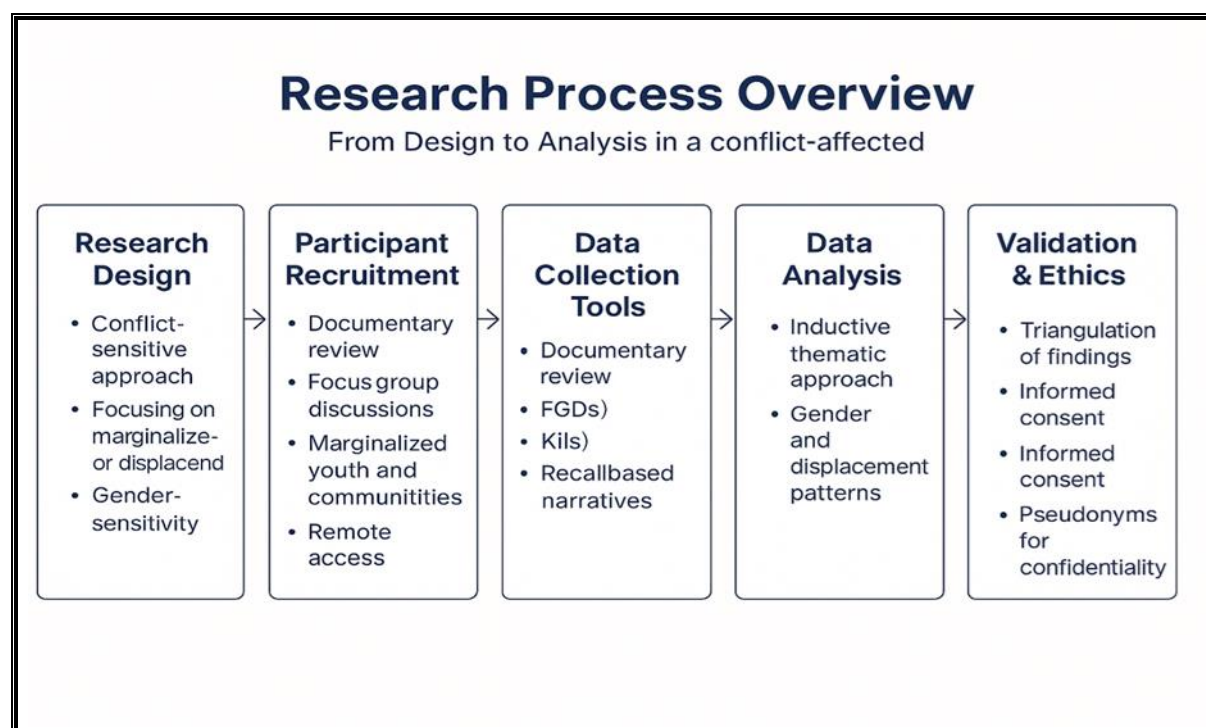


Figure 1: The Key qualitative research steps with gender focus and remote access in conflict settings.

2.1. Identify Subsections

To ensure credibility, the study employed multiple strategies adapted to the challenges of remote fieldwork. Triangulation was achieved through the use of diverse data sources, including document review, written narratives, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires. Cross-validation was carried out by comparing responses across different participant categories such as displaced women, civil society actors, and ex-child soldiers. Thematic consistency and recurrence across data sets contributed to the reliability of the findings.

Dependability was reinforced by maintaining a detailed log of all interviews, communications, and field notes, as well as by documenting methodological decisions throughout the research process. Confirmability was supported by grounding the findings in direct participant accounts, avoiding speculative interpretations, and allowing the data to speak for itself.

2.2. Participant Characteristics

A total of 112 participants were engaged in the study using purposive sampling. Eligibility criteria focused on individuals and groups with direct experiences as victims, witnesses, or community responders to the phenomenon of CAAFAG. The sample included women-led organizations, youth networks, guardians, local experts, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. Both internally displaced persons and cross-border refugees were included.

Participants were drawn from across Sudan, with 37 individuals from North Darfur and 75 from other regions of Darfur and major Sudanese cities. Among the North Darfur participants, 68% were women. Of those from other areas, 29% identified as women. Recruitment ensured a mix of age, gender, and social roles to reflect the diversity of experiences in conflict-affected communities. No explicit exclusion criteria were applied, aside from the requirement that participants be over 15 years old and have direct or community-level experience with CAAFAG dynamics.

2.3. Sampling Procedures

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with firsthand experience of CAAFAG-related dynamics, including prevention, response, or lived experience. The study reached out to approximately 130 individuals, of whom 112 agreed to participate, resulting in an 86% participation rate. All participants were recruited voluntarily; no financial incentives were offered. Data were collected remotely—through secure voice calls, digital interviews, and written responses—due to security and access constraints in conflict-affected areas. Locations included North Darfur and other Darfuri and Sudanese cities where displaced or affected populations reside. The study adhered to feminist, intersectional, and culturally sensitive research ethics.

2.4. Sample Size, power, and Precision

The target sample size was set at approximately 100 participants to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. The final sample of 112 met and exceeded this target. The participants reflected a broad spectrum of demographics and roles; however, the sample may slightly overrepresent women in North Darfur due to their stronger engagement in prevention initiatives. While the study does not aim to generalize statistically, the sample offers strong qualitative depth suited for thematic and interpretive analysis.

2.5. Measures and Covariates

Data were collected through three primary methods: 1) documentary review of DDR policies and UN frameworks, 2) focus group discussion (one with girls and guardians, one with civil society actors), and 3) written narratives using open-ended questionnaires and the recall method. These tools were designed to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions of community-based prevention. To enhance credibility and consistency, data collection instruments were reviewed by local experts for contextual and cultural relevance. Multiple sources were conducted in Arabic.

2.6. Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was employed to investigate the lived experiences and community-based strategies used to prevent child recruitment in North Darfur. The design was naturalistic and non-experimental, with no conditions manipulated or assigned. Participants were observed and engaged in their natural contexts through interviews, focus groups, and written narratives. No random assignment or experimental grouping was used, and the study did not involve between-subject or within-subject comparisons. This approach was selected to allow an in-depth understanding of community dynamics and culturally embedded practices, particularly in a conflict setting where formal DDR processes are often inaccessible or ineffective. The design was grounded in principles of child protection and feminist methodology, emphasizing participant agency and local knowledge.

3. Results

3.1. Recruitment

Participant recruitment and data collection were conducted between September 2023 and May 2024. Due to security concerns and access limitations in North Darfur, recruitment was carried out remotely using digital platforms, including secure messaging and voice calls. Participants were identified through purposive sampling, with primary sources including local civil society organizations, women-led networks, youth associations, and children associated with armed groups.

3.2. Statistics and Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by feminist and community-centered frameworks. Thematic analysis offers a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Clarke & Braun, 2008). Transcripts from interviews, focus group discussions, and written narratives were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring patterns and categories related

to community-based prevention of CAAFAG recruitment. Coding was conducted manually and organized into key themes such as:

- Cultural influence of the Hakamate
- Women-led early intervention strategies
- Structural marginalization in DDR processes

Analytic rigor was ensured through triangulation of data sources and reflexive memoing to minimize researcher bias and enhance trustworthiness—two critical strategies in qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Direct participant quotes were selected to reflect the depth, contradiction, and nuance of lived experiences. Findings are presented thematically to offer clear and contextually grounded insights into the data.

3.3. *Ancillary Analyses*

Several limitations affected the scope and depth of the data:

- Inaccessibility of field sites in North Darfur due to ongoing armed conflict.
- Security risks for participants, including fear of surveillance or retaliation.
- Difficulty accessing refugee populations without stable internet or communication.
- Limited ability to engage with girls associated with armed groups due to trauma, stigma, and protection concerns, in accordance with ethical standards set by international guidelines for working with CAAFAG (UNICEF, The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the study gathered substantial data through persistent outreach, adaptation of tools, and collaboration with trusted networks.

3.4. *Baseline Data*

The study involved 112 participants from across Sudan, including 37 from North Darfur and 75 from other regions. Of the North Darfur participants, 68% were women; among those from other areas, 29% were women. Participants were categorized into women-led organizations, community elders, youth networks, guardians, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. 100% of the participants were internally displaced or refugees, with varying levels of access to DDR-related processes or formal mechanisms.

3.5. *Women-Led Community Strategies In Preventing CAAFAG Recruitment*

Women across North Darfur play a subtle yet under-recognized role in preventing the recruitment of CAAFAG, drawing from community-based knowledge, informal networks not typically captured by state-led DDR models (UNDDR, 2023). This section presents three key areas where women's leadership is most visible: through cultural influence, grassroots protection mechanisms, and their struggle for structural inclusion.

3.5.1. *Cultural Capital of the Hakamate*

The Hakamate were repeatedly described as central figures in discouraging child recruitment through oral performances. Their songs challenge tribal divisions, condemn violence, and encourage peaceful behavior (El Fangry, 2016). A Participant from El-Fasher stated, "When the Hakamate sing, people listen. Their words stay with you."

This dual role of the Hakamate emerged strongly in the data. On one hand, they can escalate conflict by glorifying violence or tribal loyalty; on the other, they are powerful peace influencers. Their impact stems from their oral storytelling and performative songs, which serve as moral commentaries. As one participant noted, "The Hakamate influence young men...when they sing for peace, people lay down their arms."

Culturally, the Hakamate are seen as “mothers of the community voice,” bearing informal but potent social capital. Their endorsement or condemnation through song carries intergenerational influence. This gives them a unique position to be transmuted into structured community peace agents (Her Words Slayed Dragons: Sudan’s Hakkamaat. Women’s Literacy in Sudan, 2021), especially with proper training and inclusion in reintegration programs.

However, risks exist. If they remain outside formal DDR strategies, their influence can be co-opted for divisive agendas. Their participation in peacebuilding should be intentional and supported to avoid reinforcing patriarchal or tribal divisions.

The data also revealed ambivalent perceptions of the Hakamate. While approximately 41% of participants from North Darfur viewed them as peacebuilders, 50% of participants from other regions expressed similar support. However, a notable portion of participants remained critical, highlighting the potential for manipulation. For example, Umaima described the Hakamate as essential in encouraging tribes to resolve disputes and act as moral guides. In contrast, Ihsan warned that their songs can also incite violence, especially when driven by financial or political incentives.

This contrasting view underscores their deep political and cultural embeddedness. It highlights the need for ethical and accountable engagement when including the Hakamate in peacebuilding frameworks.

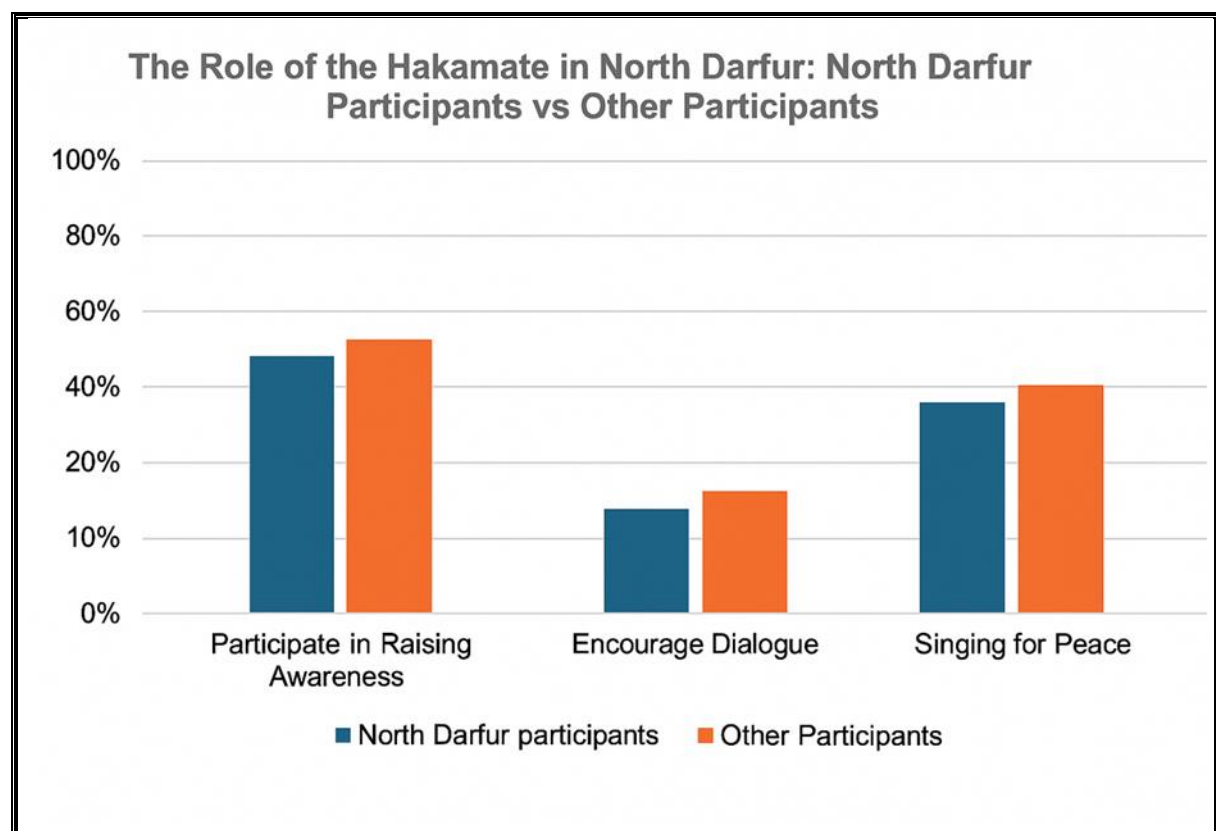


Figure 2: Perceptions of the Hakamate’s peace role by region, showing similar support across participant groups.

3.5.2. Women as Intermediaries and First Responders

Women-led organizations frequently mediate between families and local leaders when early signs of potential child recruitment emerge. These grassroots interventions often take the form of household visits, informal counseling, and awareness sessions tailored to the local context (O’Kane & Moore, 2012). In the absence of

external funding or formal recognition, women continue to operate as trusted figures, relied upon for their proximity to at-risk families and their intuitive knowledge of community dynamics.

Participants noted that these women act as *de facto* early warning systems, identifying subtle behavioral changes or household stressors that signal vulnerability to recruitment. One respondent explained, “They hear things before anyone else does because people trust them.” Their work is both preventive and responsive, filling a protection gap often overlooked by formal child protection actors (Save the Children, 2024).

Furthermore, women-led organizations and youth groups are also act as the first responders to recognize signs of vulnerability among children, especially in displacement settings. They mediate between families and local leaders through household visits, awareness sessions, and informal psychosocial support. These networks, though largely unfunded and operating outside formal structures, are trusted by communities and serve as frontline actors in local early warning systems. Their efforts may not always be labeled as “prevention” in policy frameworks, both they play a critical role in building community resilience and mitigating the risks that lead recruitment. By monitoring at-risk families and responding to emerging tensions, these informal actors contribute significantly to long-term protection outcomes for children.

3.5.3. Systemic Exclusion from Formal DDR Frameworks

Despite their pivotal role in preventing child recruitment, women-led initiatives in North Darfur remain structurally marginalized from formal DDR processes. Participants consistently highlighted the women, though actively engaged in early warning systems, community mediation, and psychosocial support, are often excluded from policy formulation and decision-making spaces (Palik & Salama, 2024). As one civil society leader emphasized, “We do the work, but we are never involved in the meetings.”

This exclusion is not only symbolic but has practical consequences. Community-based initiatives led by women and youth operate in isolation, without sustainable funding, protection mechanisms, or institutional backing. As a result, their intervention—though locally trusted and often effective—is rendered fragile, unsustainable, and difficult to scale, especially during periods of acute conflict or displacement. This disconnect between grassroots peacebuilding efforts and formal DDR systems reflects a broader pattern of failing to recognize the informal, gendered labor that sustains community resilience.

Closing this gap requires more than token participation. It necessitates intentional partnerships that acknowledge women not only as victims or caregivers, but as active agents in peacebuilding. Without integrating their voices and local knowledge into the design and implementation of DDR frameworks, prevention efforts risk remaining fragmented and ineffective in addressing the root causes of child recruitment.

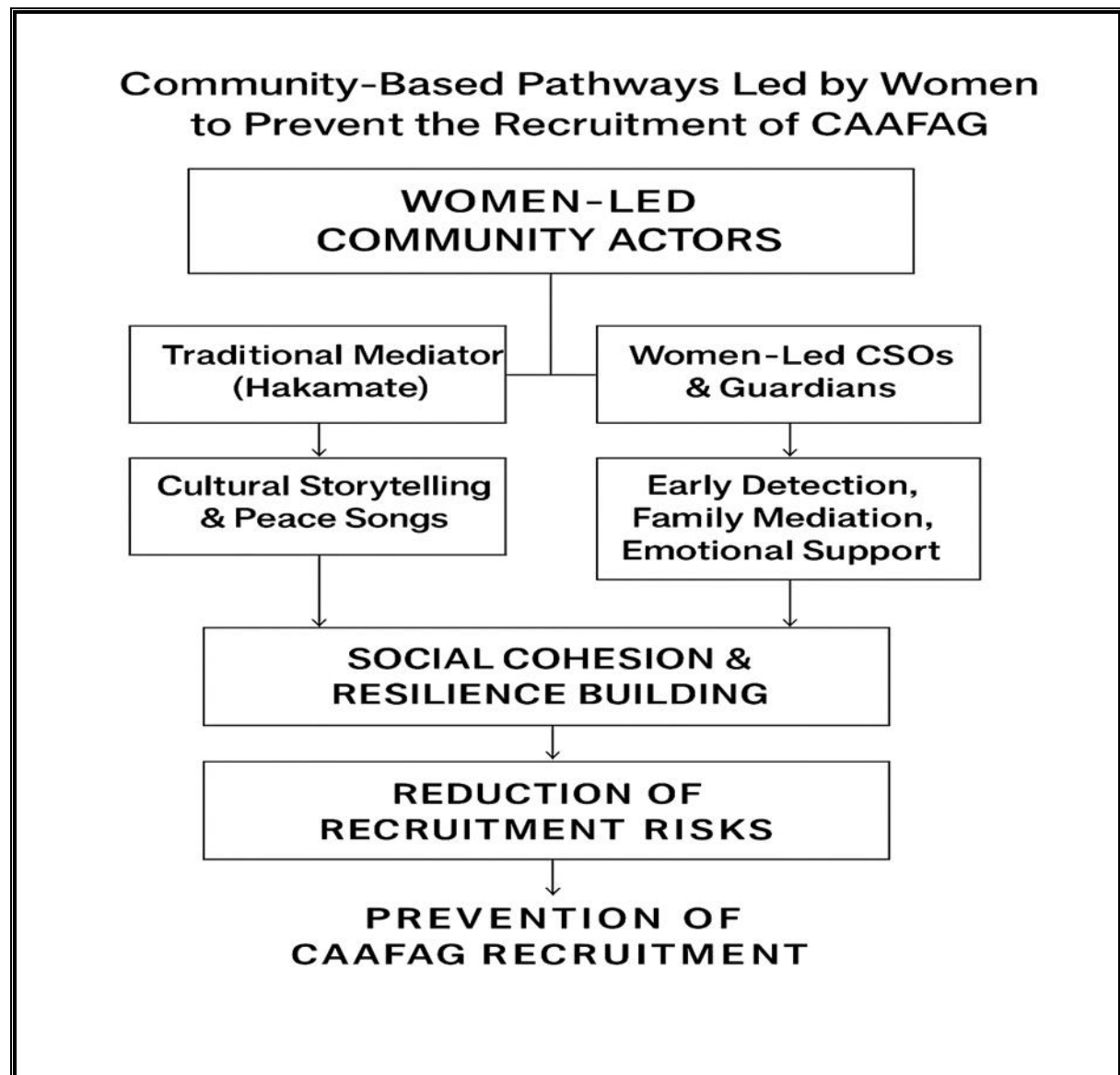


Figure 3: Community-based prevention model illustrating how women-led actions foster resilience and reduce CAAFAG recruitment risks.

4. Discussion

This study originally set out to explore the reintegration of CAAFAG in North Darfur. However, the data revealed a significant shift: community members, particularly women, are actively involved in preventing child recruitment long before reintegration becomes necessary. This unexpected insight led to a redefinition of the research focus, supporting the central hypothesis that informal, women-led practices form a critical yet under-recognized component of child protection.

The findings align with feminist critiques of peacebuilding and DDR frameworks, which highlight the systemic exclusion of women and non-state actors. The cultural authority of the Hakamate, for example, represents a powerful form of gender social capital that remains underutilized in formal peacebuilding strategies. These insights confirm that the informal mechanisms of community mediation, storytelling, and emotional support--largely led by women--constitute foundational elements of prevention.

A key theoretical implication lies in distinguishing between direct and indirect prevention. While women in North Darfur often lack formal institutional mandates to stop recruitment, their roles in strengthening social cohesion, resolving disputes, and supporting vulnerable families serve as indirect deterrents. These findings deepen our

understanding of how community resilience and localized peacebuilding operate outside state structures, advancing both feminist theory and conflict prevention models.

However, the results also reveal limitations. The dual perception of the Hakamate underscores their embeddedness within local political systems. While their influence can foster peace, it can also reinforce tribal divisions if left unregulated or politically manipulated. Additionally, methodological constraints—including the need for remote data collection due to insecurity, and the reliance on purposive sampling—may limit the generalizability of the findings. The exclusion of male perspectives and formal state actors from the sample further narrows the scope of insights.

Despite these limitations, the study offers strong implications for practice. Institutions and NGOs should approach traditional mediators like the Hakamate through ethical, inclusive partnerships that amplify their peacebuilding roles while safeguarding against bias or co-option. Similarly, support for women-led initiatives must move beyond tokenism to structural inclusion in DDR design, funding, and implementation.

Ultimately, This research highlights a critical gap in DDR and child protection policy: the neglect of community-rooted, gender-responsive prevention mechanisms. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing women not only as caregivers or reintegration actors but as first-line defenders against recruitment. By elevating grassroots voices and integrating them into formal processes, stakeholders can build more sustainable, ethical, and locally legitimate peacebuilding systems.

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that women in North Darfur are already performing the vital work of preventing child recruitment—work that is culturally resonant, community-rooted, and cost-effective. Their interventions, from the public performances of the Hakamate to household mediation and psychosocial care, are deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities under strain.

However, their efforts remain underfunded, under-recognized, and institutionally excluded. Prevention cannot be treated as an afterthought in DDR programming—it must be centered as a strategic pillar. To strengthen these efforts, the following actions are recommended, each drawn directly from the study's findings:

- Formally recognize women-led prevention strategies in such as early warning systems, household mediation, and psychosocial support. Within national and international child protection and DDR frameworks, these informal efforts were shown to effectively identify and respond to recruitment risks;
- Provide flexible funding and institutional support to grassroots organizations and cultural actors like the Hakamate. As the study demonstrates, the Hakamate hold significant influence through oral storytelling and performative peace narratives. Their peace-promoting role must be resourced and safeguarded to avoid political co-option or loss of legitimacy;
- Ensure meaningful participation of women in the design and implementation of DDR and child protection policies. Despite their demonstrated leadership, especially in displacement contexts, women remain sidelined from official decision-making; Elevating their voices would close the gap between policy and local protection realities.;
- Address structural drivers of recruitment, such as displacement, poverty, and gender-based exclusion, through locally informed and gender-responsive strategies. Findings revealed that child vulnerability is deeply tied to these factors, which women-led initiatives are already working to mitigate on the ground.

Prevention is not only about avoiding harm; it is about investing in those who are already building peace from the ground up. Women in North Darfur embody this resilience and innovation. Their work is not theoretical—it is practical, moral, and long overdue for institutional backing.

At the sometime, more work is needed to document and strengthen local preventive models. Future research should focus on:

- Evaluating the long-term impact of women-led prevention in high-risk settings;
- Exploring the role of traditional actors like the Hakamate across different regions;
- Identifying how informal prevention mechanisms can be meaningfully integrated into formal child protection systems;
- Investigating how international actors can support—not—local leadership.

By building on existing community knowledge and centering women's roles in both policy and research, it is possible to move toward a more sustainable, locally grounded strategy for preventing child recruitment.

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Informed Consent Statement/Ethics Approval: All participants gave their informed consent before taking part in the study. For minors, informed assent was obtained in addition to guardian consent. The study followed ethical principles appropriate for conflict-affected populations, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and emotional safety. Ethical approval was not obtained from a formal institutional review board, as the research was conducted independently and outside the framework of a university or funded project. All measures were taken to uphold internationally recognized ethical standards for research involving vulnerable populations.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and protection concerns for participants in conflict-affected settings. Anonymized excerpts may be shared upon reasonable request and subject to ethical review.

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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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NOTES 1

The researcher identifies as a Sudanese woman with lived experiences of conflict and displacement, which influenced both the choice of topic and interpretive lens. While efforts were made to remain analytically rigorous, the intersection of personal proximity and academic inquiry may have shaped the depth of engagement and trust built with participants. This positionality should be considered in interpreting the study's findings.

NOTES 2

The term Hakamate refers to traditional female oral poets in Darfur who wield significant influence through song and storytelling. While their cultural roles vary across communities, in this study the term reflects both their functions in promoting peace and their potential role in escalating conflict and increasing war tendencies, as described by participants. This duality is essential for understanding their embedded role in informal strategies to prevent child recruitment.

APPENDIX A

Thematic Interview Guide Used for Data Collection

The following thematic guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with community members, civil society actors, and local leaders in north Darfur. The aim was to explore community perceptions, roles of women, and informal mechanisms in preventing the recruitment of CAAFAG.

Section 1: Community understanding of Recruitment Risks

- What are the main reasons children are recruited into armed groups in your area?
- Are there any groups or individuals in your community who help protect children from being recruited?

Section 2: Role of Women in Community Protection

- In what ways do women contribute to reducing recruitment risks?
- Can you describe the work of any women-led organizations or networks that support children or families?
- How are women viewed when they speak out about violence or recruitment?

Section 3: Cultural Influences – The role of the Hakamate

- What influence do the Hakamate have in your community?
- Have you heard songs or stories from the Hakamate that encourage peace or discourage fighting?
- Can the Hakamate influence young people's decisions to join or avoid armed groups?

Section 4: Informal Warning and Support Mechanisms

- Are there early signs when a child may be at risk of being recruited?
- How does the community respond to these warning signs?
- Who usually acts first to protect or intervene?

Section 5: Institutional and Policy Gaps

- Are women or youth included in decision-making about DDR?
- What kind of support do informal community efforts receive from government or NGOs?
- What would make local peacebuilding and prevention efforts more effective?

Section 6: Personal Reflections

- Do you have a personal story about a child or family affected by recruitment?

APPENDIX B

Sample Guiding Questions Used in Interviews and FGDs

A sample of the open-ended questions used during the qualitative data collection phase. The questions were adapted based on participant roles (e.g., community leaders, women's groups, Hakamate) and aimed to explore informal strategies preventing child recruitment in North Darfur.

A. General community Perceptions

- How would you describe the current risks facing children in your community regarding recruitment by armed groups?
- What are some signs or indicators that a child is at risk of being recruited?

B. Women's Role in Prevention

- Can you describe how women in your community contribute to preventing children from joining armed groups?

C. The Role of the Hakamate

- How are the Hakamate perceived in your community—as peacebuilders or otherwise?
- Can you recall any situations where a Hakamate's song or message influenced community behavior?

D. Interaction with Formal Structures

- Do these community efforts ever connect with government programs or NGOs? If not, why?
- What support do you think is needed to strengthen these informal prevention strategies?

Intergenerational Social Mobility and Gender Equality Status in Bangladesh: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Gender disparity remains a critical concern in sociological research and global policy discourse. In alignment with social mobility theories, the elimination of gender inequality has gained international attention, exemplified by the World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Index (GSMI). Although gender equality is a core objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its formulation from a social mobility perspective remains underexplored in the context of Bangladesh. This study aims to examine the impact of intergenerational social mobility on gender equality in Bangladesh. Using an explanatory research design, the study develops a social mobility model of the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and employs a household survey conducted through a multi-stage sampling technique. Findings indicate that the downward socioeconomic status (SES1) of parents reinforces gender inequality, whereas the upward mobility (SES2) of their children contributes to its reduction. The study concludes that fostering upward social mobility could be instrumental in addressing gender inequality across future generations in Bangladesh. These findings hold consistent across varied datasets, sample frames, and model specifications.

Keywords: Social Mobility, Socioeconomic Status, Gender Inequality Index, Sustainable Development, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Gender equality is a primary focus of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh. Despite its consistent GDP performance, Bangladesh remains afflicted by gender inequality (Asadullah and Chakravorty, 2019). The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2025 study indicates that Bangladesh has risen to 24th place among 146 nations, a significant improvement from its 99th position in 2024. This marks the largest jump in the global

gender gap ranking in one year. Bangladesh's overall gender parity score increased from 68.9% in 2024 to 77.5% in 2025. In the sub-sections of Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2025, economic participation score in Bangladesh improved due to labor-force data revisions, bringing its economic parity back to its 2023 level. The country made progress in bridging the gender gap in literacy, with women increasingly catching up to men in literacy rates. In political empowerment, Bangladesh ranks 3rd globally, with the proportion of women in ministerial positions rising from 9.1% to 22.2% between 2024 and 2025 (WEF, 2025). Ashraf and Ali (2018), on the other hand, while measuring the gender inequality index (GII), brought educational attainment and health, and survival under the social participation pillar. Thus, they have measured GII based on three pillars: economic participation, political participation and social participation (e.g., Ashraf and Ali, 2018). The present study, to explain Ashraf and Ali's GII status in the Bangladeshi context, has considered intergenerational social mobility as the key determinant as found in an extensive body of empirical studies (Soharwardi and Ahmad, 2020; Baig et al., 2018).

Observational studies on gender inequality reveal determinants including social mobility, workplace facilities and environment for women, age, social norms, access to services, decision-making capacity, job security, institutional expansion, wage disparity, race, globalisation, geographic inequality, trade liberalisation, ethnicity, religion, and patriarchy (Soharwardi and Ahmad, 2020; Baig et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019; Ragasa et al., 2019; Stavi et al., 2021; Montgomery and Dacin 2020). The findings in the Bangladeshi context suggest that patriarchy does not matter GII (Mishra, 2020). However, the SES index, developed in the American context by Blau and Duncan, derived from education, occupation, and income is the root mobility determinant for explaining women's empowerment or gender equality status (Blau et al., 1967; Ayella and Williamson, 1976; Klasen, 2019; Avvisati, 2020). Unfortunately, none has been conducted any study in the Bangladeshi context on examining the effect of intergenerational social mobility, derived from Blau and Duncan's SES index, on the gender inequality index (GII) developed by Ashraf and Ali (2018) based on economic participation, political participation, and social participation. In addition, none have either developed or proposed to design a theory-based policy in the field of social mobility and gender equality in Bangladesh. Under this circumstance, the study has two central research questions: how should the theory-based policy for gender equality in Bangladesh be developed? What are the most influential factors of intergenerational social mobility while explaining gender equality in Bangladesh?

2. Literature Review

The research seeks to investigate intergenerational social mobility and its impact on gender equality in Bangladesh. This knowledge is crucial for understanding social mobility about an individual's movement between socio-economic strata in relation to their parents, significantly impacting societal frameworks. This literature debate is divided into two parts: theoretical frameworks and concepts, and actual evidence from Bangladesh or similar contexts.

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Three sociological classics such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim did not directly utter the concept of social mobility but addressed modernity as a key to the processes of social change (Tiryakian, 1995). Though the assumptions, methods, and findings of the Big Three classics differed, all agreed that societal change is dependent on social and technological forces (Boamah and Rothfub, 2018; Oeij et al., 2019). For instance, Pollack (2015) argues that the continuing process of *rationalization* is an indispensable and irreversible change. Huber (2009) posits that the dialectical tension between production forces and social relations culminates in the emergence of a new social order. Salmi and Sonck-Rautio (2018) assert that the division of labour is fundamental to contemporary society. The present study suggests that though the classical sociologists did not directly talk about social mobility, there are clear insights into social mobility theory in their theories of social change. To clarify, educational and occupational mobility are rooted in Durkheim's notion of 'division of labor' which can well explain intergenerational social mobility and gender equality status. To argue, Durkheim's idea of industrialized society metaphorized as organic solidarity is the product of the 'division of labor' due to educational expansion (Durkheim and Halls, 1997). *Secondly*, economic mobility and income inequality stem from Marx's dialectical battle between the forces of production and social relations (Marx and McLellan, 2000). Marx asserted that capitalism is the most

dynamic economic model because of its inherent capacity for renewed profit, as illustrated by his definition of capitalism as $M-C-M'$ (where M represents money, C denotes commodity, and M' signifies money + increment). Thus, Marx called capitalism the most dynamic economic model though Marx criticized capitalism for its product of social inequality (Swedberg, 2003). However, he predicted that communism was the panacea for resolving social inequality (Marx and McLellan, 2000). *Thirdly*, all of the above three mobility aspects are reflected in Weber's idea of rational action practiced by individuals in rational capitalism to achieve their values or purposive goals. Thus, Weberian analysis of upward social class mobility is dependent on the life chances of the individuals to live in the modern rational society (Weber and Tribe, 2019; Swedberg, 2003).

Unfortunately, the classical sociologists as the root theorists of social mobility have very often been neglected. This, perhaps, happens due to their lack of clarification on the difference between social change and social mobility. Later, Sorokin's work (1959) "*Social and Cultural Mobility*" clarified such a difference introducing the concept of 'social mobility' and stating that there is neither a completely open society (i.e., class system) nor a completely closed society (i.e., caste system). To him, neither those societies are identical nor their pace of mobility too. He also mentions that societal change can happen over time depending on social mobility in terms of individual movement from one position to another within the mobility ladder (Sorokin, 1959 & 1998). The present study, hence, argues that the classical sociologists are the real proprietors of the concept of social mobility which can explain the gender equality status. This argument will be more obvious from the analytical perspectives of the contemporary theories of social mobility.

2.2 Empirical Literature

There are many types of social mobility. They are horizontal-vertical, upward-downward and intergenerational-intragenerational. These types of mobility can further overlap with each other. The present study is related to intergenerational social mobility which is referred to as intergenerational (i.e., within past and present generations) movement between social positions such as the position of parents (social origins) and that of their children (social destinations) (Hertel, 2017). There are many aspects of intergenerational social mobility such as educational, occupational, income, lifestyle, status, prestige, and religion (Staff et al., 2017). Based on these aspects, contemporary social mobility theories can be explained from different perspectives.

Firstly, the functionalist perspective asserts that variations in social position should be seen as gradational inequality (Wright, 1979) and disparities in wealth and status or prestige (Duncan, 1961; Treiman, 1977). Blau and Duncan (1967), in "The American Occupational Structure," discovered that fathers' educational attainment and occupational standing significantly influence their sons' professional accomplishments. The influence of fathers' employment on their sons' careers was partially mitigated by the educational attainment of the sons. Blau and Duncan, consistent with functionalist theory, posited that the mobility observed between agricultural, manual, and non-manual occupations will diminish due to the rise of universalism, favouring achievement over ascription (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Treiman, 1970). *Secondly*, the occupational micro-class approach is directly theoretically connected to Durkheim's idea of the 'Division of Labour' (Grusky and Galescu, 2005). This viewpoint posits that the large classes resulting from the distortions of early industrialisation would be supplanted by occupation-based micro-social classes due to the development of inequality within the labour market (Grusky and Sørensen, 1998). *Thirdly*, the neo-Weberian perspective referred to as the EGP (Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero) scheme or CASMIN (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations) categorises class distinctions solely in terms of life chances (Breen and Jonsson, 2005; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007). Goldthorpe (2007) initially formalised the OED triangle, comprising class origins (O), educational attainment (E), and class destinations (D). Goldthorpe's OED triangle elucidates the interaction between O, E, and D. Alterations may impact the relationships among $O>E$, $E>D$, or $O>D$. He elucidates the interaction effect of all three elements on the relationship between O and D, suggesting that the ED link may alter in relation to the OD link involving schooling (Hertel, 2017). Goldthorpe (2016), in his examination of advanced nations such as modern Britain, discovered that the extent of social mobility is diminishing due to the proliferation of educational qualifications. *Fourthly*, the neo-Marxist perspective developed by Wright which is one of the most creative Marxist class schemes based on exploitation (Wright, 1979). Wright's class scheme is interesting while analyzing intergenerational social mobility (Western and Wright, 1994) in terms of expertise affecting the cultural skills and job preferences of their children. As a

result, the exploitation associated with parental class origin matters in the intergenerational penetrability of class boundaries (Wright, 1997). *Fifthly*, Oesch's formulation of a novel class scheme resulted from the expansion of education, increased female participation in the labour force, and the emergence of service classes alongside routine non-manual vocations (Oesch, 2008). Oesch, disregarding Goldthorpe's perspective on work relations, observes the direct impact of educational credentials on the "advantage associated with employment relations" (Oesch, 2006: 67). *Finally*, the Esping-Andersen class scheme analyses the relationship between the intragenerational socio-economic changes and stratification system in the post-industrial societies (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

Considering the sociological theories in the field of social mobility and gender stratification, the study has formulated five hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant effect of SES₁ on the SES mobility index.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant effect of SES₂ on the SES mobility index.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant effect of the SES mobility index on GII.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant association between SES₁ and GII.

Hypothesis 5: There is a significant association between SES₂ and GII.

3. Research Gap

None has explained GII in the Bangladeshi context depending on Blau and Duncan's SES mobility index derived from three indicators such as education, occupation, and income (Blau et al., 1967, 1978; Hopper et al., 1968) which is sociologically significant while studying gender equality status in Bangladesh. The *first* reason is that it incorporates all the classical aspects including educational mobility, occupational mobility, and income mobility. The *second* reason is that Bangladesh is a society where universalism is yet to be established but exists at the stage of increasing inequality (Paulus et al., 2020). The *third* reason is that Blau and Duncan's model compares the effect of the social origin (the parental generation) on their future generations. The fourth reason is that the pre-test survey also supports Blau and Duncan's model to explain GII. The *fifth* reason is that gender equality is one of the top priority areas of SDGs. So, the study follows Blau and Duncan's SES mobility index as the root determinant of explaining gender equality status in Bangladesh. Based on this research gap, the study has an endeavour to assess the effect of intergenerational social mobility on gender equality status in Bangladesh.

4. Materials And Methods

4.1 Ethical Consideration

The research received approval in accordance with the ethics committee requirements of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) and was supported by the same institution. The participants were informed that their involvement in the survey was voluntary and that the confidentiality of their responses would be preserved. They also stated that they could withdraw from the survey at any moment. The respondents' consent was obtained through a written form that outlined the research objectives, data collection methods, and data procedures. Verbal consent was also obtained from them. Participants were guaranteed that their identities would remain undisclosed in any subsequent presentations or publications stemming from the study. This study allocated a distinct identifying code to preserve the confidentiality of the data and the identity of the respondents. All datasets were secured with passwords and stored in several locations.

4.2 Research Design and Measurement of Variables

Quantitative study adheres to a rigorous experimental research approach. The study evaluated the importance of the offered hypotheses across four segments: Socioeconomic Status 1 (SES₁), Socio-economic Status 2 (SES₂), Mobility Index (MOBIN), and Gender Inequality Index (GII). The quantified values of exogenous variables, specifically SES₁ and SES₂, were employed to assess the GII mediated by MOBIN. The SES₁ is defined as the socio-economic level of the parents or first generation, determined by the composite index score derived from their Parent's Educational Score (PES), Parent's Occupational Score (POS), and Parent's Income Score (PIS).

Likewise, child's Educational Score (CES), Child's Occupational Score (COS), and Child's Income Score (CIS) pertain to the socio-economic status of children or the second generation in relation to SES2. The exogenous constructs SES1 (socio-economic status of the parents or first generation) and SES2 (socio-economic status of the children or second generation) were defined in relation to their PES and CES, POS and COS, and PIS and CIS. The PES and CES were defined as proportional scores reflecting the educational levels of parents and children in accordance with the general education system in Bangladesh. In this perspective, educational attainment was quantified as follows: PhD and above=7, MPhil=6, postgraduate=5, graduate=4, HSC=3, SSC=2, below JSC=1, and illiterate=0. Conversely, the study defined POS and COS as the proportional scores corresponding to the occupational levels of parents and children, respectively.

The occupational levels were derived from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2017), with modifications to the codes based on rank scores. In this perspective, occupational levels were redefined as follows: Managers=10, Professionals=9, Technicians and Associate Professionals=8, Clerical Support Workers=7, Service and Sales Workers=6, Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries Workers=5, Craft and Related Trades Workers=4, Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers=3, Elementary Occupations=2, and other occupations=1. The income levels of both parents and children were categorised as upper=3, middle=2, and low=1; ethnicity was classified as Hindu=1, Bengali=2, and others=3; and religion status was categorised as Hindus=1, Islam=2, and others=3. Furthermore, age categories were defined as follows: for dads and mothers, up to 55 years=1, 56-60 years=2, and above 60 years=3; for sons and daughters, up to 30 years=1, 31-35 years=2, and above 35 years=3.

The GIIs for each responder were determined using categorical dummies. Both sons and daughters were requested to indicate their level of agreement with each factor in the Gender Inequality Index between sons and daughters (GIIsd) on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "not at all" and 5 signifies "a great deal." Based on Eq. (1) formulated by Ashraf and Ali (2018), the GIIsd was initially computed using SPSS software (Windows version 25), followed by the calculation of GII using SmartPLS software (Windows version 4).

$$GIIsd = (EPsS/EPdS) * (PPsS/PPdS) * (SPsS/SPdS) * (1/3) \quad (1)$$

Here, EPsS, PPsS, and SPsS denote a son's scores in economic, political, and social engagement, respectively. Similarly, EPdS, PPdS, and SPdS indicate a daughter's score in economic, political, and social engagement, respectively. Within these frameworks, the endogenous construct GII was defined through six indicators: EPs and EPd encompass the assertion 'I have a financial contribution to my family'; PPs and PPd incorporate the assertion 'My opinion is valued during significant family decisions, and SPs and SPd include the assertion 'I engage in societal activities'. The EPs, PPs, and SPs were allocated to sons, whereas EPd, PPd, and SPd were allocated to daughters. In comparison, the status of children's educational, occupational, and income levels (CES, COS, and CIS), combined with the status of parents' educational, occupational, and income levels (PES, POS, and PIS), comprise the mobility index (MOBIN). In accordance with Eq. (1), the MOBIcp was predominantly computed using SPSS software, whereas MOBIN was determined using SmartPLS software (Windows version 3.3), as seen in Eq. (2).

$$MOBIN = (CES/PES) * (COS/POS) * (CIS/PIS) * (1/3) \quad (2)$$

Thus, the study has specified the following conceptual framework (**Fig. 1**) where *CES* reveals the educational status of children; *CIS* represents the income status of children; *COS* denotes occupational status of children; *PES* expresses educational status of parents; *PIS* detects income status of parents; *POS* presents occupational status of parents; *SES1* states socio-economic status of parents; *SES2* presents socio-economic status for second generation or children; *MOBIN* indicates mobility index; *MOBIcp* shows mobility index for child/parent generation; *GII* indicates gender inequality index; and *GIIsd* expresses gender inequality index for sons/daughters.

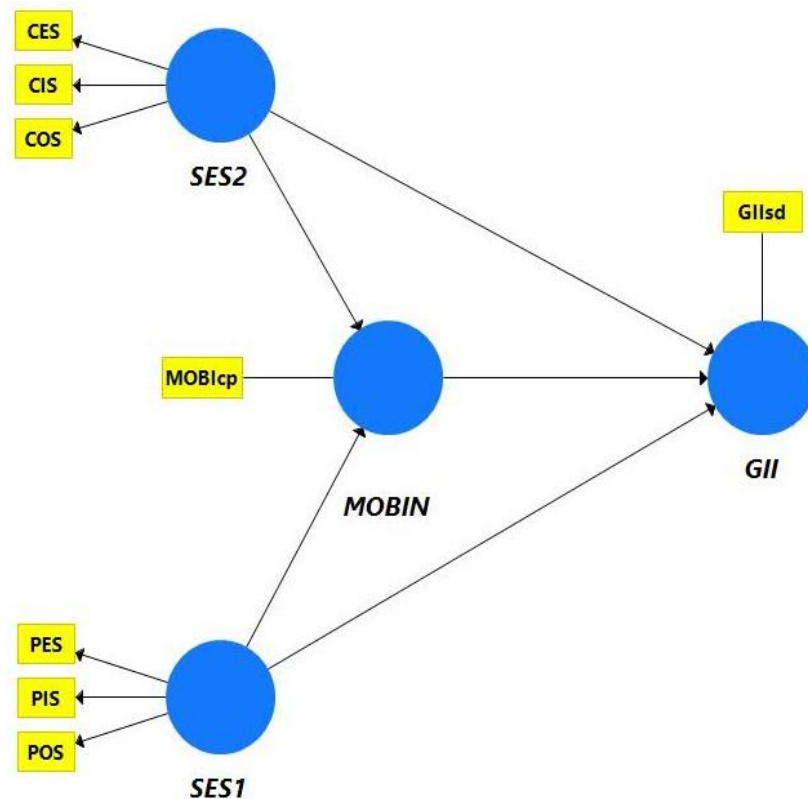


Figure 1: Hypothesized Model
[Source: Modifiedly Adopted]

4.3 Sampling Technique

The study collected data following a multi-stage technique. In the 1st stage, the study chose three clusters. Out of 64 districts of Bangladesh, the first cluster consisted of 27 districts of which Kushtia is the member district of this cluster. The second cluster covered 31 districts in which Panchagarh is the representative district of this cluster and the third cluster included Dhaka out of 4 districts. Findings from Hossain and Hossain (2019) about the district-wise clusters of socio-economic and demographic homogeneity in Bangladesh motivated us to split our sample size into three clusters. The study has, thus, chosen above mentioned 3 districts from three clusters for sample selection. In the second stage, three *upazilas* (Khoksa, Debiganj & Pallabi) were selected randomly. In the third stage, three unions were selected further randomly (Samaspur, Debiduba, and Ward No. 3). But in the final stage, the representative respondents were purposively selected considering the inclusion criteria of 4 respondents from each household (1 father, 1 mother, 1 son, and 1 daughter). The reason for selecting 4 respondents from each household is to develop the mobility index (*MOBIN*) based on *SES1* and *SES2* as well as the gender inequality index (*GII*).

4.4 Sample Size Determination

The minimal acceptable sample size was established using two iterations of Cochran's method due to the finite study population. The initial phase was determining the number of respondents as $n=384$, accounting for a 5 percent margin of error. Subsequently, in the second stage, a sample of 384 was modified to account for a finite population size of $N=30728$ (i.e., $N_1+N_2+N_3 = 3254 + 5199 + 22275$). The definitive sample size of households was established at 380. Utilising this sample strategy, data was gathered from 40 houses (n_1) in the first cluster, 64 households (n_2) in the second cluster, and 276 households (n_3) in the third cluster.

4.5 Data Collection

We conducted a pre-test survey for the appropriate empirical inquiry. Twenty-five individuals were solicited to partake in this pre-test survey. Upon concluding the pre-test, we proceeded to conduct household surveys in

collaboration with other associates. Participants in the pre-test were excluded from the final home surveys. The household surveys were executed in three districts of our suggested clusters from July to December 2019. A suitable sample strategy was employed during data collection to mitigate sampling error. In this context, all survey interviews were executed by a team of skilled data collectors. The importance and consequences of the current investigation were elucidated to all participants. The interview of each responder was conducted over an extended duration. The data collectors refrained from engaging in personal and irrelevant gossip to prevent biasing the respondents' answers. The surveys adhered rigorously to data collecting processes to ensure compliance with human research standards.

5. Result And Discussion

The analysis revealed that the entire sample exhibited a bias towards a higher representation of individuals with varied education, occupation, income, and age among fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of socioeconomic and demographic (SED) factors among respondents.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Major SED Characteristics of Respondents ($n=380$)

Variables	Categories	Parents				Children			
		Father		Mother		Son		Daughter	
		n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Age	55 ≤	10	2.63	18	4.73	380	100	380	100
	56-60	12	3.20	340	89.47	0	0.00	0	0.00
	> 60	358	94.20	22	5.79	0	0.00	0	0.00
Gender	Female	0	0.0	380	100.0	0	0.0	380	100.0
	Male	380	100.0	0	0.0	380	100.0	0	0.0
Family Size	Up to 6	15	3.95	15	3.95	15	3.95	15	3.95
	6 to 8	270	71.05	270	71.05	270	71.05	270	71.05
	> 8	95	25.0	95	25.0	95	25.0	95	25.0
Ethnicity	Hindu	29	7.6	29	7.6	29	7.6	29	7.6
	Bengali	282	74.2	282	74.2	282	74.2	282	74.2
	Others	69	18.2	69	18.2	69	18.2	69	18.2
Religion	Islam	348	91.6	348	91.6	348	91.6	348	91.6
	Hindus	29	7.6	29	7.6	29	7.6	29	7.6
	Others	3	0.8	3	0.8	3	0.8	3	0.8
Education	Illiterate	39	10.30	60	15.80	0	0.00	0	0.00
	JSC<	168	44.20	213	56.10	9	2.40	7	1.80
	SSC	83	21.80	49	12.90	35	9.20	60	15.80
	HSC	46	12.10	40	10.50	63	16.60	109	28.70
	Graduate	30	7.90	12	3.20	184	48.40	149	39.20
	Postgraduate	11	2.90	6	1.60	70	18.40	50	13.20
	MPhil	2	0.50	0	0.00	12	3.20	3	0.80
	PhD	1	0.30	0	0.00	7	1.80	2	0.50
Income category	Lower class	249	65.50	357	93.90	78	20.50	96	25.50
	Middle class	128	33.70	20	5.30	280	73.70	272	71.60
	Upper class	3	0.80	3	0.80	22	2.90	12	3.20
Occupation	Elementary	110	28.9	28	7.40	7	1.8	11	2.9
	PMO&A*	35	9.2	0	0.0	27	7.1	17	4.5
	CRTW**	23	6.1	3	0.8	16	4.2	21	5.5
	SAFF***	56	14.7	0	0.0	23	6.1	3	0.8
	SSW****	60	15.8	9	2.4	67	17.6	156	41.1
	CSW*****	43	11.3	5	1.3	105	27.6	51	13.4
	TAP*****	25	6.6	6	1.6	108	28.4	65	17.1
	Professionals	2	0.5	3	0.8	9	2.4	5	1.3
	Managers	1	0.3	0	0.0	13	3.4	7	1.8
	Other	25	6.6	326	85.8	5	1.3	44	11.6

*PMO&A=Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers; **CRTW=Craft and Related Trades Workers; ***SAFF=Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries; ****SSW=Service and Sales Workers; *****CSW= Clerical Support Workers; *****TAP= Technicians and Associate Professionals.

[Source: Field Data]

Approximately 95 percent of the respondents, comprising fathers and mothers, belong to the oldest demographic category. Conversely, all children fall inside the category of individuals under 55 years of age. Regarding gender, 50 percent of responders are female, while the other 50 percent are male. Over 70 percent of responders have family sizes ranging from 6 to 8 members. Approximately 75 percent of respondents identify as Bengali, while around 92 percent identify as Muslim. A larger proportion of fathers and mothers failed to obtain the Junior School Certificate (JSC), whereas the educational attainment of their children appears to be significantly improving. The occupational status of fathers and mothers lags far behind that of their children. There has been an increase in social mobility for sons and daughters relative to their parental status or origins. The largest proportion of fathers and mothers resides in the lower class, followed by the middle class and upper class, with the majority of their offspring belonging to the middle class. To enhance empirical evaluation, we established the measurement model and structural model for assessing the endogenous and exogenous constructs.

5.1 Measurement Model

The study employs three steps to assess the proposed model. *First* of all, the internal consistency is initially assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR). The analysis reveals that all values significantly exceed the criterion of 0.70 (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014; Hair, Tomas et al., 2016; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010) and the acceptable value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 1998). The internal consistency of the data has been verified. *Secondly*, convergent validity has been assessed via cross-loadings (refer to Figure 2 for further details) and average variance extracted (AVE), with both metrics required to exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.5 (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2016; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The cross-loadings of CES (0.966), CIS (0.900), and COS (0.983), together with those of PES (0.939), PIS (0.831), and POS (0.903) in our study indicate that SES2 and SES1 adequately reflect these two variables. Consequently, the cross-loadings and AVE values exceeding 0.50 in our study validate the convergent validity of our data. *Finally*, the discriminant validity has been evaluated through Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio which should be less than 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001). Benitez et al. (2020) argue that it should be less than 0.85. Our estimated HTMT ratios of SES1, SES2, and GII2 are lower than 0.85 which makes conformity of discriminator validity of data.

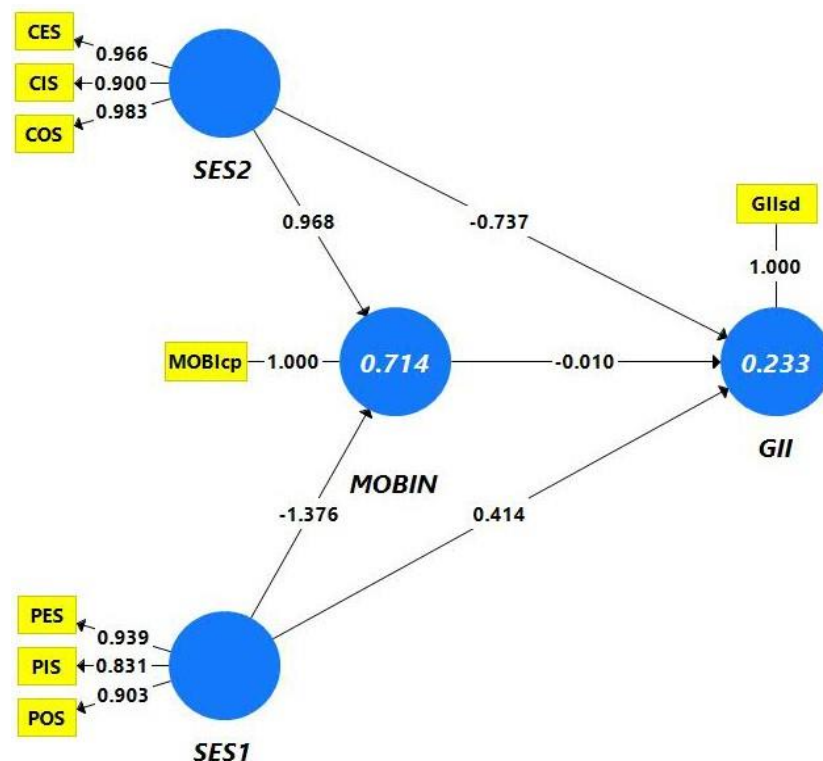


Figure 2: Measurement Model
[Source: Field Data]

5.2 Structural Model

Following confirmatory factor analyses and the assessment of the reliability and validity of exogenous and endogenous constructs, the study assesses the structural model. The structural model denotes the internal framework illustrating the interconnections among latent variables (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2012). The study adheres to specific procedures in this context. Initially, multicollinearity has been assessed. The estimated variance inflation factor (VIF) values indicate that the model constructs are largely devoid of multicollinearity issues, as the majority of VIFs are less than 3, with two factors approximately at 5 (Hair et al., 2010, Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2016; Kock and Lynn, 2012, Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2006).

Secondly, regarding the coefficient effect, the exogenous construct SES1 exerts a positive influence (0.414) on the endogenous construct GII. The exogenous construct SES2 exerts a negative influence (-0.737) on GII. The beneficial impact of SES1 indicates that the first generation undergoes downward mobility, whereas the detrimental impact of SES2 suggests that the second-generation experiences upward mobility. Current research indicates that the SES of the first generation may exacerbate gender inequality, while the SES of the second generation may mitigate it (Archambault et al., 2017; Tezcan, 2019). The research indicates that all structural path coefficients between SES1 and GII, SES1 and MOBIN, SES2 and GII, and SES2 and MOBIN are significant at the 1 percent level, with T-statistics above 2.58 and P values less than or equal to 0.01. Nonetheless, we cannot ascertain any correlation between MOBIN and GII due to its lower T-statistics and elevated P-value. (see **Table 2** and **Fig. 3** for more details).

Table 2: Results of Estimated Path Coefficients

Constructs	Coefficients	T-statistics	P-values
MOBIN->GII	-0.010	0.181	0.857
SES1->MOBIN	-1.376	24.382	0.000
SES1->GII	0.414	3.494	0.000
SES2->MOBIN	0.968	15.901	0.000
SES2->GII	-0.737	6.143	0.000

[Source: Field Data]

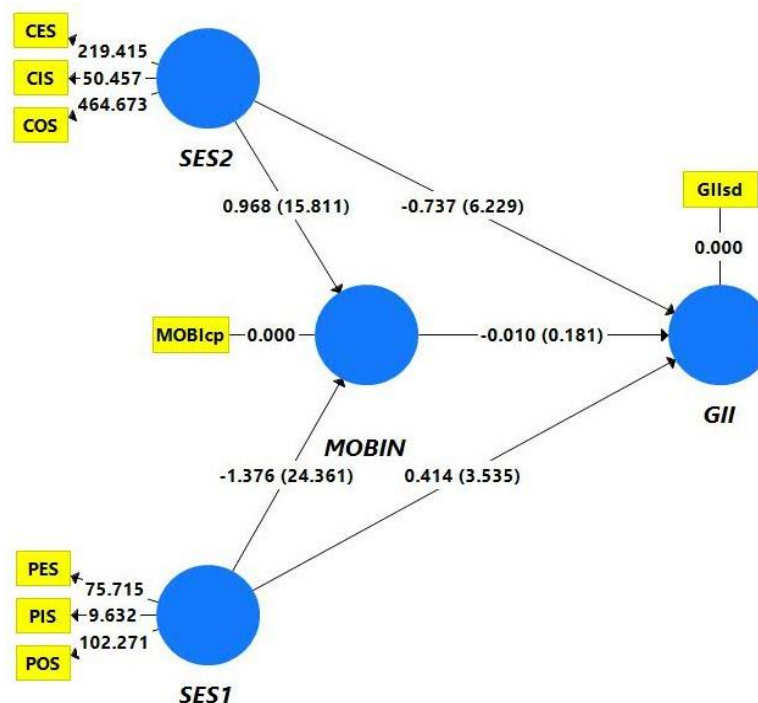


Figure 3: Structural Path Coefficients and T-statistics

[Source: Field Data]

Thirdly, the coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.23 signifies that 23 percent of the variation in the endogenous latent variable GII is elucidated by the corresponding exogenous variables SES1 and SES2, mediated by MOBIN. Iqbal (2020) posits that an R^2 value between 0.20 and 0.30 is deemed acceptable in the absence of variables in the model or index. Consequently, the proposed model is deemed acceptable. *Fourthly*, the effect size (f^2) serves as a tool for evaluating the impact of exogenous constructions on endogenous constructs. Cohen (1988) posits that effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 correspond to minor, medium, and large effects of exogenous variables on endogenous constructs, respectively. The current investigation indicates that the effect size of SES1 on MOBIN (2.444) is substantial.

However, the adverse impact of the structural coefficient suggests that the parental generation has undergone a decline in socioeconomic status mobility. The effect size of SES2 on MOBIN (1.209), coupled with the positive structural coefficient, suggests that the current generation of children has undergone upward socioeconomic mobility. The effect size of SES1 on GII is minimal at 0.024. However, the positive structural coefficient effect suggests that the parent generation has encountered gender discrimination. The effect magnitude of SES2 on GII (0.118), coupled with the negative structural coefficient, suggests that the generation has undergone gender equality. However, the effect magnitude of MOBIN on GII (0.000) has yet to be observed. *Finally*, according to the Blindfolding approach, the estimated predictive power or relevance of the endogenous construct (Q^2) indicates that GII2 possesses substantial predictive power and relevance, as the Q^2 value is 0.229, exceeding the threshold value of 0. The calculated value aligns with the proposed Q^2 value of the Stone-Geisser model (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974).

The aforementioned assessments of the social mobility model regarding GII suggest that it aligns with the Blau and Duncan (1967) model established in the American environment of the 1970s. The correlation between MOBIN and the GII indicates that the MOBIN remains inadequate and fails to mitigate gender inequality in Bangladesh. MOBIN, as a mediating variable, does not significantly contribute to the explanation of GII. The inverse link between SES1 and SES2 likely stems from the absence of universalism, as demonstrated by the examination of Blau and Duncan's (1961) predictions and EGP class mobility (i.e., OED triangle) and class framework. Blau and Duncan's mobility model is closely associated with traditional sociologists, like Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. The study findings suggest that gender inequality, as a component of social inequality, can be elucidated through Marx and Weber's concepts of economic status mobility and Durkheim's notions of educational and occupational status mobility. From a Durkheimian perspective, the socioeconomic level (SES) of parental generations parallels educational and occupational status in mechanical solidarity, as both are ascribed at birth. Conversely, SES2 in child generation exhibits parallels with the educational competencies and occupational division of labour found in organic solidarity, where both are attained rather than ascribed. According to Durkheim, while organic solidarity initially fosters educational and vocational stratification, the process of modernisation will promote universalism, ultimately diminishing inequality. From that perspective, the SES1 was significant, as mothers exhibited lower mobility compared to fathers. The average SES score of mothers (2.26) is lower than that of fathers (2.47). The average educational scores for mothers and fathers were 1.50 and 1.85, respectively. The average ratings for mothers and fathers for occupation were 4.19 and 4.20, respectively. The average income scores for mothers and fathers were determined to be 1.09 and 1.36, respectively. In mechanical solidarity, mothers had decreasing trends in educational, vocational, and financial mobility relative to fathers. Conversely, the SES2 of the child generation was determined to be organic as a result of the upward mobility of both sons and daughters. However, the proportion of daughters was determined to be lower than that of sons, as the mean SES ratings for daughters and sons were 3.78 and 4.08, respectively. The mean educational scores for daughters and sons were 3.47 and 3.86 respectively; the mean occupational scores were 5.99 for daughters and 6.47 for sons; and the mean income scores for both daughters and sons were 1.91. Consequently, while both daughters and sons exhibit upward mobility relative to their parental generation, gender inequality persists within Bangladeshi organic solidarity. In terms of the Gender Inequality Index (GII), the average score for daughters (3.45) is lower than that for sons (3.7). In a similar vein, SES2 is juxtaposed with Marx's capitalist modernity and Weber's rational modernity, whilst SES1 is contrasted with Marx's primitive communism and Weber's non-rational traditional society. Consequently, the study suggests that theories of social mobility are not novel. Instead, they are grounded in classical sociological theories, however frequently overlooked in mobility studies. This study advocates for the re-examination of classical theories of social mobility, as the topic of gender disparity can be effectively analysed through the three

primary classical views, despite their lack of statistical testing on upward or downward mobility across various social classes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary objective of this study was to assess the impact of intergenerational social mobility on gender equality in Bangladesh.

6.1 Summary of the Findings

The findings reveal a significant negative correlation between the socioeconomic status of the parental generation (SES1) and the mobility index (MOBIN), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. This suggests that lower SES in the parental generation is associated with restricted upward mobility.

In contrast, the socioeconomic status of the child generation (SES2) shows a positive and significant relationship with the mobility index, confirming Hypothesis 2. This indicates improved mobility among the offspring compared to their parents, further supporting Hypothesis 3, which posits higher socioeconomic mobility in the child generation.

Moreover, SES1 demonstrates a strong positive effect on the gender inequality index, validating Hypothesis 4. This implies that lower parental SES contributes to the persistence of gender inequality. Conversely, SES2 has a significant negative effect on the gender inequality index, as stated in Hypothesis 5, indicating that improved socioeconomic conditions among the younger generation contribute to reducing gender inequality in Bangladesh.

6.2 Recommendations for the Policymakers

Based on the estimated results, this study has some implications for the policymakers of our government. *First*, the policymakers and government should take proper steps to boost mobility and increase universalism without compromising the past generations and ethnic minority groups in Bangladesh since the *MOBIN* is hitherto not satisfactory in level and cannot reduce gender inequality significantly. *Secondly*, administrators should prioritize the educational, occupational and income aspects of all generations, groups, and communities of Bangladesh. The reason is that educational mobility boosts occupational mobility which further boosts income mobility. These three kinds of mobility are the root mobility indicators.

6.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite following the scientific principles and steps of social research, the present study has some limitations. The *first* limitation is to formulate *MOBIN* as a function of the educational score of child generation (consisting of 50 percent sons and 50 percent daughters) divided by parent generation (consisting of 50 percent fathers and 50 percent mothers) multiplied by the occupational score of child generation divided by parent generation multiplied by income score of child generation divided by parent generation multiplied by 1 divided by 3 (i.e., $(CES/PES) * (COS/POS) * (CIS/PIS) * (1/3)$). But, if the *MOBIN* was formulated as a function of each score of 100 percent fathers divided by 100 percent mothers (i.e., $(FES/MES) * (FOS/FOS) * (FIS/FIS) * (1/3)$), the study might have produced another dimension of *MOBIN* from a gender perspective. So, future researchers are suggested to formulate *MOBIN* following the second alternative. *Secondly*, the study was based on the respondents from three districts of Bangladesh, adopting multi-stage sampling where the final step follows a purposive sampling technique to fulfil the inclusion criteria of the respondents within the limited study fund. However, if the number of districts had expanded, the final step could have followed random sampling which would be a more nationally representative study. In this regard, future researchers are recommended to expand the number of districts to follow the random sampling in each step of the multi-stage sampling technique. To do so, the researchers are recommended to conduct such a study having the necessary funds. *Thirdly*, gender equality status was explained only from a social mobility perspective though there are many other aspects of this kind of study. For example, there are scopes of explaining GII based on the perspectives of marriage, political pressure, displacement, climate change, and hazardous conditions. The *final* limitation is to include only SES mobility developed by Blau and

Duncan though there are some other aspects of SES mobility (e.g., CAPSES aspect where SES is defined as a function of three capital factors such as Human Capital, Material Capital, and Social Capital). Furthermore, future researchers are recommended to conduct gender equality status depending on the CAPSES factors developed by Oakes and Rossi (2003). So, social scientists should conduct further studies in this field to move from the 'intergenerational social mobility and gender equality status in Bangladesh' to the 'gender mobility and Bangladesh society' to the 'gender mobility and global society'.

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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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Analysis Study of Indonesian Women's Football Supporters; Expectations, Perceptions, Potentials and Culture

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Abstract

The participation of women in football fandom has been increasing, highlighting the importance of understanding their expectations, perceptions, potential, and the cultural influences that shape their behavior. This study aims to analyze these dynamics among Indonesian female supporters, with a particular focus on Sundanese and Javanese cultural contexts. A qualitative research approach was employed, combining questionnaires and in-depth unstructured interviews. The sample consisted of 1,078 respondents, including 497 female supporters (from groups such as Mojang Bobotoh, Viking Ladies, and Bonita), 233 male supporters, 257 members of the general public, and 91 sports figures. Findings indicate that collaborative efforts and specific measures are needed to ensure the safety of female supporters. Approximately 47.5% of respondents perceived their presence positively, contributing to a more vibrant match atmosphere, although 15% associated it with negative emotional reactions when their team lost. Furthermore, 63% agreed that women are capable of taking care of themselves, while 21.5% noted that their loyalty occasionally conflicts with cultural etiquette. The study concludes that female supporters of Persib and Persebaya play a vital role in enriching Indonesia's supporter culture. Their expectations and perceptions align with broader societal demands for more active and inclusive female participation in sports. While their potential to promote enthusiasm and peace in football should be encouraged, challenges such as discrimination and internal conflicts remain. The integration of Sundanese and Javanese cultural values by female supporters demonstrates that football fandom can coexist with the preservation of local cultural traditions.

Keywords: Fandom, Female Supporters, Coaching Model

1. Introduction

Numerous instances of supporter violence in Indonesia have been extensively documented, yet an effective strategy to address this issue has not been established to date. Some of the incidents that recently drew the most

attention were the Kanjuruhan incident and the harassment of female supporters in various forms (Delyarahmi & Siagian, 2023). These conflicts involved both genders. It is commonly assumed that exercise provides ample opportunities to expend energy and learn to manage stress and emotional situations without resorting to violence. As individuals, supporters possess various potentials, each characterized by distinct traits, attitudes, behaviors, and motivations. From childhood, individuals begin to form psychological relationships with their social environment, leading to differences influenced by varying cultural contexts. Culture, considered a primary factor in shaping attitudes and behaviors, particularly in relation to religious practices, underscores the urgency for research to develop an appropriate strategy for constructing a coaching model for supporters.

The presence of spectators at football competitions is believed to increase players' motivation and spirit, potentially strengthening team mentality, increasing economic value, and fostering friendships (Tinson et al., 2023). Generally, football supporters exhibit high loyalty to their clubs, and positive supporter behavior contributes to team success (Pritchard et al., 2022). On the other hand, the presence of spectators can also have negative consequences, including physical altercations among supporters, the destruction of public property, dissatisfaction with referees, and excessive regional fanaticism. The issue of violence in football is not confined to Indonesia but is prevalent in many countries, including Europe and America (File & Worlledge, 2023). In Indonesia, several prominent supporter groups include *The Jak Mania*, known as a supporting organization for the Persija team; *Aremania* the front line for Persema team; *Juku Eja* a group of PSIM Ujung Pandang enthusiasts; *Pasopati* known for their fanaticism towards Persijatim Solo; *Bonek* – *bondo nekat* literally translated as having only reckless mindset – a group with an extraordinary passion for Persibaya; and *Bobotoh* in Bandung (West Java) which has expanded with the emergence of *Viking* groups, *Bombers*, *Robocop* and others. Notably, several supporter groups have established subgroups consisting of female supporters, such as *Viking girls* and *Mojang Bobotoh* (Sutresna et al., 2023).

Currently, numerous women of varying ages, educational backgrounds, and social levels are avid football supporters in Indonesia. Football remains a highly popular sport in the country. However, in the cultural context, the perception of women as football supporters is still constrained by societal acceptance of a "gap" related to inappropriate behavior when viewed in social and cultural settings.

1.1 Female Supporters in Sundanese Cultural Circle

West Java is renowned for its Sundanese cultural heritage, where the term "mepuan" refers to women as "wanoja," epitomized by the figure of "lungguh timpuh emok anadelmi" (Ekawati et al., 2023). In contrast, women in East Java typically grow up immersed in Javanese traditions and culture, which emphasize family togetherness, loyalty to tradition, and respect for parents and ancestors. These two provinces in Indonesia present a compelling context for examining the role of women in Sundanese and Javanese societies, where women's roles are highly esteemed, and they are seen as pivotal in maintaining cultural customs and traditions. Football supporters are an integral aspect of matches, and to comprehensively understand their behavior, it is essential to immerse oneself within the supporter community. This immersion reveals the developmental potential stemming from the existing fanaticism among football supporters (Culvin, 2023). Football matches in Indonesia have begun to be presented in more engaging formats, with significant matches typically scheduled for weekends, highlighting football's transformation into a major form of entertainment (Athalarik & Rusadi, 2023). Today, football fanaticism is not limited to men; women exhibit nearly the same level of enthusiasm (Dunn, 2019). Women Participation in football supporters' activities has become prominent in Indonesia, with many female supporters attending matches based on their own volition rather than through invitations from others (Eskandari, 2022).

This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia; similar enthusiasm is observed in countries with a high level of football fanaticism, such as Italy, where female supporters have gained significant attention. In Italy, some female supporters have even integrated into "ultras," known for their intense passion for football (Pitti, 2019). Women require special accommodations to feel comfortable in stadiums, as enhancing their comfort can increase their enthusiasm to attend matches (Pfister et al., 2018).

The enthusiasm for football matches has been particularly notable in West Java, driven by the region's success in the 2023 competition season. One factor boosting spectator interest is the continuous improvement in club quality (Smith, 2023). Persib Bandung's championship last season heightened fanaticism, prompting the league to capitalize on this by inaugurating the first league in West Java, incorporating Sundanese cultural elements in the opening ceremony. This cultural integration attracted national attention and increased stadium attendance, with more families becoming involved. This study aims to develop a model for nurturing potential female supporters, enabling them to contribute positively to football competitions in Indonesia. This coaching model could serve as a reference for policymakers and a role model for all football supporter organizations in the country. The inherent fanaticism in football must be managed by clubs and organizing committees, as the perceptions and viewpoints of supporters can vary widely (Aksoy, 2023). Developing a supporter coaching model can channel this fanaticism positively. As seen in Italy, specialized members provide oversight and positively direct supporters' presence in stadiums, benefiting the club despite Italy's large and fervent supporter base (Antonowicz et al., 2021).

1.2 Female Supporters in Javanese Cultural Circle

Surabaya, as a dynamic metropolis, has a long history in the world of football, especially with its famous fan base, namely Bonek. Behind the dominance of male supporters, now there is an increasingly strong role of female supporters, known as Bonita (Bonek Wanita). The presence of these Surabaya female supporters brings new dynamics, not only in the world of sports, but also in the context of Javanese culture which is rich in traditional values (Suryandari & Giovani, 2022).

In Javanese culture, women are traditionally seen in roles characterized by subtlety, gentleness, and supportiveness towards men's roles. However, the emergence of female supporters in Surabaya's football community exemplifies a shift in these traditional roles. These female supporters exhibit the same bravery, activity, and enthusiasm as their male counterparts, passionately supporting Persebaya, the pride of Surabaya (Athalarik & Rusadi, 2023).

Despite the growing presence of female supporters in Surabaya, they continue to face substantial challenges. The harsh and masculine environment of the stadium can be a barrier for some women to actively participate in the supporter community (Junaedi et al., 2017). Additionally, social stigmas, such as the assumption that female supporters lack a genuine understanding of the game or are merely following trends, remain prevalent issues.

The increase in the number of female supporters in Surabaya can be attributed to the recent composition of the Persebaya team, which includes many young national team players. This has led to a rise in female supporters attending matches. Furthermore, the Gelora Bung Tomo Stadium, Persebaya's home base, offers a comfortable environment that attracts many families to support the team directly at the stadium (Utama et al., 2022).

The presence of female supporters in Surabaya also reflects how modernity has shaped a new identity within Javanese culture. Surabaya, as a modern and dynamic city, provides a space for women to express themselves more freely while still adhering to local values (Auzan & Sukardani, 2022). Bonita members, for instance, often combine modern casual attire with Persebaya's signature items such as green scarves or club flags, maintaining a unique blend of modernity and traditional manners in their interactions in the stands (Aswant & nurcahyati, 2020). Bonita's existence not only alters the perception of women in sports but also contributes to creating a more inclusive and safe stadium environment. During major matches, Bonita members often act as intermediaries between different supporter groups, striving to maintain a conducive atmosphere and prevent conflicts. The presence of female supporters can serve as an indicator of stadium security; a higher number of women and families in the stadium typically signifies a higher level of comfort and safety (Baker, 2020). Similarly, Persib Bandung supporters in Surabaya are equally passionate, and with optimal management, they can contribute significantly to their favorite team.

1.3 Female Supporters (Soccer fundom)

Indonesia is notable for its dominant soccer supporter culture, which is significantly more prominent compared to other sports (Kusuma & Octastefani, 2022). The demographic of soccer supporters is evolving, with a growing

number of female enthusiasts actively participating in the fandom (Doewes et al., 2020). The number of female supporters who have joined formal organizations is increasing, and nearly every region boasts legally recognized supporter entities.

the presence of female supporters underscores a movement toward gender equality within the supporter community, raising questions about whether these women exhibit the same loyalty, fanaticism, and rights as their male counterparts (Johan & Akhiruyanto, 2020). Historically, female supporters primarily attended matches to support their teams. However, contemporary motivations are influenced by factors such as lifestyle, the attractiveness of players, and social interactions, indicating a shift in the reasons behind their support (Woods & Ludvigsen, 2022). The media has increasingly begun to highlight female supporters through various broadcasts. Despite this, coverage remains superficial, typically featuring these supporters in soft news or feature segments lasting only 5-7 minutes, which does not allow for an in-depth exploration of their roles and contributions (Fenton et al., 2023).

1.4 Engagement Supporter Culture and Behavior

In the context of Indonesian culture that adheres to eastern culture, the presence of women in the midst of many men can be perceived as unconventional (Doewes et al., 2020). The equality of rights and obligations between women and men is also sometimes an endless conversation, contributing to diverse public opinions about female supporters. In the past few years, there are still many people who have a skewed view of female supporters, due to their attitudes in the way they dress, speak, etc. (Nepomuceno et al., 2022). Previously, the "tomboy" stereotype was prevalent among female supporters, but recent trends show a more diverse representation, including women who wear veils, thereby challenging traditional stereotypes. However, negative perceptions persist, highlighting the enduring stereotypes and injustices faced by women in sports (Kusuma & Octastefani, 2022). There is a lot of injustice against women who participate in sports, which stems from the stereotypes attached to them." (Kossakowski & Besta, 2023). The phrase "if you don't like football, it's not a man's name" underscores the traditionally masculine perception of football, reinforcing gender biases (Elliott et al., 2020; Alvemark, 2021).

The strong cultural influence in the women's movement is seen in some cases. In some cases, achieving gender equality is hindered by religious beliefs and cultural norms (Doidge et al., 2019). The involvement of women in "hard" sports remains a controversial topic, sparking debates both in public and academic circles (Ziaul Haq & Yudhistira, 2022). Historically, sports have been perceived as male-dominated domains, presenting various challenges for female supporters (Morano et al., 2020). This perspective stems from the idea that sports perpetuate and reinforce masculine ideologies (Sutresna et al., 2021), limiting women's freedoms compared to men (Harding, 2022).

The assumption related to the figure of a woman with an eastern cultural background presents an opportunity for positive change, which can "cool" the atmosphere of the competition. Women's support often involves participation in *fan clubs* which have seen a rapid surge in the modern football era. *This fan club* that has begun to be in demand has many activities that allow women to participate in. Starting from watching football match together, *fun futsal* or a kind of *gathering*. Women participation in these activities help manage emotional responses to team performance outcomes from both opposing sides (Antonowicz et al., 2020) The presence of this female supporter has existed since the largest supporter community, namely *The Vikings*, was born although their initial numbers were small and met with mixed reactions from male supporters (Ericsson & Nilsson, 2023) Over time, as more women began attending matches, male supporters have grown more respectful towards them. Female supporters often display the same loyalty and fanaticism as their male counterparts, forming their own communities and traveling to support their teams both at home and away (Ingram et al., 2020).

2. Method

2.1 Identify Subsections

Data collection was conducted through phenomenological case studies within a naturalistic inquiry paradigm, involving direct and intensive engagement with the research subjects. Such an approach focuses on a deep

understanding of individual experiences and perceptions related to specific phenomena within the natural context of the respondents, thereby facilitating the collection of rich and detailed data (Lester et al., 2020). Consequently, this methodology enables researchers to explore information about individual characteristics (including age, education level, and economic status), expectations, perceptions, potential, and cultural attributes of Sundanese and Javanese women among Indonesian women's football supporters in West Java and East Java.

2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The respondents comprised 497 female supporters from two football organizations Persib Bandung Female Supporters (Mojang Bobotoh and Ladies Viking) and Persebaya Surabaya Female Supporters (Bonita), 233 male supporters, 91 sports figures, and 257 members of the general public. The respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 50 years. They included students, employees, and individuals from various other professions, with 1-30 years of experience as football supporters. Primary information related to female supporters was obtained through interviews, while questionnaires were used to gather secondary data. The selection of key informants (female supporters) for this study was based on their willingness to participate, which was determined when the researcher observed the atmosphere of matches from April to August 2024.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

Primary data were obtained through direct, personal, and unstructured interviews, while secondary data were gathered via questionnaires and observations. The unstructured interview technique was chosen because it allows informants to share their stories and personal reflections without the constraints of rigid questions (Knott et al., 2022). This approach is crucial for capturing the nuances and complexities of the informants' experiences in depth (Jain, 2021). The questions, which were included in the interview guide and tailored to the research topic, aimed to gather insights into the expectations, perceptions, potentials, and cultural appreciation of Indonesian women's football supporters in West Java and East Java (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Each interview lasted between 5 and 30 minutes.

2.3.1 Instrument

Data were collected by 4 interviewers who asked open-ended questions (Mintert & Pfister, 2014). The data obtained from each interviewer were then deciphered and interpreted (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). his study also collected information about individual characteristics (such as age, education level, and economic status), as well as expectations, perceptions, potentials, and cultural characteristics of Sundanese and Javanese women among Indonesian women's football supporters in West Java and East Java. Additional secondary data were obtained from male supporters from various supporter organizations, sports figures, and members of the general public (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

2.3.2 Data Analysis

Data collection was conducted in stages through direct field observation, with recordings made using a tape recorder. After data collection, content analysis was performed to identify patterns or meanings in the qualitative data. The goal of this analysis was to understand the individual experiences by examining the words, phrases, and recurring themes in the interview transcripts or field notes (Cassell & Bishop, 2019). he content analysis process involved several stages: data collection, open coding, code grouping, and data presentation (Mezmir, 2020). Meanwhile, secondary data obtained through questionnaires were analyzed using a comparative approach with a percentage formula (Ricci et al., 2019).

2.3.3 Research Design

The research method employed is a qualitative approach, utilizing interpretive phenomenological analysis during data extraction. This method allows for the interpretation of collected data to draw conclusions regarding the

expectations, perceptions, potentials, and cultural characteristics of Indonesian women's football supporters in West Java and East Java.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of Female Supporters (age, education, occupation, economy)

The role of female supporters has undergone significant changes. This shift is attributed to their tendency to support the team not solely based on achievements but rather on the physical performance of players and referees. Female supporters exhibit distinct behavioral characteristics, displaying greater bravery in both words and actions, especially when defending their favorite team.

Table 1. Respondent Age

Age	Total	Percentage
Under 17	106	21%
Between 17-30 years old	204	41%
over 30 years old	187	38%

The age of the respondents is very diverse, with 21% under 17 years old, often attending matches with their families or relatives involved in match operations. The largest group, 41%, falls within the 17-30 years age range, typically attending with peer groups, often without parental accompaniment. Those over 30 years old constitute 38% of respondents, frequently attending with extended families or through institutional ticket allocations.

Table 2. Educational background

Education	Total	Percentage
Elementary School/Equivalent	84	17%
Junior High School/Equivalent	108	22%
SMA/SMK/Sederajat High School/Vocational School/Equivalent	207	42%
Bachelor's/Master's/Doctoral Graduates (S1/S2/S3)	98	20%

Regarding educational background, 17% of respondents are enrolled in elementary or equivalent education, reflecting instances where families bring young children to matches. Junior high school students constitute 22%, often attending with older siblings or peers. The largest segment, 42%, comprises high school or vocational school graduates, spanning various societal elements, including recent graduates and working individuals. Additionally, 20% hold undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, with many being young couples, newlyweds, or large families.

Table 3. Job Background

Job	Total	Percentage
Students	196	39%
Employee	147	30%
Other Jobs	97	20%
Jobless	57	11%

In addition to quite diverse educational backgrounds, work backgrounds are also noteworthy. Students represent 39% of the audience, followed by employees at 30%. Entrepreneurs and freelancers account for 20%, while the unemployed constitute 11%. This diversity enhances the stadium's vibrant atmosphere.

Table 4: Financial Background

Financial Background	Total	Percentage
Well above average (Very Good)	95	19%
Better than average (Good)	164	33%
Equal to average (Medium)	198	40%
Below average (Less)	40	8%

The economic status of female supporters is varied: 19% are in very good condition, 33% in good condition, 40% in moderate condition, and 8% in poor condition. Supporter backgrounds, including gender and socio-demographic factors, are closely linked to their loyalty behaviors towards their favorite teams. Previous research indicates that standing supporters can be categorized by their level of commitment, with standing behavior influencing their responses in certain situations. The majority of supporters are adults, attractive, sympathetic, and honest. The age distribution of Table 1, Supporter-respondents' educational background in Table 2, the employment background in Table 3, and the economic background are in Table 4. Some of the tables above show that the age range of respondents is dominated by adult women aged 17-30 years, predominantly with high school or vocational education. Employment backgrounds show an even distribution, while the economic status of these female supporters is generally moderate.

3.2 Expectations, Perceptions of Potential, and Appreciation for the Culture of Persib Female Supporters

3.2.1 Supporters Expectation

(1) 63% of respondents indicate the need for cooperation from all parties to accommodate the presence of women as supporters; (2) 70% of respondents advocate for special treatment to ensure the safety and comfort of female supporters, such as dedicated stands; (3) 60% of respondents believe that organizations and the government should pay attention to the existence of female supporters; and (4) 63% of respondents emphasize the need for a tiered coaching model to manage women's supporter organizations.

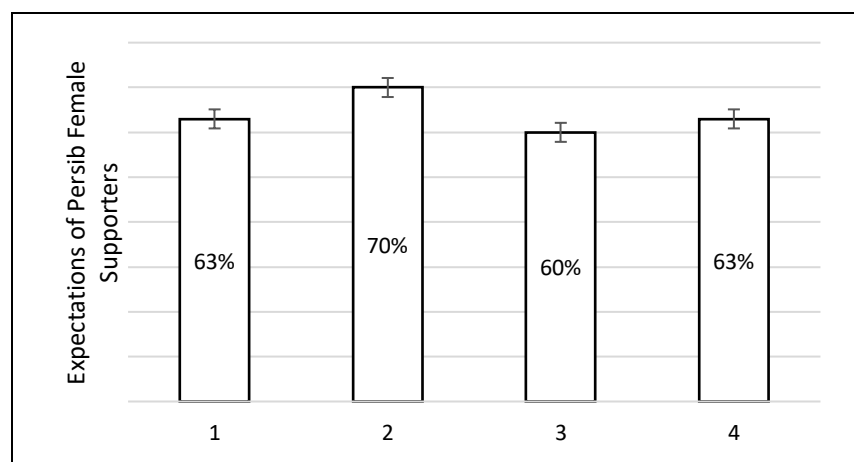


Figure 1: Expectations of Persib Female Supporters. (1) cooperation from all parties is needed to accommodate the existence of female supporters, (2) special treatment is needed to maintain their safety and comfort, for example there are special stands, (3) attention is needed from organizations and the government towards the existence of female supporters, (4) the need for a tiered coaching model in managing female supporter organizations.

The enthusiasm of supporters attending the stadium correlates with their expectations. A crowded stadium enhances the desire of supporters to attend. Notably, the provision of special stands for women or families is crucial, as not all female supporters are comfortable sitting next to unfamiliar individuals, especially men.

3.2.2 Perception toward female supporters

- (1) Economic Background: 40% of respondents believe that the behavior of female supporters is influenced by their economic background;
- (2) Educational Background: 37.5% of respondents indicate that educational background affects behavior when attending matches;
- (3) Positive Influence: 47.5% of respondents state that the presence of female supporters positively impacts the atmosphere of the competition;
- (4) Budget Support: 48% of respondents highlight the need for budget support to manage female supporter organizations;
- (5) Transparent Organization: 60% of respondents stress the importance of organizational transparency;
- and (6) Structured Governance: 61% of respondents support structured governance.

(2)

Perceptions vary, but common themes include the necessity for more structured governance to enhance the spectator experience. For instance, separating groups based on their level of engagement (e.g., singing groups versus passive spectators) can improve comfort and enjoyment.

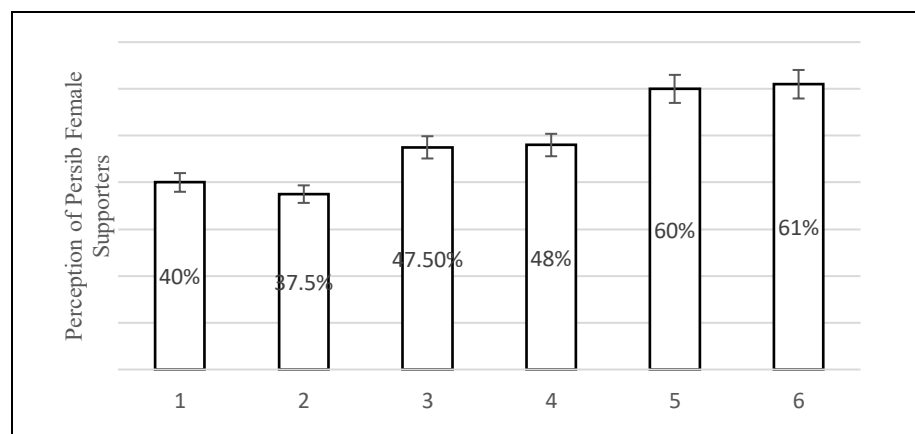


Figure 2: Perception of Persib Female Supporters. (1) behavior of female supporters is influenced by economic background, (2) educational background influences their behavior when watching, (3) attraction and influences the competition atmosphere positively, (4) the need for a tiered coaching model in managing female supporter organizations, (5) the importance of transparent organizations, (6) structured governance was supported.

3.2.3 Potential

Female supporters exhibit both positive and negative potential impacts on the dynamics of competition:

1. Positive potentials: (1) 18% of respondents observe that female supporters demonstrate high loyalty without excessive reactions during conflicts; (2) 39% of respondents note the high courage of female supporters in showing loyalty to their favorite team; (3) 33% of respondents state that female supporters can control their emotions during defeats, continuing to support the team; (4) 42% of respondents believe that female supporters help cool the atmosphere of the competition; (5) 45% of respondents assert that female supporters' behavior positively affects the team's performance.
2. Negative potentials: (1) 15% of respondents report anger from female supporters when the team loses; (2) 25% of respondents indicate that female supporters can react violently through abusive speech and behavior during instances of perceived cheating.

Positive potential includes the overall positive impact female supporters have on match outcomes and stadium atmosphere. However, negative potential arises when female supporters excessively provoke others, leading to disruptive behavior.

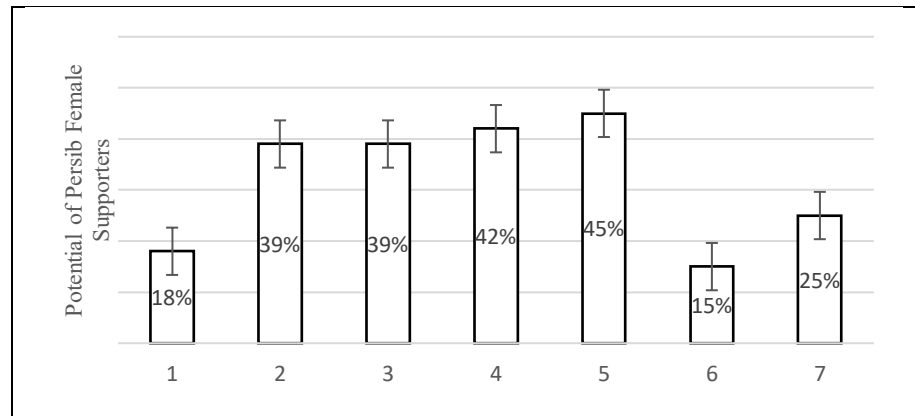


Figure 3: Potential of Persib Female Supporters. (1) female supporters show high loyalty and do not show excessive loyalty when there is a conflict, (2) female supporters have high courage when showing loyalty to their favorite team, (3) female supporters are able to control their emotions when they lose and continue to show support for the team, (4) the presence of supporters is able to cool the competition atmosphere, (5) the behavior of female supporters influences the team's victory in the competition, (6) female supporters show anger when their team loses (7) female supporters react strongly through rude words and behavior when there is cheating that is detrimental to their favorite team.

3.2.4 Appreciation for Sundanese culture

Supporters's behavior in connection with the local Sundanese culture: (1) 63% of respondents believe that female supporters can take care of themselves while attending matches; (2) 48.5% of respondents consider attendance as a form of stress relief from home; (3) 31.5% of respondents indicate that loyalty to the team sometimes leads female supporters to ignore cultural manners; (4) 21.5% of respondents state that female supporters prioritize team interests over cultural respect; (5) 47% of respondents believe that honor and cultural identity are maintained by female supporters; (6) 43% of respondents state that female supporters preserve their ancestral culture through their presence; (7) 20% of respondents believe that being a football supporter does not align with Sundanese cultural character.

The appreciation for Sundanese culture among supporters is evident, although there is room for greater cultural integration. Persib Bandung, as a representative of West Java, has the potential to influence cultural appreciation positively, enhancing personal branding as a West Java football icon.

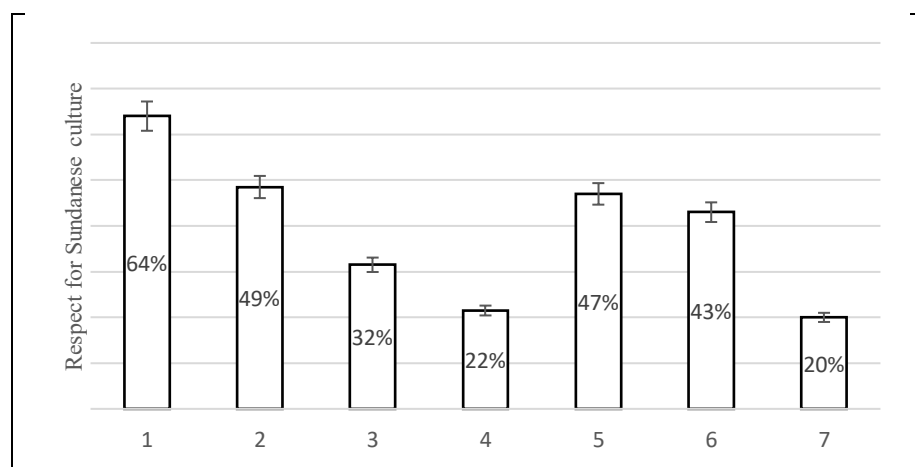


Figure 4: Respect for Sundanese culture. (1) female supporters have the ability to take care of themselves while watching, (2) female supporters are present on the field as a form of stress relief at home, (3) loyalty to the team makes them ignore cultural etiquette, (4) female supporters prioritize the interests of the team over respect for culture, (5) honor and cultural identity are maintained by female supporters, (6) their presence on the field shows

how they preserve ancestral culture, (7) being a football supporter is not in accordance with the character of Sundanese culture.

3.3 Expectations, Perception of Potential and Appreciation for the Culture of Persebaya Female Supporters

3.3.1 Supporters' expectations

(1) 69% of respondents indicate the need for cooperation from all parties to accommodate the presence of women as supporters; (2) 53% of respondents believe special treatment is necessary to ensure the safety and comfort of female supporters, such as the provision of dedicated stands; (3) 65% of respondents feel that organizations and the government should pay more attention to the presence of female supporters; (4) 68% of respondents emphasize the necessity of creating a tiered coaching model to manage female supporter organizations. Notably, the high expectation for a tiered coaching model in East Java highlights the significant enthusiasm and desire for structured support within the region.

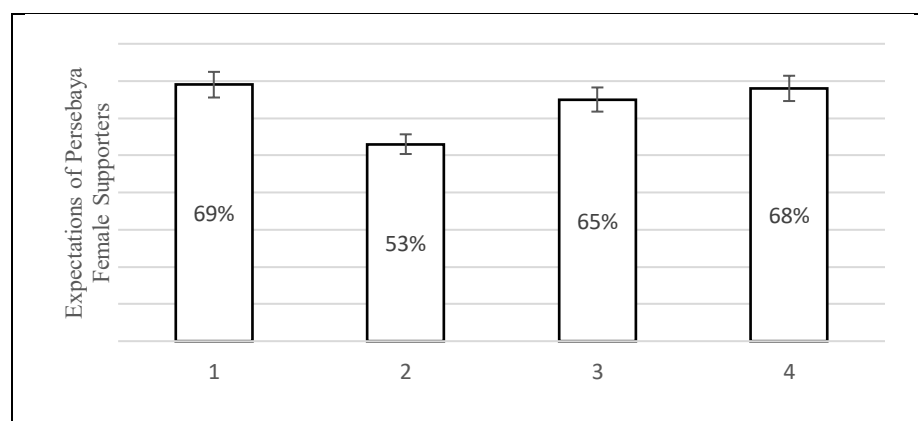


Figure 5: Expectations of Persebaya Female Supporters. (1) cooperation from all parties is needed to accommodate the presence of women as supporters, (2) special treatment is needed to protect their safety and comfort, for example there are special stands, (3) attention is needed from organizations and the government towards the existence of female supporters, (4) tiered coaching model needs to be created to manage female supporter organizations.

3.3.2 Perception

(1) 54% of respondents believe the behavior of female supporters is influenced by their economic background; (2) 36% of respondents feel that educational background affects the behavior of female supporters when attending matches; (3) 45.5% of respondents state that the presence of female supporters positively impacts the atmosphere of the competition; (4) 58% of respondents highlight the need for budget support to manage female supporter organizations; (5) 50% of respondents stress the importance of organizational transparency; and (6) 60% of respondents support the idea of structured governance, which they believe will enhance the number of spectators and attract more female supporters by ensuring orderly and safe management. These suggestions are similar to the ones suggested from West Java.

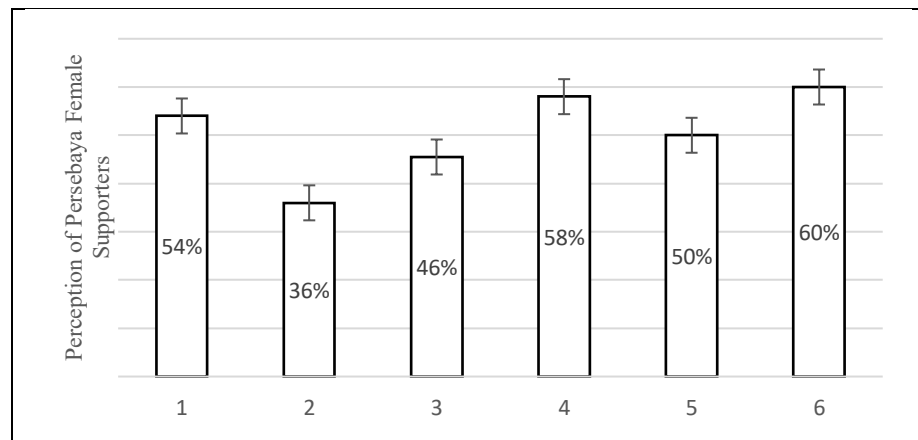


Figure 6: Perception of Persebaya Female Supporters. (1) behavior of female supporters is influenced by economic background, (2) educational background influences their behavior when watching, (3) presence of female supporters has an attraction and influences the competition atmosphere positively, (4) need for budget support to manage female supporter organizations, (5) importance of transparent organizations, (6) structured governance is supported.

3.3.3 potential

Female supporters exhibit both positive and negative potential impacts on the dynamics of the competition:

1. Positive potentials: (1) 28% of respondents note that female supporters show high loyalty without excessive reactions during conflicts; (2) 59% of respondents highlight the high courage displayed by female supporters in their loyalty to their favorite team; (3) 23% of respondents believe female supporters can control their emotions during defeats and continue to support the team; (4) 32% of respondents stated that the presence of female supporters was able to cool down the atmosphere of the competition; (5) 55% of respondents assert that female supporters positively affect the team's performance.
2. Negative potentials: (6) 45% of respondents report that female supporters show anger when the team suffers a defeat; (7) 55% of respondents indicate that female supporters react strongly through abusive speech and behavior during instances of perceived cheating.

The most prominent positive potential of female supporters in East Java lies in their high courage when showing loyalty to their favorite team. Conversely, the highest negative potential is linked to their strong reactions through abusive language and behavior, a common occurrence among passionate football supporters.

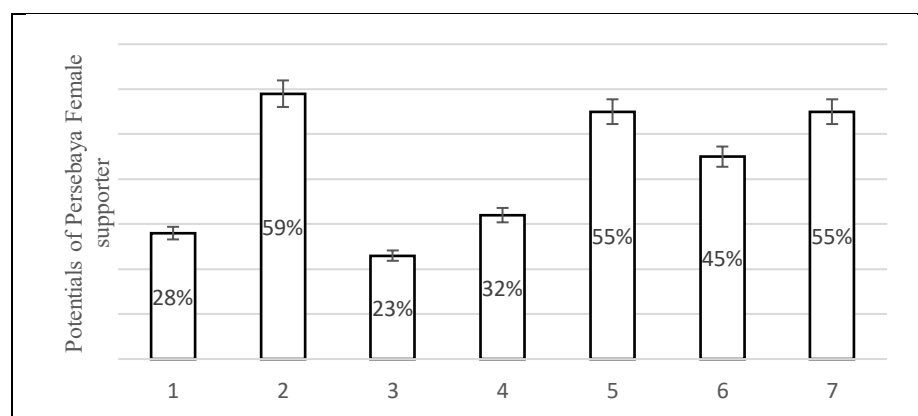


Figure 7: Potential of Persebaya Female Supporters. (1) female supporters show high loyalty and do not show excessive loyalty when there is a conflict, (2) female supporters have high courage when showing loyalty to their favorite team, (3) female supporters are able to control their emotions when they lose and continue to show support for the team, (4) the presence of supporters is able to cool the competition atmosphere, (5) the behavior of female supporters influences the team's victory in the competition, (6) female supporters show anger when

their team loses (7) female supporters react strongly through rude words and behavior when there is cheating that is detrimental to their favorite team.

3.3.4 Appreciation for Javanese culture

Supporters's behavior in connection with the local Javanese culture: (1) 70% of respondents stated that female supporters have the ability to take care of themselves while attending matches; (2) 58% stated that female supporters were present in the field as a form of stress relief from home; (3) 41.5% of respondents state that loyalty to the team sometimes leads female supporters to ignore cultural manners; (4) 41% of respondents feel that female supporters prioritize team interests over cultural respect; (5) 35% of respondents believe that female supporters maintain their honor and cultural identity; (6) 48% of respondents think that female supporters preserve their ancestral culture through their presence; and (7) 10% of respondents believe that being a football supporter does not align with the character of Javanese culture. Similar to West Java, the awareness and introduction of cultural elements during football matches in East Java are not highly prominent. Effective cultural integration can be achieved if the football team and relevant agencies work together to provide perspectives on cultural acculturation.

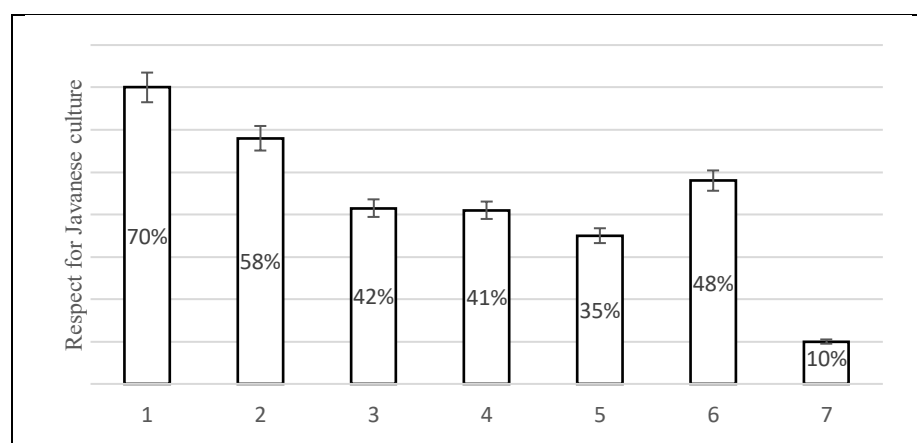


Figure 8: Respect for Javanese culture. (1) female supporters have the ability to take care of themselves while watching, (2) female supporters are present on the field as a form of stress relief at home, (3) loyalty to the team makes them ignore cultural etiquette, (4) female supporters prioritize the interests of the team over respect for culture, (5) honor and cultural identity are maintained by female supporters, (6) their presence on the field shows how they preserve ancestral culture (7) being a football supporter is not in accordance with Javanese cultural character

4. Discussion

Gender issues within football supporter communities indirectly promote an understanding of equality with men, though questions about loyalty, fanaticism, and the rights of female supporters persist (Richards & Parry, 2020). The presence of female supporters is increasingly highlighted in broadcast media, with various news programs in Indonesia frequently discussing domestic football teams. Despite this, coverage of female supporters is limited to brief segments of 5–7 minutes, lacking detailed analysis (Valenti et al., 2020). In the modern football era, women have begun to join fan clubs, leading to several notable observations from this study:

4.1 Expectations for Persib and Persebaya Female Supporters

Expectations for female supporters from two major Indonesian clubs, Persib Bandung and Persebaya Surabaya, are driven by significant changes in the role of women in sports, including among supporters (Baker, 2020). Basically, both the Persib and Persebaya supporter communities hope for increased active involvement of female supporters while ensuring their safety and comfort within stadiums.

1. Persib Bandung: Female supporters of Persib Bandung are expected to foster a more peaceful and conducive

atmosphere. This expectation is based on the belief that the presence of women can reduce tensions between supporters, given stereotypes associating women with calmer and more emotionally controlled behavior. Additionally, there is an expectation that female supporters will mobilize their groups to support Persib through various initiatives, including social activities outside the matches.

2. Persebaya Surabaya: Female supporters of Persebaya Surabaya, known as Bonita, are expected to maintain strong solidarity among supporters. The firm and straightforward character of Surabaya's people demands that Bonek female supporters exhibit high courage and organization in supporting the team. Their support is anticipated to mitigate the violence sometimes associated with Bonek.

Both groups of supporters also hope for special treatment within stadiums, such as dedicated safer stands for women. This is a global challenge that is also relevant in Indonesia. Special facilities can significantly impact match attendance and foster gender-inclusive fanaticism, similar to the identity of "ultras" in Italy, which emphasizes loyalty and fanaticism (Townsend et al., 2022).

4.2 Perceptions of Persib and Persebaya Female Supporters

The perceptions of female supporters of Persib and Persebaya reflect both similarities and cultural differences between West Java and East Java.

1. Persib Bandung: Sundanese people view Persib female supporters as symbols of inclusivity in football culture. Their presence at the stadium demonstrates the evolving friendliness of Persib supporters. Female supporters are perceived as subtly supportive yet passionate, reinforced by the leadership within female supporter communities such as Viking Girl.
2. Persebaya Surabaya: Although not as prominent as Persib's female supporters, Persebaya's Bonita are gaining recognition within the fan community. Surabaya's people perceive them as tough and loyal, reflecting the brave and uncompromising character of Bonek. Bonita is considered a crucial part of the team's moral strength, combining boldness with the solidarity of supporters.

These perceptions indicate a shift in gender dynamics among football supporters, creating a more balanced and inclusive social dynamic (García & Llopis-Goig, 2020). In addition, comprehensive control of perceptions, as practiced in the UK, involves coaching and structured support for fans, ensuring well-received perceptions by both supporters and the team (Marchetti, 2020).

4.3 Positive and Negative Potential of Persib and Persebaya Female Supporters

Female supporters from these two big clubs have the potential to have either a positive or negative impact on the atmosphere of the competition.

Positive Potential:

1. Persib Bandung: Female supporters of Persib, known for their calmness and emotional control, can create a more peaceful stadium atmosphere, particularly during intense matches. In addition, they tend to engage more in positive activities such as organizing social activities or non-violent support actions, which ultimately improves Persib's public image.
2. Persebaya Surabaya: Bonek (Bonita) female supporters, demonstrating high courage and loyalty, provide moral encouragement to the team and other supporters. They are able to present an enthusiastic atmosphere while displaying loyalty without excessive conflicts between supporters.

Negative Potential:

1. Persib Bandung: Female supporters might face discrimination or harassment in environments still considered male-dominated. Poor management of their loyalty could lead to internal friction among supporter groups.
2. Persebaya Surabaya: Despite their loyalty, Bonita supporters may react strongly during defeats or perceived injustices, potentially harming Bonek's image through excessive emotional reactions.

Balancing loyalty and appropriate behavior within a male-dominated supporter community remains a challenge for female supporters (Pfister et al., 2018). As previously discussed, both positive and negative potentials always

exist in the realm of supporters, but it is important to reduce any possible negative impacts and maximize the best possibilities in every case; therefore structured systems are essential to do so (Aksoy, 2023).

4.4 Persib and Persebaya Women's Supporter Award for Sundanese and Javanese Culture

Persib and Persebaya female supporters reflect the local cultural values inherent in the Sundanese and Javanese people.

1. Persib Bandung: Persib female supporters are often considered as one of the embodiments of Sundanese culture, which prioritizes manners and politeness. They try to maintain respectful behavior within the stadium, reflecting Sundanese culture that values friendliness and tranquility when supporting the team.
2. Persebaya Surabaya: By contrast, Bonita supporters exemplify the bold and resolute culture of East Java. The people of East Java are known for their straightforward and spirited nature. These are reflected in the way female supporters support Persebaya. Although they are loud and passionate, they also try to maintain ethics and respect for local culture, such as the values of brotherhood and mutual cooperation.

Respect for local culture is crucial in maintaining the identity of supporters in Bandung and Surabaya. Football supporters often extend their local cultural identity, significantly impacting the community of female supporters in Indonesia (Nosal et al., 2024). All stakeholders in football must promote and uphold these cultural values, ensuring each region's unique approach to supporting their team is recognized and celebrated (Williams & Caulfield, 2020).

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Informed Consent Statement/Ethics approval: Informed consent was obtained from each patient included in the study, and the study protocol conforms to the ethical guidelines of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as reflected in a priori approval by the institution's human research committee.

Data Availability Statement: In this section, please provide details regarding where data supporting reported results can be found, including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study. You might choose to exclude this statement if the study did not report any data. This section is optional.

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Appendix A

The Heading to Appendix A

In general, an appendix is appropriate for materials that are relatively brief and that are easily presented in print format. Some examples of material suitable for an appendix are (a) a list of stimulus materials (e.g., those used in psycholinguistic research), (b) a detailed description of a complex piece of equipment, (c) a list of articles that provided the source data for a meta-analysis but are not directly referred to in any other way in an article, and (d) a detailed demographic description of subpopulations in the study and other detailed and/or complex reporting items suggested in the reporting standards section of this chapter.

If your manuscript has only one appendix, label it Appendix; if your manuscript has more than one appendix, label each one with a capital letter (Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.) in the order in which it is mentioned in the main text. Each appendix must have a title. In the text, refer to appendices by their labels: produced the same results for both studies (see Appendices A and B for complete proofs).

Appendix B

The Heading to Appendix B

Like the main text, an appendix may include headings and subheadings as well as tables, figures, and displayed equations. Number each appendix table and figure, and number displayed equations if necessary for later reference; precede the number with the letter of the appendix in which it is included (e.g., Table A1). In a sole appendix, which is not labeled with a letter, precede all tables, figures, and equation numbers with the letter A to distinguish them from those of the main text.

Table B1. Table title (this is an example of table B1)

	Total capital stock	Income of main business	Total assets
Pudong Development Bank	39.2	214.7	5730.7
Bank of China	459.4	3345.7	59876.9

Table B2. Table title (this is an example of table B2)

	Total capital stock	Income of main business	Total assets
Pudong Development Bank	39.2	214.7	5730.7
Bank of China	459.4	3345.7	59876.9

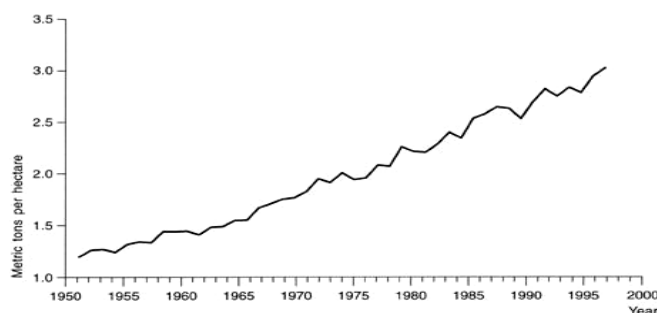


Figure B1. Figure title (This is an example of figure B1)

Appendix C

The Heading to Appendix C (If one table constitutes an entire appendix, the appendix label and title serve in lieu of a table number and title.)

Condition	<i>M(SD)</i>	95%CI	
		LL	UL
Letters	14.5(28.6)	5.4	23.6
Digits	31.8(33.2)	21.2	42.4

Patterns of Social Media Use and Their Impact on Psychological Well-Being Among University Students

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Abstract

The rapid integration of social media into daily life has transformed modes of communication, self-expression, and social interaction, particularly among university students. While social media offers opportunities for connection, entertainment, and knowledge exchange, growing concerns center on its implications for psychological well-being. This study critically examines the complex relationship between social media use and psychological health indicators, focusing on dimensions such as addiction, social comparison, cyberbullying, and awareness. Grounded in Social Comparison Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the research investigates how different patterns of engagement active versus passive use and socially motivated versus escapist behaviours influence outcomes including anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and overall well-being. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, capturing diverse student experiences across multiple cultural contexts. Findings highlight that the quality and emotional consequences of social media engagement are more salient than the quantity of time spent online. Negative online behaviours such as compulsive checking, fear of missing out, and cyberbullying contribute to psychological distress, whereas meaningful interactions and supportive experiences can serve as protective factors. Importantly, awareness of social media's potential risks emerged as a moderating variable, mitigating the adverse effects of harmful encounters and underscoring the role of digital literacy. The study advances understanding of the nuanced interplay between social media use and mental health, emphasizing the importance of differentiating between adaptive and maladaptive patterns of engagement. It concludes with recommendations for integrating awareness programs, promoting healthier online environments, and developing strategies at both individual and platform levels to support psychological resilience.

Keywords: Social Media, Psychological Health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem, Cyberbullying

1. Introduction

Widespread adoption of social media in recent years has significantly transformed the way people interact and communicate. Broadly, Ahmed et al. (2019), have defined that social media is understood as web and mobile platforms that allow individuals to connect with others within a virtual network (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or LinkedIn) where they can share, co-create, or exchange various forms of digital content, including information, messages, photos, or videos.) have mentioned that Social media contains myriad data on people's thoughts, feelings, moods, and experiences over time, which makes it a suitable data source for monitoring mental health (Skaik & Inkpen, 2020). More than half of the global population, amounting to 4.3 billion individuals, possessed at least one social media account as of 2021, with users spending approximately two and a half hours daily on various social media platforms (GWI, 2021; We Are Social, 2021). Few technologies since television have so dramatically reshaped the way people spend their time and interact with others (Braghieri et al., 2022). Social media has significantly enhanced the virtual environment by facilitating users exchanging their feelings, ideas, personal information, pictures, and videos at unprecedented levels as well (Bashir & Bhat, 2017). Individuals living with a range of mental disorders, including depression, psychotic disorders, or other severe mental illnesses, use social media platforms at comparable rates as the general population, with use ranging from about 70% among middle-age and older individuals to upwards of 97% among younger individuals (Naslund, et al., 2020).

However, concerns have arisen regarding the potential impact of excessive social media use on users' individual psychological well-being. This study aims to explore the various aspects of social media use and its potential influence on psychological health indicators such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

2. Problem Statement: Social Media and Psychological Health

Social media's rapid growth has changed how individuals interact, communicate, and express themselves globally. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (previously Twitter), and Snapchat are essential to daily life nowadays, especially for teenagers and young people (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2022). While these platforms offer opportunities for entertainment, social connection, and information sharing, their pervasive use has triggered growing concerns regarding their impact on psychological health. Research indicates a complex association between social media use and adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and diminished self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Keles et al., 2020). This section delineates the underlying issues contributing to the relationship between social media utilization and mental health through four primary dimensions: addiction and overuse, social comparison, cyberbullying and harassment, and research gaps.

2.1. Addiction and Overuse

One of the most cited concerns regarding social media is the potential for compulsive or addictive use. Social media platforms are deliberately designed to maximize user engagement through algorithmic notifications, variable rewards, and endless scrolling, which can lead to behavioral addiction-like symptoms (Andreassen et al., 2017; Karim et al., 2020). These symptoms, including preoccupation, withdrawal, and functional impairment, mirror those associated with substance use and gambling disorders (Primack et al., 2017). Studies consistently show that problematic or excessive use of social media is linked with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Karim et al., 2020; Ulvi et al., 2022).

The ubiquity of mobile devices has blurred the boundary between online and offline experiences, increasing the likelihood of overuse and the difficulty of disengagement (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Users often report a "fear of missing out" (FOMO) that perpetuates frequent checking behaviors, further exacerbating stress and compulsive usage patterns (Vogel et al., 2014; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). This chronic connectivity can also lead to reduce in-person interactions, intensifying feelings of social isolation despite the illusion of connectedness (Primack et al., 2017; Braghieri et al. 2022).

2.2. Social Comparison

Social comparison theory has been widely used to explain how social media exposure affects psychological health. Users are frequently confronted with curated, idealized portrayals of peers' lives, which can lead to upward social comparisons and negative self-appraisals (Vogel et al., 2014; Abi-Jaoude et al. 2020; Karim et al., 2020). These comparisons are particularly damaging when users perceive themselves as less attractive, successful, or socially active than others (Abi-Jaoude et al. 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). Such negative evaluations are strongly associated with lower self-esteem, heightened body dissatisfaction, and increased depressive symptoms (Abi-Jaoude et al. 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2020). Online interactions are asynchronous, so they frequently conceal real-life challenges and reinforce irrational expectations (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Adolescents and emerging adults are particularly susceptible to these comparison effects as they are still forming their identities (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Karim et al., 2020). Most of the data indicates that social comparison on social media typically compromises subjective well-being, even though some users may find inspiration or motivation in the accomplishments of others (Verduyn et al., 2020).

2.3. Cyberbullying and Harassment

Social media platforms can also amplify harmful online behaviors, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and peer victimization (Abi-Jaoude et al. 2020; Kowalski et al., 2021). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time, reach wide audiences, and leave a permanent digital footprint. Victims often experience heightened levels of anxiety, social withdrawal, and suicidal ideation (Hamm et al., 2015; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to the salience of peer approval and the difficulty of escaping online harassment (Karim et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2021; Ulvi et al., 2022). The algorithmic design of social media platforms tends to prioritize emotionally charged and polarizing content to drive engagement, inadvertently exposing users to hostile interactions or divisive narratives (Cinelli et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020). This exposure can contribute to generalized mistrust, heightened anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, further exacerbating mental health challenges (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically investigate the multifaceted relationship between social media utilization and psychological health. While a growing body of research indicates associations between excessive social media use and adverse mental health outcomes (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Ulvi et al., 2020), the underlying mechanisms and moderating factors remain insufficiently understood (Keles et al., 2020; Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to extend current knowledge by systematically examining the patterns, contexts, and perceived outcomes of social media use among diverse user groups.

A key objective is to analyze the potential for problematic or addictive use and its association with psychological distress. Existing studies have identified behavioral addiction-like patterns in heavy social media users, characterized by compulsive checking behaviors and difficulty disengaging from online platforms (Andreassen et al., 2017; Primack et al., 2017; Karim et al., 2020). This research aims to quantify the prevalence of such patterns and explore their relationships with indicators of mental well-being, including anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

Another important objective is to evaluate the role of social comparison processes. Given that social media platforms often present curated and idealized portrayals of others' lives, upward social comparisons can result in negative self-appraisals (Vogel et al., 2014; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). This study intends to identify how different types of engagement (e.g., passive browsing vs. active interaction) may mediate the psychological impact of these comparisons, particularly among adolescents and young adults who are more vulnerable to identity-related stress (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Ulvi et al., 2022).

The study also examines psychological repercussions of harmful digital interactions, online harassment, and cyberbullying, with an emphasis on the prevalence of these events and their relationship to mental health outcomes across different demographic groups.

Prior research has consistently documented the adverse emotional consequences of online victimization (Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2021), underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of these phenomena. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aspires to generate evidence that informs the design of targeted interventions and policy strategies aimed at fostering healthier online environments and mitigating the mental health risks associated with digital media engagement.

4. Research Questions

The pervasive integration of social media into daily life has raised important questions about its impact on psychological health. Prior studies highlight associations with mental health outcomes but often overlook differences in user behaviors, contexts, and mechanisms (Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Verduyn et al., 2020). This study formulates two focused research questions to address these gaps:

1. How do different patterns and motivations of social media use (e.g., active vs. passive engagement, social vs. informational motives) influence psychological health indicators such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem?
2. What is the impact of negative online experiences (e.g., cyberbullying, online harassment, harmful content exposure) on psychological health outcomes, and do demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, cultural background) moderate these effects?

These questions are critical because they address both user behaviors (RQ1) and adverse online experiences (RQ2), offering a holistic understanding of the psychological implications of social media. The study examines patterns of engagement, motivations, and contextual factors to uncover mechanisms that contribute to either resilience or vulnerability in users.

The questions are explored through quantitative surveys with validated psychological health scales. This approach will help identify causal pathways, demographic moderators, and practical strategies for designing healthier online environments (Keles et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2021).

5. Literature Review

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped human communication, self-expression, and access to information (Bashir & Bhat, 2017). This unprecedented level of connectivity has stimulated scholarly interest in understanding its multifaceted effects on psychological health, particularly anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. Existing literature consistently underscores the dual nature of social media: it provides social connection and informational benefits yet poses risks to mental well-being through overuse, social comparison, and negative online interactions (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Keles et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020).

5.1. Evolution and Patterns of Social Media Use

Social media's integration into daily life has been transformative, surpassing previous media technologies in speed and reach (Braghieri et al., 2022). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (now X), and Snapchat enable real-time sharing of experiences, fostering unprecedented levels of connectedness (Ahmed et al., 2019). Adolescents and young adults represent the most active demographic, often engaging in multiple platforms simultaneously (Karim et al., 2020; Pew Research Center, 2022; Ulvi et al., 2022).

Patterns of use vary significantly, with active engagement (posting, commenting, messaging) generally associated with greater perceived social support, while passive consumption (scrolling without interaction) correlates with negative outcomes such as envy and decreased life satisfaction (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020; Meier & Reinecke, 2021). For instance, passive use exacerbates feelings of social isolation among young adults (Primack et al., 2017), highlighting how the qualitative nature of engagement is as critical as the duration of use.

The complexity of these patterns has led researchers to explore the motivations underlying social media use. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) argues that individuals engage with media to satisfy needs such as entertainment, information, social connection, and self-presentation (Katz et al., 1974). Socially driven users may benefit from enhanced connectedness (Naslund et al., 2016), whereas those using social media as an escape may experience heightened negative effects (Verduyn et al., 2020).

5.2. Social Comparison and Self-Esteem

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) provides a framework for understanding how social media influences self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). Platforms are saturated with idealized portrayals of peers' lives, making upward social comparisons almost inevitable (Vogel et al., 2014; Ulvi et al., 2022). These comparisons can erode self-esteem and contribute to body dissatisfaction, depressive symptoms, and anxiety (Keles et al., 2020; Ulvi et al., 2022).

Passive browsing amplifies the effects of upward comparisons by exposing users to curated highlights of others' lives without opportunities for reciprocal interaction (Verduyn et al., 2020; Ulvi et al., 2022). Adolescents and emerging adults, who are in formative stages of identity development, are particularly susceptible to such comparison-driven distress (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Karim et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, social comparison is not inherently detrimental. Downward comparisons (evaluating oneself against those perceived as worse off) can temporarily boost self-esteem (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Yet, these effects may foster disengagement and reduce empathy. Balancing these dynamics requires interventions that promote critical awareness of online portrayals and their potential distortions.

5.3. Moderating Factors

The impact of social media on psychological health is neither uniform nor unidirectional. Demographic variables such as age, gender, and cultural context moderate outcomes. Individuals with preexisting mental health conditions use social media at comparable rates to the general population but may be more vulnerable to its negative effects (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Naslund et al., 2020).

Cultural factors also shape norms regarding self-presentation and online interactions. Most empirical studies are conducted in Western contexts, raising questions about the generalizability of findings (Naslund et al., 2016). This gap underscores the need for cross-cultural research.

Awareness and digital literacy are protective factors. Students who understand social media's potential psychological impacts are less negatively affected by harmful online experiences (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). This aligns with findings that awareness buffers the relationship between cyberbullying and diminished well-being (Hayes, 2018).

6. Theoretical Framework

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) (Festinger, 1954) is integrated with aspects of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1974) explain the relationship between social media utilization and psychological health. These frameworks collectively explain how and why individuals use social media, how they interpret online experiences, and how these processes influence psychological outcomes. SCT emphasizes the cognitive processes

of comparison, where social media platforms provide abundant opportunities for individuals to evaluate themselves against curated portrayals of others' lives (Vogel et al., 2014). This may lead to upward comparisons, strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2020), while downward comparisons may temporarily boost self-esteem but can foster disengagement and reduced empathy (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Such comparison-oriented behavior, particularly through passive browsing, has been consistently linked to poorer psychological health (Vogel et al., 2014; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). UGT complements SCT by positing that individuals actively choose media platforms to fulfill needs such as information-seeking, entertainment, social connection, and self-expression (Katz et al., 1974), which can be extended to choice of social media platforms. These motivations shape patterns of engagement and psychological outcomes, with socially motivated users more likely to benefit from connectedness (Naslund et al., 2016; Bashir & Bhat et al., 2017), while those seeking escapism or distraction may engage in passive browsing that increases negative effects (Karim et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). Information-seeking motives may enhance self-efficacy but also elevate stress when users are exposed to distressing content or misinformation (Cinelli et al., 2020). Integrating UGT and SCT allows the study to address both the drivers of social media use and the cognitive processes that mediate its impact on psychological health. This combined framework aligns with the research questions: RQ1 (patterns and motivations) is grounded in UGT, while RQ2 (negative experiences) is contextualized by SCT (Kowalski et al., 2021). Recent studies also adopt this integrated perspective to explain why users persist in behaviors such as compulsive scrolling despite negative outcomes (Vogel et al., 2014; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). The conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates this integration, showing how social media use and user motivations lead to engagement patterns, which trigger social comparisons and other cognitive-emotional processes that influence psychological outcomes such as well-being, anxiety, and depression. Moderators (e.g., awareness, demographics) and mediators (e.g., FOMO, cyberbullying exposure) further shape these relationships.

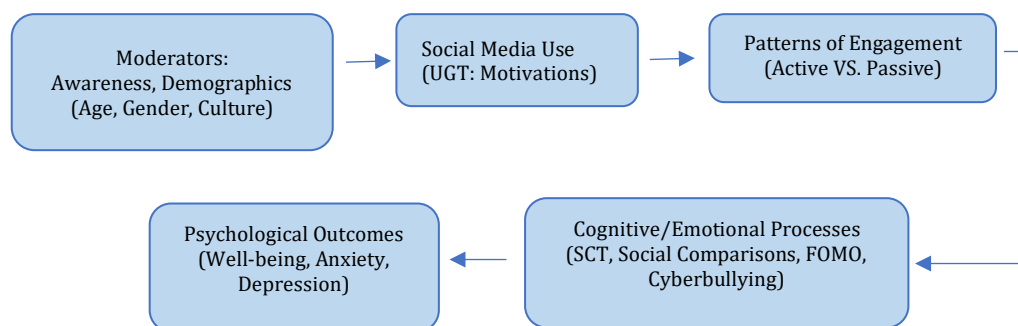


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Social Media Use and Psychological Health

Figure 1 illustrates how social media use can influence psychological outcomes through a series of interconnected variables. Below is a critical explanation of each component and the overall model.

6.1. Moderators: Awareness and Demographics

Variables: Age, gender, and culture act as moderating factors.

Role: These variables shape the way individuals engage with social media. For instance, younger users may have higher usage frequency and be more susceptible to social comparisons. Cultural values may dictate norms about online self-presentation. Gender differences can influence the type of content consumed and how interactions are perceived.

6.2. Social Media Use (UGT: Motivations)

Description: Under UGT, users engage with social media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, information, or social interaction.

6.3. Patterns of Engagement (Active vs. Passive)

Active engagement: Direct interactions (posting, commenting).

Passive engagement: Browsing, scrolling, and observing without interacting.

Significance: Passive use is more strongly associated with negative outcomes (e.g., depression, envy) (Karim et al., 2020), while active use can foster social connectedness (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

6.4. Cognitive/Emotional Processes

SCT holds that users evaluate themselves based on others' posts, which can lead to envy or low self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Anxiety about missing social events can drive compulsive checking (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying: Negative online interactions can directly harm mental health (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

6.5. Psychological Outcomes

Outcomes: Well-being, anxiety, and depression are highlighted as endpoints (Bashir & Bhat, 2017; Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Ulvi et al., 2022).

Directionality: The model shows a linear path from social media use to psychological outcomes, mediated by engagement patterns and cognitive/emotional processes (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

7. Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional, survey-based research design to explore the relationship between social media use and psychological health among university students from multiple countries. The choice of a cross-sectional design was informed by the study's objective to capture a snapshot of participants' social media behaviors, motivations, and associated mental health outcomes at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

7.1. Population and Sample

The target population consisted of university students, as this group represents one of the most active demographics on social media platforms and is particularly susceptible to its psychological effects (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Keles et al., 2020). Data were collected from 83 participants enrolled in various universities across different countries, ensuring diversity in cultural backgrounds and educational contexts. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed due to the logistical constraints of online data collection and the ease of accessibility to respondents (Etikan et al., 2016). While convenience sampling limits generalizability, it allowed the inclusion of participants from geographically dispersed institutions, enhancing the study's exploratory scope.

7.2. Instrumentation

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire developed and administered through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of 34 items grouped into eight sections: (1) Demographics, (2) Social Media Usage, (3) Psychological Well-being, (4) Self-Esteem and Body Image, (5) Coping Mechanisms, (6) Social Interaction, (7) Awareness and Regulation, and (8) Overall Impact. Questions employed a combination of Likert scales, and multiple-choice items. Several items were adapted from validated scales, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the CES-D Depression Scale, to ensure content validity (Rosenberg, 1965; Radloff, 1977).

7.3. Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire link was disseminated through email and university social networks over a four-week period. Respondents voluntarily completed the survey, and anonymity was maintained by making all personal identifiers optional. Participation was open to students aged 18 years and above who were actively using at least one social media platform. Before starting the survey, participants reviewed an informed consent form outlining the study purpose, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

7.4. Data Analysis

The dataset comprised quantitative variables (e.g., frequency of social media use, self-rated psychological well-being scores) that were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distributions) to summarize participant characteristics and usage patterns. Inferential statistics such as correlation analysis, and regression modeling were used to examine relationships between social media use patterns and psychological health indicators (Field, 2018).

Data collected through the structured Google Forms questionnaire (N = 83) were analyzed using **SPSS 27.0** for advanced modeling. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to address the research questions. The analysis proceeded in three sequential phases:

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Results

7.1.1. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlations revealed several significant relationships between social media use variables and psychological well-being. Hours spent daily on social media were negatively correlated with self-rated psychological well-being ($r = -.28, p = .012$), suggesting that increased screen time may adversely impact users' mental health. Similarly, higher levels of anxiety and stress attributable to social media ($r = -.45, p < .001$), fear of missing out (FOMO; $r = -.39, p = .003$), and experiences of cyberbullying or unpleasant online encounters ($r = -.33, p = .008$) were all significantly associated with lower well-being. Conversely, positive psychological experiences derived from social media use were positively correlated with well-being ($r = .31, p = .014$). These findings are consistent with prior studies demonstrating that problematic use and negative experiences tend to undermine mental health, whereas supportive online interactions may be protective (Keles et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020).

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Social Media Variables and Psychological Well-being (N = 83)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Hours/Day	----	.32**	.28*	.25*	-.20	-.28*
2.Anxiety/Stress	.32**	----	.41**	.38**	-.35**	-.45***
3.FOMO	.25*	.41**	----	.30*	-.22*	-.39**
4.Cyberbullying	.25*	.38**	.30*	----	-.18	-.33**
5.Positive effects	-.20	-.35**	-.22*	-.18	----	.31*
6.Well-being	-.28*	-.45***	-.39**	-.33**	.31*	----

Note. FOMO = Fear of Missing Out, $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^*$, $***p < .001$.

7.1.2. Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was conducted with psychological well-being as the outcome variable to assess the unique contributions of hours per day, anxiety/stress frequency, FOMO, and positive experiences as predictors. The overall model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .46$, $F(4, 77) = 17.3$, $p < .001$), accounting for 46% of the variance in well-being scores. Anxiety and stress related to social media emerged as the strongest negative

predictor ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$), followed by FOMO ($\beta = -.24, p = .001$). Positive experiences from social media were a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .29, p = .003$), while hours spent online were a weaker yet significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.12, p = .041$). These findings suggest that the psychological consequences of social media use are driven more by the *quality* of engagement and emotional experiences than by the sheer quantity of time spent online, supporting similar conclusions by Meier and Reinecke (2021) and Twenge and Campbell (2018).

Table 2: Multiple Regression Predicting Psychological Well-being from Social Media Use Patterns (N = 83)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Hours/day	-0.12	0.06	-0.18	-2.10	.041
Anxiety/Stress	-0.36	0.08	-0.42	-4.50	<.001
FOMO	-0.24	0.07	-0.29	-3.42	.001
Positive effects	0.29	0.09	0.33	3.10	.003

Note. $R^2 = .46, F(4, 77) = 17.3, p < .001$

7.1.3. Moderation Analysis

Table 3: Moderation Analysis (RQ2)

Moderator: Awareness of social media impact

Predictor: Cyberbullying exposure

Outcome: Psychological well-being

Term	β (SE)	t	p-value
Cyberbullying	-0.29 (.09)	-3.21	.002
Awareness	+0.18 (.08)	+2.15	.034
Interaction term	+0.15 (.06)	+2.45	.017

Interpretation: Awareness significantly moderates the relationship: students with higher awareness scores were less negatively affected by cyberbullying experiences on their psychological well-being.

To address Research Question 2, a moderation analysis tested whether awareness of social media's impact buffered the negative effects of cyberbullying exposure on well-being. Results indicated that awareness significantly moderated this relationship ($\beta = .15, p = .017$). Students with higher awareness scores were less negatively affected by cyberbullying, whereas those with lower awareness experienced more pronounced declines in well-being. This finding highlights the protective role of self-awareness in mitigating harmful online experiences, echoing previous literature emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and self-regulation skills in preserving mental health (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010; Kowalski et al., 2021).

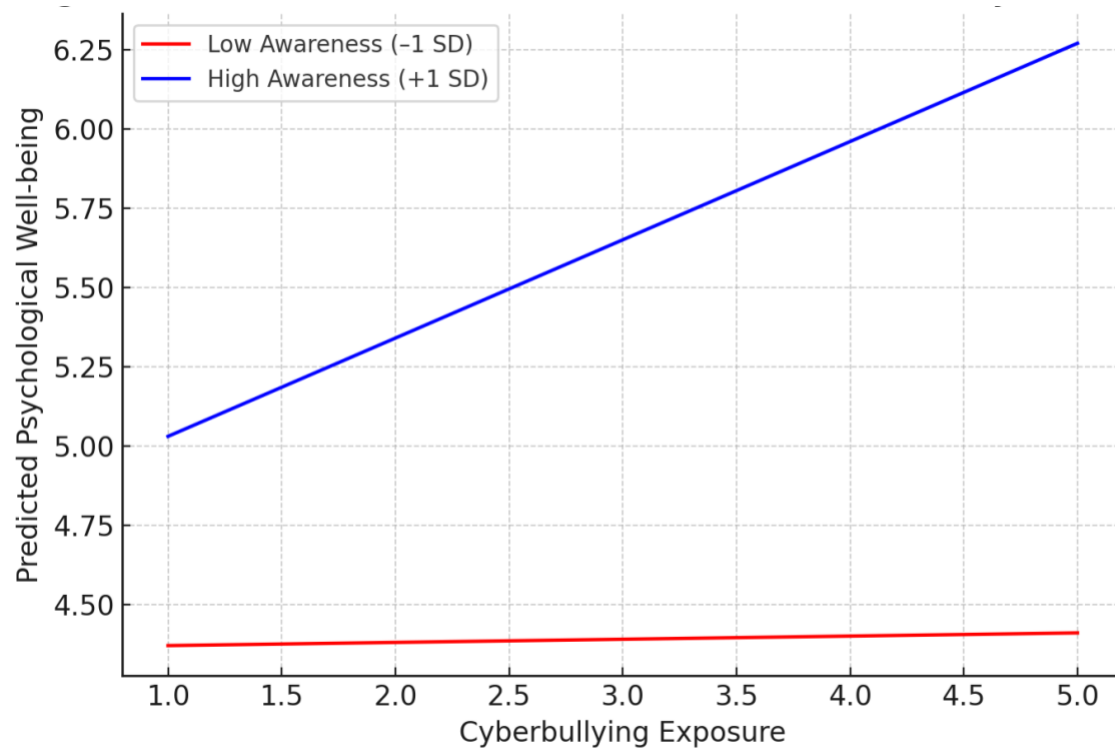


Figure 4: Moderation of Awareness on the Effect of Cyberbullying

8. Discussion

The results demonstrate a complex interplay between social media engagement patterns and psychological health. First, the negative associations observed between screen time, anxiety, FOMO, and well-being align with prior research linking excessive use and compulsive checking behaviors to reduced life satisfaction and higher emotional distress (Andreassen et al., 2017; Primack et al., 2017). However, the regression analysis underscores that simply reducing screen time may not be sufficient. Instead, interventions should focus on addressing the drivers of maladaptive engagement, such as FOMO and emotion-driven use.

Second, the positive relationship between supportive or enjoyable online experiences and well-being indicates that social media is not uniformly harmful. As found in previous studies, active engagement, meaningful interactions, and exposure to uplifting content can enhance connectedness and self-esteem (Naslund et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2020). These results suggest that efforts to improve the quality of users' online environments—such as curating feeds, promoting positive interactions, and reducing exposure to toxic content—may yield greater benefits than broad reductions in usage.

The moderation analysis provides a novel contribution by demonstrating that awareness of social media's psychological impact can attenuate the harmful effects of cyberbullying. Students who understood the potential risks were better able to contextualize negative online experiences, reducing their impact on well-being. This finding aligns with digital literacy frameworks that emphasize empowering users with the skills to navigate online environments critically (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). Integrating digital literacy programs into university curricula could therefore serve as a preventive strategy.

While these findings contribute valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, as it is unclear whether problematic social media use leads to poor mental health or vice versa (Meier & Reinecke, 2021). Self-report measures may also be subject to bias, particularly in sensitive areas such as cyberbullying. Additionally, the relatively small, convenience-based sample limits generalizability. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs with larger and more diverse samples to explore temporal dynamics and cultural differences.

All in all, the study highlights that the impact of social media on psychological health depends on both engagement patterns and the user's capacity for self-regulation. The findings underscore the importance of targeting FOMO, fostering positive online experiences, and enhancing user awareness as part of mental health interventions. Platforms themselves may also play a role by implementing algorithmic safeguards to reduce exposure to harmful content and by promoting digital well-being tools. Such multi-level strategies could help leverage the benefits of social media while mitigating its psychological risks (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Kowalski et al., 2021).

9. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of social media utilization on psychological health among university students from multiple countries. Using a cross-sectional approach, the findings highlight the complex interplay between patterns of social media use, negative online experiences, and psychological well-being.

The results revealed that the quality and emotional consequences of social media engagement are more critical than the sheer quantity of use. While excessive daily screen time was negatively correlated with self-rated psychological well-being, regression analysis demonstrated that frequent experiences of anxiety, stress, and fear of missing out (FOMO) were the strongest predictors of lower well-being. Conversely, positive psychological experiences derived from meaningful interactions and supportive online environments emerged as significant protective factors. These findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive forms of social media engagement, rather than adopting a purely reductionist view focused solely on time spent online.

Another critical finding relates to the impact of negative online experiences such as cyberbullying and harassment. Consistent with prior literature (Kowalski et al., 2021; Hamm et al., 2015), cyberbullying was significantly associated with declines in psychological well-being. However, the moderation analysis demonstrated that awareness of social media's psychological impact buffered this negative effect, indicating that students with higher awareness and digital literacy were less vulnerable to the harms of cyberbullying. This highlights the value of promoting self-regulation and media awareness programs as part of preventive mental health strategies.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence that social media's effects on mental health are multifaceted, influenced by the interplay of user motivations, emotional experiences, and the broader online environment. The findings support the need for multi-level interventions: at the individual level, digital literacy programs can foster healthier patterns of use and coping mechanisms, while at the platform level, algorithmic safeguards can minimize exposure to harmful content.

While cross-sectional design limits causal inference, this research provides a foundation for future longitudinal studies exploring temporal relationships between social media use and psychological outcomes. Broader, culturally diverse samples are also recommended to enhance generalizability. Nevertheless, these findings provide actionable insights for educators, mental health practitioners, and platform developers seeking to balance the benefits of social media with its potential psychological risks.

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Affective Polarization and Defensive Turnout of Black Voters: The 2020 Crucible

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Abstract

Why do African Americans vote in huge numbers, even when enthusiasm for the Democratic Party is low? For decades, scholars pointed to racial solidarity and loyalty to the Democrats. But what if hostility, not loyalty, is a driving force? This paper introduces the defensive turnout theory, which is the idea that in racially charged elections, many Black voters cast ballots not out of enthusiasm for Democrats, but to block Republican threats. Using standard logistic regression models to analyze the 2020 American National Election Studies (ANES) data, the study finds that hostility toward the Republican Party is positively associated with Black turnout rates more than warmth toward the Democratic Party. Each 10-point increase in anti-Republican sentiment is positively associated with a voting odd of 9%, while equivalent Democratic warmth is counterintuitively associated with a 14.7% decrease in turnout odds at a 95% confidence interval even after accounting for key sociodemographic factors. While causality cannot be inferred from the cross-sectional design, the 2020 election presents a unique case of a high-stakes and racially charged electoral landmark, which invites scholars and practitioners to rethink what truly motivates Black turnout and what belonging means when democracy itself feels contested in a polarized era.

Keywords: Affective Polarization, Negative Partisanship, Defensive Turnout, African American Voting Behavior, Linked Fate

1. Introduction

African Americans have for the longest time been the Democratic Party's most steadfast supporters. Nearly nine in ten consistently vote blue¹ (Hajnal and Lee, 2011: 40-41; White and Laird, 2020: 2, 4). This loyalty is often explained by "linked fate," which is the belief that individual and group destinies are intertwined and are shaped by the memory of shared struggle (Dawson, 1994). However, such accounts risk overlooking the role of negative emotions, such as hostility toward the Republican Party (also known as the Grand Old Party or GOP), in mobilizing Black voters today. In a political era marked by heightened racialized rhetoric and policy threats, many African Americans are motivated less by the celebration of the ideals of the Democratic Party and more by a vigilant

response to perceived danger from the right² (Crane, 2004; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Philips and Plutzer, 2023). This leads me to ask, how do feelings of affect influence Black voter turnout in racially polarized elections?

Political scientists once viewed partisanship as rooted in ideology or rational group interest (Campbell et al., 1960; Dawson, 1994). Yet, recent scholarship reveals a more turbulent emotional landscape. Affective polarization, which refers to the experience of warmth towards one's own party (in-group) and hostility against the opposing party (out-group) at the same time, now shapes not only voting but also how Americans see themselves and their communities (Brewer and Pierce, 2005; Iyengar et al., 2012; Amira et al., 2021; Tyler and Iyengar, 2022). For many African Americans, voting has always been more than a civic duty. It is a shield, a declaration, and sometimes a line of defense (Philips, 2024). In a nation where belonging has often been contested, the act of casting a ballot can feel like both claiming a place and protecting it. As American politics becomes more polarized and emotionally charged, understanding what truly drives voter turnout among Black electorate is both urgent and overdue.

While much of the research in this area has focused on white voters, the emotional and behavioral aspects of Black partisanship are drastically understudied. This paper introduces a novel theoretical concept of defensive turnout, where political participation is not driven by partisan enthusiasm but by the need to ward off perceived threats. Drawing on nationally representative data from the 2020 American National Election Study (ANES, 2021), I examine how negative emotions shape self-reported turnout among African American respondents.

This study is one of the first to empirically test whether hostility toward the out-party significantly outweighs warmth toward the in-party regarding Black voter turnout, and to do so using recent data from a racially charged election. It also integrates affective polarization with the unique historical and structural context of Black political behavior, which moves beyond generic models of partisanship. In this way, it extends newer work such as Slaughter (2025), who finds that Black voter participation is a form of democratic assertion and a response to political and policy threats in an increasingly polarized environment. This study contributes to our understanding of political participation and polarization by showing that the emotional engines of democracy run differently across racial lines and are also shaped by the ever-present perception of threat (Jardina, 2019; Philips and Plutzer, 2023; Reiljan et al., 2023).

1.1 Defensive Turnout and the Emotional Logic of Black Political Participation

The emotional nature of American politics is becoming more defined by what citizens resent, not by what they support. The political participation of African Americans is the clearest example of this. While frameworks like linked fate (Dawson, 1994) and group interest theory (Campbell et al., 1960) have explained Black voter cohesion, they run the risk of ignoring the more serious emotional factors that influence Black political behavior in the twenty-first century. According to recent studies, while enthusiasm for Democratic candidates among African Americans has declined, Black voter turnout in 2020 reached historic levels (Garzia and Ferrera da Silva, 2022; Philips and Plutzer, 2023). This contradiction suggests that the reasons behind Black political participation are changing. It also indicates that the record turnout was likely associated more with a feeling of urgency and resistance to perceived threats rather than just loyalty to a party or excitement for candidates. I argue that these classical theories do not account for what motivates voter turnout in elections where emotional hostility stemming from racial threat is heightened or clearly perceived. I therefore propose a new theoretical approach called defensive turnout to explain how negative emotions motivate Black electorates when partisan loyalty or group pride is weak, particularly in the 2020 election. This theory reframes Black political engagement as a defensive tactic in a polarized democracy, which may be motivated more by the urgent need to defend hard-won rights and fight the threat of exclusion than by partisan attachment.

1.1.1 The Mechanisms of Defensive Turnout

Defensive turnout refers to a kind of voter engagement where negative emotions toward the out-party are more likely to predict voter turnout than in-party love. The exercise of electoral franchise is performed as a means of

preventing racial marginalization and injustice. Voting becomes an act that is performed as a response to racialized cues, policy risks, and rhetorical hostility. In this way, defensive turnout captures the unique emotional calculus of Black political behavior in racially polarized elections. This theory rests on two core propositions. First, it assumes that the greater the perceived emotional and policy threats from the out-party, the more likely Black voters may be motivated to go to the polls. Second, emotional attachment to the in-party may be insufficient to motivate Black electorates compared to hostility toward the out-party in racialized contexts.

I argue that in the presence of racialized threats, Black voters may feel more urgency to push back threats, which will be linked to increased motivation to vote. However, the absence of a clearly visible racial threat will not inspire higher voter turnout. For instance, several studies document that after the historic election of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, many Black voters assumed Hillary Clinton would easily defeat the Republican candidate, Donald J. Trump, in 2016 and continue the Obama legacy (McDaniel et al., 2018; Philpot and White, 2018). Jackson et al. (2017) and McDaniel et al. (2018) argue that the Obama presidency and the expectation of a Clinton victory fostered optimism and a belief in continued progress. These factors led to complacency and overconfidence among Black voters in key battleground states who did not perceive Trump as a serious threat. This sense of security, or reduced perception of racial threat, contributed to lower urgency and turnout. Consequently, there was a sharp decline in Black voter turnout in key battleground and swing states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania (Jackson et al., 2017). However, Black voter turnout shot up to a historic high in the 2020 election when the presence of several racial threats, such as racialized Republican rhetoric and racial injustice, as I contend in this section. Black votes increased substantially and flipped key battleground states in the 2020 elections, with turnout rates in cities like Atlanta, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia exceeding those of 2016 and in some cases approaching or surpassing 2008 levels (Philips and Plutzer, 2023).

The 2020 election presents a context of a high-stakes, polarized, and racially charged election with multiple incidents of threats that were clearly perceived by Black electorates. Beginning with the perception of racialized rhetoric by Donald J. Trump, to the threat of racial injustice signaled by the “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) movement, and targeted voter suppression in Black neighborhoods, racial hostility toward the Republican Party played a critical role in the historic turnout that occurred in 2020. The murder of George Floyd, which led to the BLM movement, sparked nationwide protests that ignited resentment and perceptions of injustice as well as racialized threats to Black lives, human rights, and safety (Bowman, 2021; Roman et al., 2025). In spite of these nationwide protests, Donald Trump’s repeated rhetoric on the BLM movement, in which he labeled the protesters as “thugs” and threats to “dominate” urban areas, further alerted many Black Americans that their communities were under threat (Chen, 2021). Also, he was perceived as an autocrat who was against Blacks when his rhetoric, like the May 2020 tweet, “when the looting starts, the shooting starts,” solidified the perception of racial danger among Blacks (Chen, 2021; McGregor and Parker, 2021). Twitter (now X), the widely used social media platform, in 2020 flagged the president’s rhetoric as a violation of its terms of service because it incited national violence (Gorwa et al., 2020). Trump was also widely regarded by Blacks as a racist in many notable and credible polls before the election. The Washington Post-Ipsos poll (2020), for instance, found that over 80% of Black Americans believed Donald Trump was racist and said he worsened racism in the country. These incidents sent a strong message to Black electorates that their communities were being attacked racially and they had to respond with their votes to keep the Republican Party out of power and secure their place in America.

Unlike models that emphasize logical voting or expressive loyalty, defensive turnout is protective. We cannot separate the emotional logic of defensive turnout from the history of Black citizenship in the United States. For many African Americans, political participation has not been fully protected nor equally accessible. Structural exclusion, legal disenfranchisement, and state surveillance have shadowed it (Keyssar, 2009; Berman, 2015; Hajnal et al., 2017). From the poll taxes and literacy tests of the Jim Crow era to current voter ID laws and felony disenfranchisement, mechanisms of suppression have consistently communicated that Black votes are both powerful and vulnerable. These long-standing patterns transform voting into an act that is more than a civic expression. To many African Americans, the Republican Party is more than just the “other side” or mere political opponents. For them, they represent a history of exclusion, racialized rhetoric, and policy threats (Tesler, 2016; Jardina, 2019). This view is intensely emotional rather than just ideological. This dynamic differs from other groups like Hispanic or Latinx and Asian American turnout patterns, which are often shaped by pan-ethnic identity

cues (Pantoja, 2016; Sadhwani, 2020; Kang, 2023). Thus, defensive turnout emerges from this emotional terrain as a rational, even habitual, strategy of political protection for African Americans.

1.1.2 Distinguishing Defensive Turnout from Key Theories of Black Political Participation

This theory differs from older models like linked fate by suggesting that where there are clear racial injustices and threats, simply being attached to a political party may not be enough to get African Americans to vote. Instead, hostility toward the opposing party can drive them to the polls, as seen in the 2020 election and other significant elections with high Black turnout. While linked fate and group interest theories argue that partisan attachment drives Black voter turnout because they believe that their group destinies are interconnected and Blacks identify with the Democratic Party because they represent their group interest, I argue that these theories hold true in elections where there are less or no visible racial threats from the Republican Party. In elections such as 2020, where racial threats were clearly perceived, hostility towards the Republican Party is more strongly associated with high voter turnout among Blacks than with their affiliation to the Democratic Party, especially when partisan pride or enthusiasm is weak.

Defensive turnout further builds on and adds distinct layers to negative partisanship and affective polarization to explain why Black turnout skyrocketed in 2020 despite low enthusiasm for the Democratic Party. Negative partisanship broadly refers to disliking the opposing party (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018), defensive turnout is a racialized and emotional intensification of this sentiment. It involves seeing the out-party as a credible threat to one's own rights, safety, or status. Turnout here is likely to be predicted more by how an individual perceives the danger posed by the out-party because of their racial background, as supported by recent empirical studies like Philips and Plutzer (2023). Moreover, it builds on affective polarization but adds new layers to it. While affective polarization affects all partisans no matter the race (Iyengar et al., 2019), defensive turnout affects specific racial groups, particularly Blacks in the United States. This is because African Americans share racial group memory, have experienced structural and historic marginalization, and perceive asymmetric political threat (Dawson, 1994; Berman, 2015; Philips and Plutzer, 2023). In this way, Black electorates do not only develop negative emotions toward the Republican party, nor do they only vote against them, but do so as a strategy to protect their individual freedoms and social standing.

As shown in Table 1, defensive turnout theory differs from linked fate, negative partisanship, and affective polarization in several key aspects.

Table 1: Comparing Theories of Black Political Participation

Theory	Distinctive Feature for Black Voters	Role of Racial Identity	Emotional Focus
Defensive Turnout	Voting as a defensive act in response to racialized danger, threat or exclusion	Central, racial threat is the trigger	Hostility, fear, urgency
Linked Fate	Voting as an expression of group unity and shared interest	Central, solidarity is key	Group solidarity, pride,

Negative Partisanship	Voting to block the out-party from power	Not necessarily racial	Hostility, resentment
Affective Polarization	Voting to show in-group love and out-group hate	Usually not racial by default	Both warmth and hostility

Source: Author

1.4 Beyond Traditional Models

Although linked fate and group interest are still significant frameworks, they are insufficient to account for the asymmetry in Black political participation that exists today. The evidence suggests that defensive sentiments may motivate voter turnout more than party affiliation (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Tesler, 2016; Philips, 2024). It suggests that Black political participation is a lived response to threats, as well as an ongoing struggle for belonging, rather than just a logical reaction to policy preferences.

I provide a conceptual model in Figure 1 to explain the theoretical argument. This framework describes how a defensive logic of participation can be triggered by negative affect, particularly hostility, aimed at the out-party. Such sentiments, I argue, are associated with higher Black voter turnout than positive sentiments like pride or enthusiasm for the in-party. In a racialized and high-stakes context where Blacks share a historic memory of marginalization and a perceive threat from the out-party, their hostility toward them will trigger the urgency to vote against them to protect their individual rights, as I have argued above.

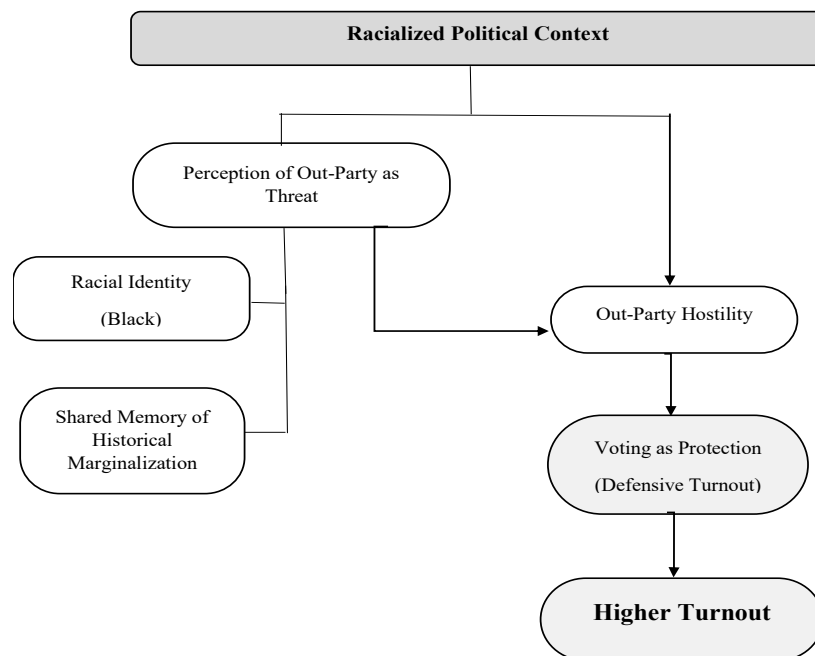


Figure 1: Theory Map of Defensive Turnout and the Emotional Logic of Black Political Participation.

Source: Author

1.5 Hypothesis

H1: Greater feelings of racial hostility toward the Republican Party will increase the likelihood African Americans voting in the 2020 election.

This hypothesis reflect the emotional asymmetry as posited by the defensive turnout theory. I expect voter behavior among African Americans in the 2020 election to be more strongly linked to hostility than to enthusiasm or loyalty. H1 shows that negative feelings towards the GOP might motivate Black voters to turn out more than connection to their own party during a time of racial threat.

2. Method

2.1 Data Source(s)

This study draws on the 2020 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series Study's data, a gold standard for nationally representative survey data on U.S. political attitudes and behavior (ANES, 2021). The ANES 2020 time series data used a combination of online, telephone, and video interviews, as well as intentionally oversampling Black Americans, which enables robust subgroup analysis (ANES, 2021; Tyler and Iyengar 2023). All analyses use ANES-provided sampling weights and appropriate variance estimation to account for the complex survey design. The study focuses on an individual-level analysis to examine voter turnout among African Americans and the "feeling thermometer" component of the data. Recent methodological studies have endorsed the ANES feeling thermometer as a robust measure of affective polarization (Tyler and Iyengar, 2023).

2.2 Sample

The analytic sample is restricted to self-identified Black or African American respondents, as indicated by the ANES race variable. Respondents who did not complete the key variables of interest are excluded from analyses that require calculation of partisan affect, consistent with best practice (Tyler and Iyengar, 2023). The study uses a sample size of 595 respondents, allows for subgroup analysis in behavioral analysis, especially considering that the study focuses on a single election (USDHHS, 2021).

2.3 Variable measurements and coding

Dependent Variable:

Voter Turnout

Measured as self-reported voting in the 2020 presidential election (binary: 1 = voted, 0 = did not vote) among African American respondents in the ANES 2020 dataset.

Key Independent Variables:

Racialized Republican Hostility³

The ANES "feeling thermometer" scale measures the respondents' feeling toward the Republican Party, ranging from 0 (coldest/most negative) to 100 (warmest/most positive). Hostility is reverse-coded, so higher values indicate greater hostility. Here, values closer to 100 become the most negative or coldest feelings toward the Republican Party.

Democratic Warmth

I measure the feeling thermometer toward the Democratic Party in a similar manner. Higher ratings (closer to 100) indicate greater warmth.

Affective Polarization Index (API)

The affective polarization index is calculated as the difference between Republican hostility and Democratic warmth (Republican hostility – Democratic warmth), which sometimes takes on negative values. I use it as an alternative measure of the dependent variable to assess the replication and robustness of my model.

Key Control Variables: Age, gender, education, income, and region (all standard sociodemographic controls available in ANES).

2.4 Analytical Strategy

The study first conducts descriptive analyses by investigating the spread of emotional responses, as well as the mean and standard deviation for Republican hostility and Democratic warmth. Additionally, I conduct both bivariate and multivariate analyses using logistic regression models (logit) to estimate associations between affect and voting. The key coefficients of interest are hostility toward the GOP and warmth towards Democrats, specifically in relation to Black voter turnout. I replicate the findings using alternative operationalizations of emotional responses (e.g., the affective polarization index as a new independent variable, with all controls maintained) and run a probability unit regression (probit) using the same variables and controls in the R statistical software or package (Version 4.4.2).

Since the ANES 2020 data is collected at one point in time and it is hard to determine cause and effect, I center the key independent variables at their means, perform a sensitivity analysis, and cluster the standard errors based on the regions where respondents were interviewed to account for differences in those areas (like voter ID laws, campaign and media exposure, etc.). This method is safer than traditional standard errors because it adjusts for both uneven error variance and the fact that responses from the same area or region may be related (Cameron and Miller, 2015). The sensitivity analysis presented in Appendix A (Table A2), shows that using clustered standard errors is important because key variables (like Democratic Warmth and the Southern region) have very different significant levels when different error methods are used. The evidence suggests that failing to account for regional clustering would lead to biased associations or conclusions. While multilevel modeling is an alternative, the study's primary goal is to identify associations with fixed effects rather than estimating regional variance components.

Odds ratios (ORs) are used because logistic regression models are estimated in log-odds, and reporting OR makes the results interpretable in percentage terms without requiring baseline assumptions. Predicted probabilities are useful and intuitive, but they are context-dependent, while ORs give a clean and model-wide summary.

3. Results

3.1 Quantifying Defensive Turnout through the Resistance Calculus

I will start with a descriptive analysis of the spread and distribution of feelings among Black voters toward both the Democratic and Republican parties, using histogram, and then I will proceed to bivariate and multivariate analyses that employ logit for the main analyses and probit models for replication.

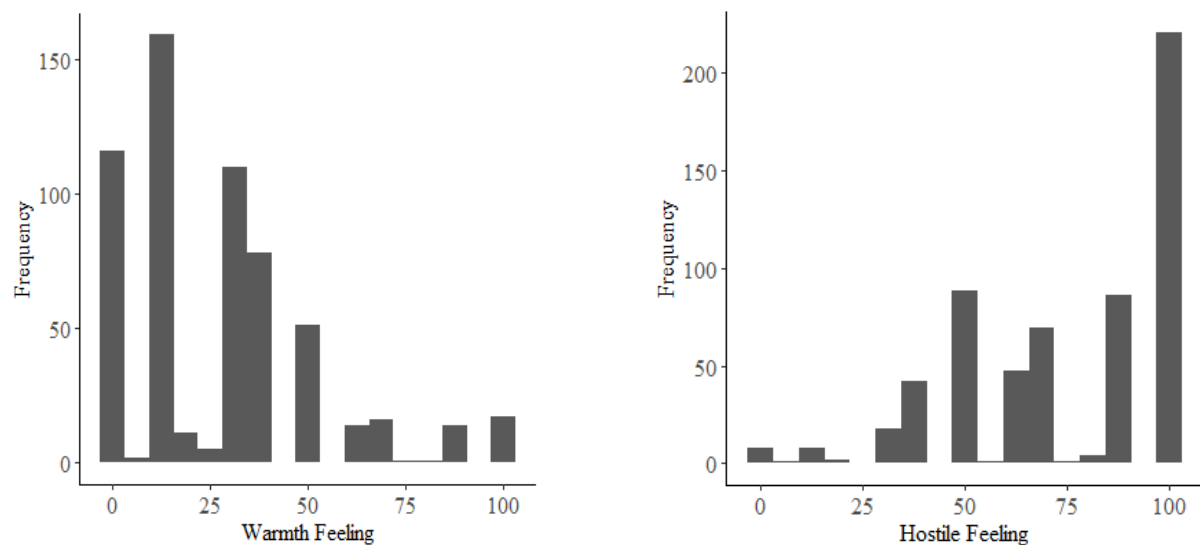


Figure 2: Histograms depicting feelings of warmth toward the Democratic Party (left) and feelings of hostility toward the Republican Party (right)

Source: Author

The emotional foundations of this behavior among Black voters are immediately visible in the histogram analyses presented above. With the histogram on the left, higher values to the right indicate greater warmth for the Democratic Party, while higher values to the right represent greater hostility for the Republican Party in the histogram on the right, respectively. The study finds that, whereas most Black respondents express moderate warmth toward Democrats (average $\approx 28.0/100$; standard deviation ≈ 24.0), their hostility toward Republicans is far more intense and politically consequential (average $\approx 74.3/100$, standard deviation ≈ 26.0). Additionally, 68% of respondents fully rate the GOP below 40 on the feeling thermometer, with responses clustering at the coldest end of the scale. This asymmetry lays the groundwork for my key finding, which suggests that negative stimuli have a stronger influence on voting decisions than positive ones.

Next, I explore the associations between emotional responses and Black voter turnout using logit in Table 2. Republican Baseline (M1) and Democratic Baseline (M2) represent the relationship between emotional responses and voter turnout without controls, while the full model (M3) and robustness check model (M4) represent the relationship between emotional responses and Black turnout, with controls. The regression table reports odds ratios with clustered standard errors (by region) in parentheses. The reference category for regions is the Northeast region. The pseudo R-squared reported is McFadden's. All models report 95% confidence intervals for statistical significance.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Models Depicting Black Voter Turnout in 2020 (Odds Ratios)

Outcome: Voted (1 = Yes, 0 = No)				
Variables	Republican Baseline (M1)	Democratic Baseline (M2)	Full Model (M3)	Robustness Model (M4)
Racialized Republican Hostility	1.018*** (0.001)	-----	1.009*** (0.004)	-----
Democratic Warmth	-----	0.982*** (0.003)	0.984*** (0.002)	-----
Affective Polarization Index	-----	-----	-----	1.012*** (0.001)
Age	-----	-----	1.029*** (0.006)	1.029*** (0.006)
Gender (Female)	-----	-----	0.797*** (0.169)	0.795*** (0.313)
Education	-----	-----	1.482*** (0.075)	1.460*** (0.064)
Income	-----	-----	1.079*** (0.039)	1.078*** (0.040)
Constant	4.980*** (0.042)	4.965*** (0.067)	0.390 (0.507)	0.391 (0.488)
Region Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
Number of Observations	595	595	595	595
Pseudo-R ²	0.034	0.034	0.153	0.152
AIC	539.88	539.45	489.52	488.38
BIC	548.66	548.23	533.40	527.87

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

3.2 Love May Just Not Be Enough

The Democratic side of the equation presents a counterintuitive finding. In the full model specification (M3), Democratic Warmth is negatively and significantly associated with voter turnout, with an odds ratio of 0.984 ($p < .01$, CI = 95%). This suggests that for every one-point increase in warm feelings toward the Democratic Party, the odds of voting are 1.6% lower when other variables are held constant. When scaled to a more meaningful level, a 10-point increase (moving from a neutral 50 to 60 on the feeling thermometer) in warmth toward Democrats corresponds to approximately a 14.7% ($0.984^{10} \approx 0.853$) drop in likelihood of voting. While these findings may seem counterintuitive, they suggest that strong Black electorates or partisans are likely to be motivated by hostility toward the GOP than by enthusiasm for the Democratic Party in heightened racialized contexts, as supported by negative partisanship and affective polarization theories (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018; Philips and Plutzer, 2023).

Contextually, this finding has close similarities with the historic turnout in 1968. President Richard Nixon's campaign prominently featured "law and order" rhetoric, which, as scholars have shown, was widely interpreted as a coded message targeting Black communities and the civil rights movement (Alexander, 2010; Lassiter, 2013). This strategy capitalized on white anxieties about urban unrest and rising crime. But for African Americans, it represented a direct threat to their safety, dignity, and hard-fought political influence. Academic analyses reveal that Nixon's approach not only heightened racial polarization but also served as a platform of attack on civil rights progress, leading to a massive Black turnout in the 1968 election (Lassiter, 2013). The 1968 campaign thus reinforced the pattern in which racially charged rhetoric from the GOP prompts Black voters to turn out at higher rates, not out of enthusiasm for the Democratic Party, but as a defensive response to perceived threats.

3.3 Seeking Protection Through the Ballot

The odds ratios shown in the complete logistic regression model (M3) in Table 2 clearly and significantly support the defensive turnout argument. Each 1-point increase in hostility toward Republicans (GOP) is positively associated with a 0.9% likelihood of voting when all other factors are held constant ($OR = 1.009$, $CI = 95\%$, $p < .01$). While this effect appears moderate at first glance, its cumulative impact is substantial. If there is a heated campaign (which is common during the Trump and Biden eras), a 10-point increase in anti-Republican sentiment that is easily identified by African Americans after racially charged rhetoric or cues will be associated with a substantial turnout odd of 9.4% ($1.009^{10} \approx 9.4\%$). That means a 10-point shift (such as moving from a neutral 50 to 60 on the feeling thermometer) in hostility toward the GOP may mobilize close to 1 in 10 additional Black voters even after controlling for age, education, gender, region, and income.

To put this finding into proper context, historical electoral incidences have had similar outcomes. A prominent example is the famous 1988 "Willie Horton Ads." The 1988 presidential election offers a vivid example of a racially charged election and its impact on Black voter behavior. The infamous Willie Horton ad, aired by George H. W. Bush's campaign, used racially coded imagery to stir up fear about crime and implicitly associated Blackness with danger (Mendelberg, 2001). Academic research demonstrates that this kind of implicit racial threat primed both white and Black voters to respond along racial lines (Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002). For African Americans, the Willie Horton episode was a forceful reminder of the vulnerability of their rights and safety in the face of racially manipulative political tactics. Studies show that such messaging can mobilize Black voters defensively, as they perceive the stakes of the elections to be not just political but existential (Valentino et al., 2002). The 1998 election thus aligns with the findings in this study and supports the defensive turnout theory by highlighting how negative and racialized cues from the Republican Party can be strongly associated with Black political engagement.

3.4 Replication and Robustness Checks

The robustness checks suggest that the study's major results are reliable and consistent over different model specifications, multiple operationalizations, and diagnostic tests. Replications employing both the Affective Polarization Index and probit models yield results that closely resemble those obtained from logistic regression studies. Furthermore, supplementary fit statistics, null effect tests, and multicollinearity diagnostics reinforce the robustness of the estimates. These checks, when looked at together, makes the defensive turnout argument stronger and show that the outcomes are not just due to how the model was chosen or set up. For complete results and visualizations, readers should look at the detailed tables and figures in Appendix B.

3.5 Limitations and Future Directions

This study utilizes cross-sectional ANES data and self-reported turnout, which limits causal inferences and may slightly inflate participation estimates. These limitations point out important opportunities for future research. Longitudinal and experimental research may clarify the evolution of racialized threats and partisan animosity over time, while more comprehensive data on linked fate, mobilization, and other emotional responses, such as wrath or pride, would enhance our comprehension of the mechanisms underlying defensive turnout. Expanding the study beyond a single election year and utilizing larger Black samples might explain the applicability of this

methodology across various electoral situations, including midterm, state, and local elections. These constraints simultaneously facilitate significant theoretical and practical ramifications. Future research may expand upon this study to evaluate the generalizability of defensive turnout among other marginalized groups, investigate the interplay between institutional barriers such as voter suppression and emotional mobilization, and assess whether defensive turnout enhances or undermines democratic participation over time. By conceptualizing restrictions as stepping stones, this study establishes a platform for future studies that not only enhances the defensive turnout theory but also provides valuable insights for policymakers, civic leaders, and campaigns aiming to comprehend and engage Black voters in a polarized democracy.

4. Discussion

While the findings suggest that GOP hostility is associated with higher Black turnout, the cross-sectional data limits causal claims. Despite these constraints, the evidence supports a defensive turnout model. The fact that the results are similar across four different models, two ways of measuring the dependent variable again, and three tests for reliability, along with the use of various control factors and sensitivity checks, indicates that the study highlights an important aspect of today's Black political behavior, where voting is seen more as a way to protect against perceived dangers rather than just showing loyalty to a political party.

The 2020 election provides a useful context for understanding the strong associations found in my study. The observed 0.9% turnout boost associated with anti-Republican sentiment explains why Black voter turnout reached record-breaking highs in 2020, despite notably low enthusiasm for the Democratic nominee, Joe Biden (Philips and Plutzer, 2023). This paradoxical pattern of higher turnout without high candidate enthusiasm has been documented in recent academic work. For example, Garzia and Ferreira da Silva (2022) show that nearly one-third of American voters in 2020 reported voting more "against" than "for" a candidate, with this trend being particularly pronounced among groups facing direct threats to their rights or status. Further, Tesler (2016) and Jardina (2019) provide evidence that racialized political messaging and perceived threats from Republican candidates can activate defensive turnout among Black Americans. These studies argue that when voters perceive heightened racial threat, such as through racially charged rhetoric or targeted voter suppression efforts, they are more likely to vote as a form of resistance, even in the absence of strong enthusiasm for their party's candidate. This conclusion is consistent with White and Laird (2020), who emphasize that Black political behavior is often shaped by a sense of group-based threat and the need to defend hard-won rights.

Taken together, this body of research supports the argument that the historic Black turnout in 2020 was less likely a product of Democratic enthusiasm and more of a reflection of defensive turnout in response to perceived racial and political threats. This highlights the importance of affective polarization and negative partisanship in shaping electoral participation, particularly for marginalized communities in polarized contexts. It also confirms the traditional patterns that show high Black voter turnout during Republican administrations (Hasen, 2014; Brennan Center, 2024). These findings further suggest that Republican rhetoric and policy positions, particularly on racial issues, are inadvertently associated with higher Black voter turnout.

Furthermore, findings in this study fundamentally extend the negative partisanship and affective polarization paradigm by demonstrating that feelings of hostility outweigh positive party identification. It establishes defensive turnout as a measurable phenomenon with real electoral consequences by offering a new framework for understanding Black political behavior in an era of heightened racial polarization. This pattern is consistent with recent work by Abramowitz and Webster (2018) and Garzia and Ferrera da Silva (2022), who find that American electorates "vote against," not "vote for," but is now demonstrated specifically for Black Americans by arguing that voting is a protection tactic. As one focus group participant (not in this study) memorably put it, "I don't vote because I love Democrats; I vote because I remember what Republicans do."

5. Conclusion

These findings carry important implications for political strategy, political theory, and electoral lawmaking. For mobilization efforts, the results suggest that appeals to enthusiasm or loyalty fall short if they do not address the

perceived threats that many Black voters experience. Campaigns and civic organizations must reckon with the reality that racialized backlash and policy retrenchment may be more effective at predicting voter turnout than partisan identification alone among Blacks. It also suggests that policy and lawmakers have a duty to make laws that prevent or minimize voter suppression and disengagement. Theoretically, this work advances our understanding of affective polarization by showing how race transforms emotional politics into a survival strategy. Thus, defensive turnout reframes participation as a protective act in an era of racial polarization.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent Statement/Ethics approval: Not applicable. This study uses secondary, publicly available data (American National Election Studies 2020 Time Series), and no new data were collected from human participants by the author.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in this study are publicly available from the American National Election Studies (ANES) at <http://www.electionstudies.org>.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, The Author; Methodology, The Author; Formal Analysis, The Author; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, The Author; Writing – Review and Editing, The Author.

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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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Notes:

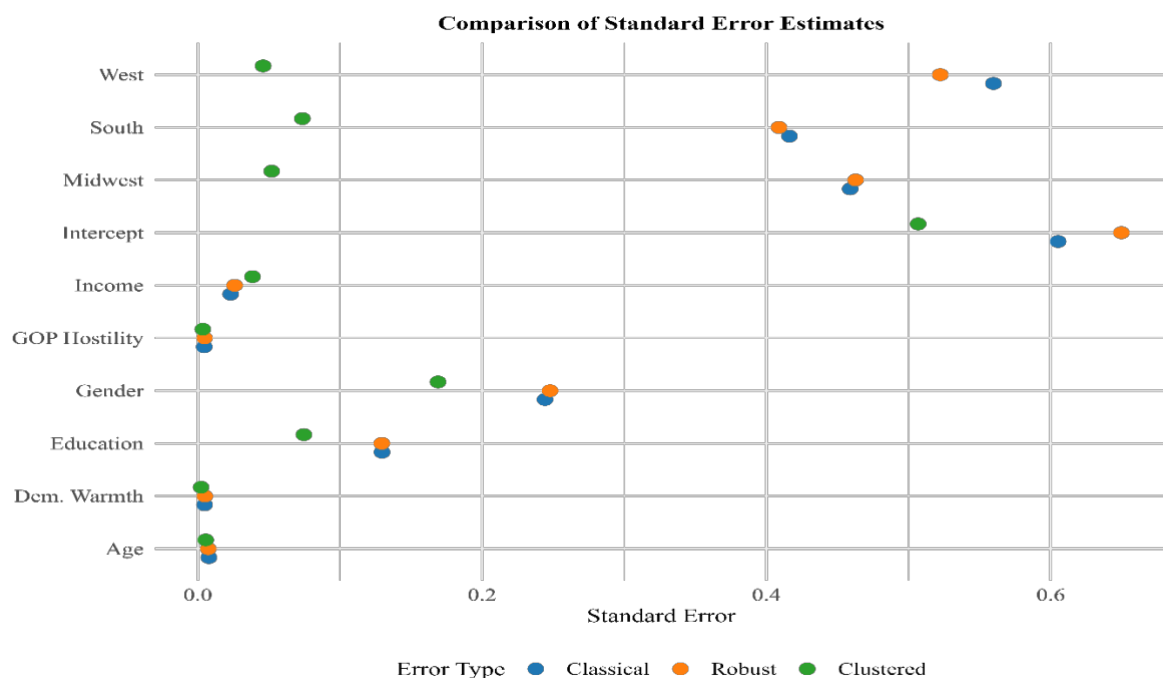
1. The Democratic Party identifies as blue, while the Republicans identify as red.
2. The Republican Party is often referred to as the right, while Democrats are often referred to as the left. This reveals the ideological positions of both parties.
3. Research proves that hostility toward Republicans is often racialized in American politics and hostility towards Republicans is closely linked to race. Studies show that Black voters and other minorities see the Republican Party as a threat to racial progress, which increases negative feelings toward it (Chen, 2021; Emery, 2023; King, 2025). I therefore interpret Republican hostility as racialized given that Black voters experienced racial threats in 2020 (Hasen, 2014; Chen, 2021).

Appendix A

Table A1. Tabular Comparison of Predictors for Republican Baseline Model (M1) and Full Model (M3).

Predictor	Baseline (M1)	Full Model
GOP Hostility	2.0%*	0.9%*
Controls?	No	Yes

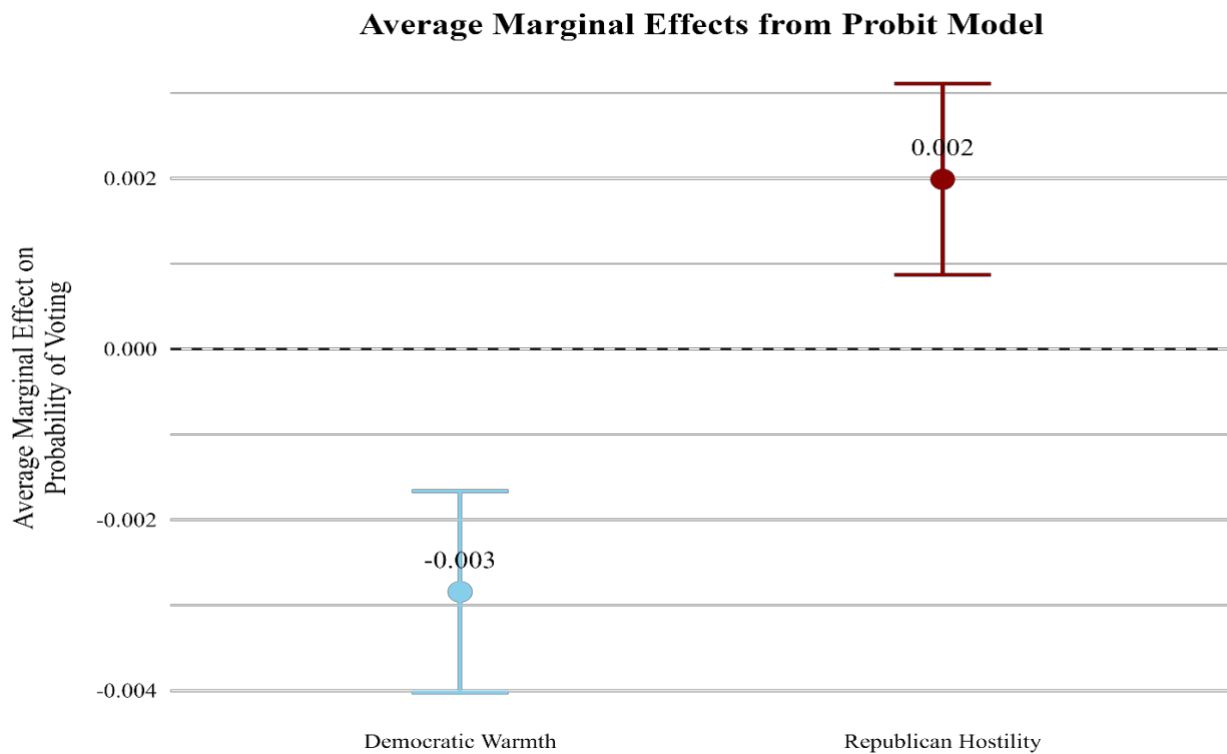
Table A2. Table showing sensitivity analysis of classic, clustered, and robust standard errors



Note: Appendix Table A2 compares classical, robust, and clustered standard errors. The largest discrepancies occur for variables with strong regional patterns (e.g., Democratic Warmth, regional indicators), reinforcing the need for clustering. Results are robust to alternative specifications, but clustered errors provide the most reliable associations.

Appendix B

Table B1. Probit Regression Showing Black Voter Turnout in 2020.

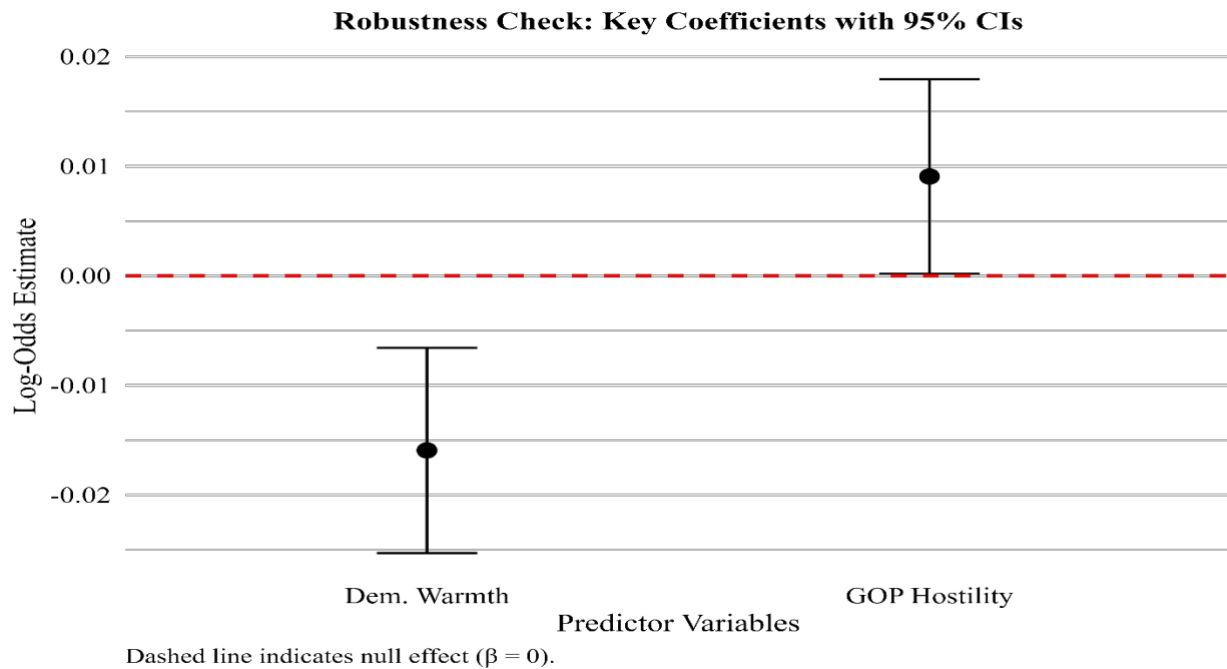


Note: Using probit regression gives the same results as the logit regression. This indicates that the study is replicable even when a different model is used.

Table B2. Tabular Comparison of Logit (OR) and Probit (AME) Regression Models.

Predictor	Effect Size	SE	z-value	p-value	CI Lower	CI Upper	Model
GOP_Hostility	1.009	0.005	2.3446	0.019	1.0017	1.0195	Logit (OR)
GOP_Hostility	0.0013	0.0006	2.3260	0.020	0.0002	0.0024	Probit (AME)
Dem_Warmth	0.984	0.0046	-3.0698	0.002	0.9770	0.9949	Logit (OR)
Dem_Warmth	-0.0018	0.0006	-2.9962	0.003	-0.0030	-0.0006	Probit (AME)

Note: I compared the reported odds ratios in the logit model and average marginal effects in the probit. Both logit (OR = 1.009, $p = 0.019$) and probit (AME = 0.001, $p = 0.020$) show that GOP hostility is strongly associated with the likelihood of Black voter turnout, whereas Democratic warmth decreases turnout (OR = 0.984, AME = -0.002; $p < 0.01$). This consistency across different regression models confirms that my findings are robust to model choice and also strengthens the defensive turnout argument.

Figure B1. Robustness of Partisan Affect Coefficients (95% CIs).

Note: I examined null effects to determine whether Confidence Intervals (CIs) included zero and checked the stability of confidence interval widths across model specifications. I find that confidence intervals excluded zero with no substantial CI widening, as shown in figure B1, with the results remaining statistically significant. This evidence also supports the reliability of the findings.

Table B3. Generalized Variance Inflation Factors (GVIF) by Model

Variable	Model 3 GVIF	Model 4 GVIF
Republican Hostility	1.08	NA
Democratic Warmth	1.16	NA
Affective Polarization Index	NA	1.04
Age	1.03	1.03
Gender	1.03	1.03
Education	1.19	1.17
Income	1.20	1.19
Region	1.06	1.05

Note: I performed multicollinearity diagnostics using generalized variance inflation factors (GVIF). The outcome indicated no concerning correlations between predictors in either of the full models. All GVIF values were below 1.2 in Model 3 (original specification) and 1.2 in Model 4 (Affective Polarization specification), which falls within the range of acceptable thresholds in statistical analysis (O'Brien 2007; Franke 2010).

Local Stories, Global Resonance: How China's Local Stories Bridge the World

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Abstract

The power of China's local and regional stories to transcend boundaries and bridge the world has never been more pronounced. These stories, rooted in rich Chinese cultural heritage and contemporary experiences, are finding their way onto the world stage, offering valuable perspectives and enriching the global connectivity landscape. However, the negative impact of "cultural discount", communication noise originating from stereotypes stemming from ethnocentric mindsets has hindered their effective trans-cultural communication. This article explores how to transform localized efforts into viral trends that resonate worldwide from three dimensions: breaking the reverse information cocoon formed by one-sided reliance on AI and cultural empowerment; redefining story-telling and taking advantage of China's local social media platforms and LLM.

Keywords: China's Local Stories, Trans-Cultural Communication, Information Cocoon, Discourse Community, "Cultural Discount"

1. Introduction

The rapid development of AI technologies like generative AI and AI agents is reshaping the landscape of international communication. Empowered by these technologies, trans-cultural communication has become a powerful publicity venue for Chinese local stories to exercise influence. The power of local and regional stories to transcend boundaries and foster international understanding has never been more pronounced. These narratives, rooted in rich Chinese cultural heritage and experiences, are finding their way onto the world stage, offering unique perspectives and enriching the global connectivity landscape. However, challenges such as fragmentation in communication channels and content, the coexistence of multiple versions, the difficulty in adapting local cultural symbols and values to global audiences, and interference from biased meta-narratives and meta-discourses, rooted in stereotypes stemming from ethnocentric mindsets, have left China's local and regional international communication grappling with solutions to reducing communication noise and eliminating the negative impact of the "cultural discount" effect. Therefore, to innovate inter-cultural story-telling, this article argues that the following issues need to be addressed: how to break the "reverse information cocoons" constructed by story teller themselves; how to mitigate "cultural discount" and reduce communication noise; how to transform localized efforts into viral trends that resonate worldwide?

Against this backdrop, this article explores how Chinese local stories can resonate on world stage from four main aspects: Breaking information cocoons through dynamic thinking and real-time adjustment; Achieving the decoding and reconstruction of cultural symbols via multimodal narrative, plural participation, transmedia storytelling, and cross-sector IP co-branding; Deeply integrating AI technologies to enhance the culture value resonance of China's local stories.

2. Breaking the Reverse Information Cocoon

In recent years, China's international communication and publicity of local stories have made significant progress in content production, narrative innovation and the continuous expansion of communication channels. Many excellent works and projects have won instant popularity. However, AI empowerment and cultural empowerment are double-edged swords. The screening logic of algorithm recommendation mechanisms mainly involves capturing users' daily browsing data, analyzing their habits and preferences, and then feeding them with almost personally tailored information, be it entertaining, academic or shopping. That is, user profiles and groupings are created based on factors like browsing duration and interaction frequency, as well as content with high relevance. In such a relatively closed discourse community, the constant reinforcement of homogeneous content will conversely form an information cocoon, completely contradicting the original intention of communicators. So, information cocoons form because of a multi-layered feedback loop between people and AI-driven recommendation algorithms. In other words, communicators themselves have built echo chambers, where like-minded individuals gather creating digital spaces that reinforce shared perspectives (Cinelli, Brugnoli, et al., 2020; Gonz'alez-Bail' on & Lelkes, 2023). This will restrict audiences from forming rich, unbiased and multi-dimensional perceptions. For example, among certain audience groups, one-sided perceptions such as, "The history of Shanxi province was written by Jin merchants" and "Porcelain and Jingdezhen, become the cultural representative of Jiangxi" have taken shape.

To break free from this reverse information cocoon, it is necessary to conduct real-time calibration of communication content, channels, and symbols. Real-time dynamic calibration means paying attention to the effects generated by stories and the images constructed by narration closely, rather than simply pursuing metrics such as view counts and repost volumes. Calibration involves expanding information sources, communication community, and constantly countering algorithmic cocoons to broaden the cognitive boundaries of audiences, thereby shaping a more abundant, authentic, and multi-dimensional local image.

2.1. Expanding Communication Channels, Content, and Building Discourse Communities

In terms of local stories bridging the world, static thinking refers to always taking Generation Z (post-95s and post-00s) as the main audience group and regarding social media they prefer, such as X, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok (the international version of Douyin), as the main communication platforms. Whereas, to expand communication channels and audience groups with dynamic thinking means conduct research on social media use in target communities, and gradually expand to localized platforms to truly integrate into local discourse communities, which linguist John Swales defined as "groups that have goals and purposes, and use communication to achieve their goals. It has mechanisms of intercommunications among its members"(1990, p470, 471) Take Southeast Asia as an example: in Indonesia, WhatsApp and Telegram are also popular, and Kaskus, the largest local online community in Indonesia, is an important venue for local cultural expression; Line is more widely used in Thailand, and Pantip is a popular local online community among Thai users; Vietnam's Zalo, equivalent to China's WeChat, has a huge user base, and local forums like VOZ (VozForum) and the emerging social network platform Lotus supported by the Vietnamese government also have a large number of users. (SalesSmartly, 2025)

More importantly, in addition to catering to Generation Z's preference for digital featured communication forms such as short videos, live streaming and micro-dramas, attention should be paid to Millennials (born between 1980 and 1995). They are often the backbone of society in most countries around the world and more vocal and wield greater political and cultural influence. For instance, "Millennials in India account for 34% of the total population and are actively shaping various key sectors of Indian society." (Akshay, 2024) Millennials prefer text-oriented

media. For example, “threads’ text-based nature has resonated with Vietnam’s post-80s generation,” and it offers a nostalgic yet refreshing alternative to the visually-dominated social media environment. (Vu, 2025) Having grown up amid the rise of blogs and online forums, Millennials find comfort in this familiar format, and text-oriented platforms enable more nuanced and in-depth conversations. Moreover, apart from using social media, they tend to use “slow media” to read in-depth reports and discuss serious social topics more thoroughly. Therefore, the discourse reconstruction of China’s local stories should also tilt toward more text-oriented media and mainstream “slow media”.

In addition, the audience group of Generation Alpha (post-2010s) cannot be ignored. “With a global population of nearly 2 billion and over 2.5 million new births every week, they are destined to surpass all previous generations in size and influence.” “They are fond of posting on social media about almost everything in life” and will become the main force of user-generated content (UGC) media platforms in the future. (Naveen, 2025). Chinese local stories should start to penetrate UGC-dominated platforms in other cultures. Gaming and live streaming of their favorite celebrities are among the main reasons many members of Generation Alpha use social media platforms. “Gen Alpha gamers don’t just play video games, they also partake in other forms of engagement. Specifically, 43% of Gen Alpha engages with gaming via playing, viewing, and multiple other forms, including joining gaming communities, following streamers, and creating content.” (AFPRelaxnews, Forbes India, 2023) Thus, constructing local story discourse communities for Generation Alpha through games like *Black Myth: Wukong* should serve as a stepping stone.

2.2. Countering the algorithmic echo chamber and expanding the cognitive boundaries of the audience

By integrating social platforms with traditional mainstream media, local stories will gain more leverages, because this kind of integration and optimization can avoid algorithmic manipulation. While using popular social media platforms, such as X, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp and Line, more professional platforms like LinkedIn cannot be neglected. Additionally, mainstream traditional media with enduring strong influence, such as *The Economist*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*, should also be key channels for the transmission of Chinese local stories.

Establish cross-circle dialogues to break through circles and attract audiences. For instance, the construction of local narratives via AI tools to design interactive scenarios, organize reading clubs, forums, etc. on major social media platforms, invite key opinion leaders (KOLs) from different fields to conduct cross-circle interpretations as well as constructive discussions and dialogues with audiences from different professions, age groups, and cultural backgrounds can not only challenge cognitive boundaries of viewers from other cultures but also break stereotypes formed out of the lack of effective communication.

Besides, the story construction tool kits to provide underlying frameworks and cognitive logics that go beyond current hot topics also include diversifying content production to break the narrative system inertia that solely relies on cultural empowerment; creating richer communication themes, especially focusing on the thematic construction of stories about China’s modernization; in-depth and cross-border new interpretations of classic works through user-generated content (UGC) to reduce homogeneity and dissolve algorithmic control.

3. Redefining Story-Telling

As audiences increasingly consume information and gain perceptions through social media, the format and approach to storytelling have had to evolve. Social media like YouTube and TikTok’s rise as dominant platforms requires story tellers to generate short, visually engaging videos that can convey key information in seconds. Story-telling has evolved into an interactive, immediate, multi-modal and transmedia experience. According to a comment from The Fix Media, Lazar Čovs, an investigative and data journalist working for BBC World Wide News, “younger generations don’t want to click through to a website anymore.” (Pacarizi, 2024)

3.1. Multimodal, plural participant narrative and public diplomacy

Disseminating representative local civilization symbols and showcasing highly recognizable spiritual emblems and cultural essences constitute the core of constructing local stories in China. The application of multimodal and plural participants narration allows for the decoding and reconstruction of unique local cultural symbols. The construction of diverse and multi-perspective stories can demonstrate the interaction between local history, tradition, and contemporary society, so as to eliminate the interference of stereotypes, and present a more comprehensive panorama.

From the perspective of soft power and public diplomacy, scholars both at home and abroad agree that public diplomacy has entered a new stage. American scholar Nicholas J. Cull, in his book *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*, mentions that in this new stage of public diplomacy, non-state actors have begun to participate and play an important role. “The new public diplomacy emphasizes people-to-people contact for mutual enlightenment with the international actor playing the role of facilitator. (2009, p13) Joseph Nye argued that public diplomacy is an important means to enhance a country’s soft power, and public diplomacy with smart power attributes emphasizes the participation of civil society in generating soft power. “Public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power, but smart public diplomacy requires an understanding of the role of civil society in generating soft power.” (2008, p108) Professor Wang Lili holds that “new public diplomacy has emerged, where the participants of emerging public diplomacy are no longer limited to the government but include interest groups, think tanks, media, and ordinary citizens, among others.” (2018, p6)

From the theoretical perspective of cross-cultural communication, Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory provides a framework for understanding how culture influences values and behaviors, which is often applied in fields such as trans-cultural communication studies. Among its dimensions, the individualism vs. collectivism dimension emphasizes the importance of interaction between official narratives, collective narratives, and individual narratives in cross-cultural communication. (2011)

Modality is generally defined as culturally recognized means of communication, including text, gestures, postures, gaze, font choices and colors, images, videos, etc., as well as their interactions. Multimodality focuses on the various modes people use to communicate with each other and express themselves. It plays an important part in representing the connotations of cultural symbols and the interactive meaning of guiding audiences to obtain meanings in their own cultural worlds, thereby generating empathy. (Kress, 2010, p1-8, p18-29)

Thus, the participation of civil society in constructing local stories can complement official, formal narratives, demonstrating cultural diversity and inclusiveness. The participation of inter-cultural intermediary “others” and key opinion leaders in story-telling can break through cognitive barriers, realize the trans-cultural decoding and reconstruction of cultural symbols, as well as stimulate emotional resonance through the participants’ real experiences and feelings.

For example, Shanxi is renowned as the “treasure trove of ancient Chinese architecture,” and among its most important buildings, Foguang Temple on Wutai Mountain was praised by the famous architect Liang Sicheng as “China’s No. 1 national architectural treasure.” If a video is produced using multimodal and plural participants narration, it can holographically display The Map of Wutai Mountain in Cave 61 of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, present an animated display of the overall structure of Foguang Temple, showcase multiple angles of the statue of the donor Ning Gongyu, as well as display the photo of Lin Huiyin with Ning’s statue—especially their silent communication across time and space accompanied by text explanations and voice-over interpretations. Simultaneously, multi-perspective story-telling and interpretations are adopted. Through expert interviews, it can reveal how Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin, amid the chaos of war, driven by their passion, disproved the assertion by Japanese scholars that “there are no existing wooden structures from the Tang Dynasty or earlier on Chinese soil; To visit Tang Dynasty wooden architecture, one has to go to Kyoto and Nara in Japan.” From the perspective of ordinary tourists and inter-cultural intermediary “others,” expressing the understanding and insights that the existence of this temple is the homage to history itself and a testament to the continuity of human civilization. Multimodal and multiple participants story-telling creates a tension and discursive space that can reproduce 1,200

years of sealed history, showcasing the profound and time-honored Shanxi civilization, decoding and reconstructing the significance of mutual learning between human history and civilizations beyond the hustle and bustle of the present life.

3.2. Transmedia Story-telling and Cross-sector IP Co-branding

Through its emphasis on multimedia, social media has ushered in transmedia story-telling, where stories are no longer confined to a single medium but instead unfold across various digital formats. Martha Kinder put forward the concept of trans-media narration in 1993, and Henry Jenkins elaborated on its influence and practices in greater detail in works such as “Convergence? I Diverge” and *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. In the foreword of *Imagining Transmedia*, Jenkins states: “All media produced today follows a transmedia logic, loosely speaking, but I used transmedia to narrowly refer to an intentional, coordinated strategy for spreading story elements across multiple media platforms.” He also points out that “readers can deploy transmedia as a source for building a better world for all of us.” (2024, x, xviii) Transmedia story-telling is widely used in the trans-cultural communication to boost the image of national cultures. For instance, Istanbul’s “Museum of Innocence” project reproduces the locations, objects, and scenes from the works of Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, expanding and enriching the text while disseminating the nation’s culture. The core of transmedia story-telling is world-building, where narratives unfold across multiple media platforms, each being independent yet pointing to the same story world, while each new narrative makes a unique and valuable contribution to the overall story. It emphasizes creation, participation, immersion, and in-depth experience. A story may start as a comic or short story, be explored through short videos or podcasts, or enriched by a series of micro-dramas. An important feature of transmedia narration is the role of collective intelligence, the construction of knowledge communities, and the joint exploration, refinement, and consumption of new knowledge by all members, defined as “prosumers” by transmedia scholars. (Jenkins, 2008) Therefore, transmedia story-telling enables traditional and modern stories to build a unified world, which can enrich and expand the discursive space and field of communication, turning the immersed audience into producers and consumers of the stories.

In the meanwhile, introducing cross-sector IP can help build a trans-cultural ecosystem of “all beautiful things from different cultures coexist.” For example, introducing the popular trendy IP Labubu into the story world of the Bird-Shaped Zun, the NO. 1 treasure of the Shanxi Museum, can leverage the inherent co-creation and communication power of Labubu’s fan community to directly activate emotional resonance among audiences in other cultures, eliminate “cultural discount”, and even establish a subcultural community.

For example, to tell local stories about Chinese War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression well and remember history, transmedia story telling means breathing life into the vivid photos, precious war relics that demonstrate the history of War of Resistance and videos of local heroes plus heroes’ family members telling their personal experience. By taking advantage of different media to build a unified story world with “drillability, continuity and multiplicity, extractability, and immersion”, Chinese local stories turn audiences into prosumers of War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. (Jenkins, 2008, p93-p130) In this way, a vibrant community for inheriting the spirit of fighting for peace and justice will be constructed, which will also expand its radiation radar and become an organic part of the community with a shared future for mankind.

4. Taking advantage of China’s Local Social Media Platform and LLM

AI technology is widely used in trans-cultural communication. Through in-depth data mining for user profiling, it enables precise delivery and customized communication, significantly improving trans-cultural communication capabilities. However, the transformation from capability to effectiveness is a big leap, which means to avoid AI illusions, deepfakes, and algorithmic manipulation by mainstream Western social media platforms on the one hand and to innovate story construction via embedding AI technologies to achieve in-depth adaptation of cultural symbols and contexts, cultural value recognition, as well as solicit public opinion support, reduce communication noise, and eliminate “cultural discount”.

Firstly, in constructing the discourse of local stories, the use of increasingly capable localized artificial intelligence tools can assist in the in-depth decoding of cultural symbols and adaptation of cultural contexts. For example, via AltDiffusion model of the Beijing Academy of Artificial Intelligence, story tellers can have access to Chinese-English bilingual image-text alignment. Large language models like DeepSeek and Doubao, with reasoning ability and online search capabilities, can generate content that conforms to the aesthetics of target cultural groups by mining cultural products from target audience groups, and automatically translate them into multiple languages. They can even adjust cultural symbols and contexts to fit the cultural preferences of local audiences, and help extract the common values between civilizations. This multi-tasking processing capability makes content conform to the target audience in terms of language, vision, and social values, which lowers the cognitive threshold, and effectively achieves cognitive transfer.

Secondly, the application of AI can realize the dialogue and interaction among officials, professionals, key opinion leaders, ordinary audience, and inter-cultural intermediary “other” discourses, break through cognitive barriers, generate value recognition through negotiation and mutual learning, and reconstruct local stories.

Thirdly, intelligent technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR) can create immersive on-site experiences to achieve emotional resonance. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in *Liquid Modernity*, proposes that fluidity and change have become constants, rather than organicity and predictability. Fluidity is the new power. Intercultural story-telling in our age presents typical characteristics of liquid society, shifting towards lightness, and individuals are also seeking “lighter connections.” (2000) Driven by ever updating new technologies, the collective memory has transformed into a fluid state, enhancing the autonomy of ordinary audiences. The “light” presentation of their daily lives and experiences can also awaken collective memory. For example, the localized experience brought by a VR video can arouse the collective memory of the hometown among overseas Chinese communities. Leaving comments, sending bullet screens, liking, and sharing on the platform can establish emotional hyperlinks, triggering value resonance with those who sense the same vibe in the global village and forming “liquid” relationships. The popular Labubu’s communication ecosystem, with its fluidity and self-replication, embodies the idea that “fluidity is power.”

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of enhancing soft power, innovating and reconstructing the discourse system of China’s local stories means making effective use of AI technologies for multimodal, plural participants engagement and transmedia narration, as well as cross-sector IP co-branding to achieve cultural and value resonance, build cultural and emotional hyperlinks, break cognitive barriers and realize cognitive transfer. At the same time, it is necessary to counter the information cocoon, eliminate the negative impact of “cultural discount”, and make greater use of China’s local social media platforms and LLM to avoid stereotypes and the interference of meta-narratives originated from mainstream Western platforms. Utilizing digital-intelligent technologies such as VR, AR, and MR will help to create immersive on-site experiences, awaken collective memory, and shape emotional resonance. Thus, the reconstruction of local story is to explore the common grounds with other cultures through dialogue, negotiation, cooperation, exchange, and mutual learning, so as to achieve value resonance and activate empathy.

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Narrative Gaps in CSR Communication: From Compliance to Conversation in Indonesian SOEs

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication in Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remains strongly influenced by regulatory compliance, often prioritizing formal disclosure over dialogic engagement. This study examines the narrative gaps in CSR communication through the case of PT Telkom Indonesia, the country's largest digital and telecommunication SOE. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Telkom's Annual Reports (2023–2024), the research identifies how compliance-driven narratives intersect with broader sustainability claims and stakeholder expectations. The findings indicate that Telkom's CSR is framed around regulatory obligations, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives, including flagship programs such as *GoZero* and *EXIST*. These narratives emphasize accountability and innovation but remain largely symbolic and top-down. Despite the extensive use of digital channels, communication strategies function primarily as promotional tools, offering limited space for stakeholder dialogue. This creates a narrative gap between the company's intended messages of sustainability and inclusion and the public's demand for transparent, participatory engagement. The study contributes to legitimacy theory by showing how compliance-based CSR secures pragmatic legitimacy but fails to achieve deeper moral and cognitive legitimacy. Practically, it underscores the urgency for SOEs to transform CSR communication from compliance to conversation, strengthening trust, corporate reputation, and stakeholder relations in Indonesia's evolving digital society.

Keywords: CSR Communication, State-Owned Enterprises, Telkom Indonesia, Narrative Gaps, Legitimacy Theory, Dialogic Communication

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a central pillar of corporate legitimacy, shaping how organizations construct their identities, manage stakeholder expectations, and sustain long-term trust. Across the

globe, companies are expected to demonstrate not only economic performance but also social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and transparent communication about these commitments. Yet, the way CSR is communicated varies significantly across contexts. In advanced economies, CSR communication has increasingly shifted from compliance-oriented disclosure toward dialogic engagement, enabling stakeholders to participate in the construction of corporate narratives. In many emerging economies, however, CSR communication continues to emphasize regulatory compliance, legal reporting, and symbolic alignment with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study addresses this discrepancy by examining the problem of **narrative gaps**—the misalignment between corporate-intended narratives and stakeholder expectations for dialogue and authenticity—in the CSR communication of Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with a particular focus on PT Telkom Indonesia.

The problem under investigation is important for several reasons. First, CSR communication is not simply a matter of transparency; it is a strategic process that contributes to organizational legitimacy. As Suchman (1995) explains, legitimacy is essential for organizational survival, and communication plays a key role in shaping how organizations are perceived by stakeholders. Compliance-driven CSR communication may secure short-term pragmatic legitimacy by demonstrating conformity with regulations, but without dialogic engagement, it often fails to build moral and cognitive legitimacy—the deeper forms of acceptance based on normative approval and taken-for-grantedness. For SOEs like Telkom, which are both business entities and political instruments of the state, the stakes are even higher. Their CSR communication not only reflects corporate priorities but also influences the state's image in the eyes of the public. Understanding narrative gaps in this context is therefore crucial to both corporate strategy and public policy.

Second, the problem is important because the Indonesian context magnifies the tension between compliance and conversation. CSR has been legally mandated in Indonesia since the enactment of Law No. 40/2007, particularly for companies exploiting natural resources. For SOEs, CSR obligations are also embedded in Ministry of SOEs regulations that align corporate responsibility programs with national development priorities. This regulatory environment ensures that SOEs like Telkom engage in CSR, but it also reinforces a compliance-driven orientation that prioritizes legal accountability over stakeholder dialogue (Waagstein, 2011). Annual reports and sustainability disclosures serve as the main vehicles for CSR communication, emphasizing alignment with state directives and international frameworks. Yet, in an era of digital transformation, stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to use digital platforms not just for promotion but for genuine interaction, transparency, and co-creation of social value (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019). The gap between these expectations and the realities of compliance-driven reporting constitutes the central issue of this study.

Third, this problem deserves attention because it highlights a contradiction in the role of SOEs in Indonesia. As agents of state policy, SOEs are tasked with promoting social development, supporting sustainability, and advancing digital inclusion. Telkom, for example, emphasizes its role as a digital transformation leader, positioning itself as a national champion of innovation and sustainability. Its Annual Reports for 2023 and 2024 highlight the Five Bold Moves (5BM) corporate strategy, focusing on fixed-mobile convergence (FMC), infrastructure management (InfraCo), data centers, B2B IT services, and digital services (DigiCo). Alongside these business strategies, Telkom communicates its CSR commitments through ESG initiatives such as GoZero (sustainability action) and EXIST (existence for sustainability), framed under the broader umbrella of the SDGs. On paper, these initiatives suggest that Telkom is fully aligned with both global and national priorities. However, the communication of these programs remains top-down, emphasizing compliance and achievement rather than dialogue and participation. This reinforces the narrative gap: the company intends to present itself as innovative, sustainable, and accountable, but stakeholders perceive its CSR communication as symbolic, compliance-driven, and lacking authenticity.

The current study builds on prior scholarship while extending it in important ways. Previous research has documented the distinction between compliance-oriented and dialogic CSR communication. Morsing and Schultz (2006) identified three strategies: the information strategy (one-way communication), the response strategy (two-way but asymmetrical communication), and the involvement strategy (two-way symmetrical communication with stakeholders as partners). While many Western companies have increasingly embraced involvement strategies,

research on emerging economies indicates that CSR remains primarily compliance-driven, shaped by legal obligations and reputational concerns (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Cho et al., 2015). In Indonesia, CSR communication has been analyzed primarily in terms of regulatory compliance, corporate image, and alignment with development agendas (Hidayat, 2022). However, relatively few studies have examined the narrative gaps that emerge when compliance-oriented CSR communication is interpreted by stakeholders who expect dialogic engagement. By focusing on narrative gaps, this study provides a new lens for analyzing CSR communication in SOEs.

The theoretical basis for this research lies in legitimacy theory. Suchman (1995) categorizes legitimacy into three forms: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. Pragmatic legitimacy is secured when organizations demonstrate benefits or compliance to stakeholders; moral legitimacy arises when organizations are perceived as pursuing the right goals for the right reasons; cognitive legitimacy occurs when organizational actions are accepted as natural and taken for granted. Compliance-driven CSR communication largely secures pragmatic legitimacy, but moral and cognitive legitimacy require dialogic, authentic communication. This study hypothesizes that Telkom's CSR communication secures pragmatic legitimacy through compliance but fails to establish moral and cognitive legitimacy due to limited dialogic engagement. A secondary hypothesis is that the emphasis on ESG branding and SDG alignment contributes to symbolic narratives that may undermine stakeholder trust, as stakeholders perceive them as "greenwashing" or "window dressing" (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

The research design corresponds directly to these hypotheses. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on PT Telkom Indonesia as a representative example of Indonesian SOEs. By applying thematic content analysis to Telkom's Annual Reports for 2023 and 2024, the study identifies the dominant CSR narratives and assesses their alignment with stakeholder expectations. This design is appropriate because it allows for systematic exploration of how compliance-oriented narratives are constructed and how they diverge from participatory expectations. The case study method also situates Telkom within its broader institutional and political context, illustrating how state mandates shape corporate communication.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study advances legitimacy theory by demonstrating how narrative gaps limit the effectiveness of CSR communication in securing moral and cognitive legitimacy. It also contributes to CSR communication scholarship by framing narrative gaps as barriers to meaningful stakeholder engagement, particularly in emerging economy contexts where compliance dominates. Practically, the research highlights the urgency for SOEs in Indonesia to transform their CSR communication strategies. By moving from compliance to conversation, SOEs can enhance public trust, improve corporate reputation, and strengthen their role as legitimate actors in society. For Telkom specifically, embracing dialogic communication would align its sustainability claims with stakeholder expectations, reducing the risk of being perceived as symbolic or performative. For policymakers, the findings underscore the need to encourage not only mandatory CSR programs but also participatory communication frameworks that foster genuine engagement between SOEs and stakeholders.

In summary, this study examines the problem of narrative gaps in CSR communication within Indonesian SOEs, focusing on PT Telkom Indonesia as a case study. The problem is important because it highlights how compliance-driven CSR narratives may secure short-term legitimacy but fail to build long-term trust and authenticity. By analyzing Telkom's Annual Reports 2023 and 2024, the study investigates how compliance-based narratives intersect with stakeholder expectations for dialogic communication. Guided by legitimacy theory, the study hypothesizes that Telkom's CSR communication secures pragmatic legitimacy but struggles to achieve moral and cognitive legitimacy due to limited dialogue. The research design—case study with thematic content analysis—enables systematic examination of these dynamics. The findings are expected to contribute to both theory and practice, offering insights into how Indonesian SOEs can bridge the narrative gap by transforming CSR communication from compliance to conversation.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication is framed within Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with PT Telkom Indonesia as the focal case. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research seeks to understand complex communicative phenomena—namely narrative gaps—within their institutional and social contexts. Rather than testing variables through experimental design or quantitative surveys, this study focuses on the interpretive analysis of corporate texts, which represent the organization's intended narratives of sustainability and responsibility. The case study method is particularly appropriate because Telkom occupies a strategic position as Indonesia's largest telecommunications SOE, and its reports provide comprehensive disclosures that reflect both corporate and political imperatives.

The primary data source consisted of Telkom's Annual Reports for 2023 and 2024, which include detailed sections on sustainability, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These reports were selected purposively because they are the most authoritative and publicly accessible documents through which Telkom communicates its CSR commitments to regulators, investors, and the general public. The selection of two consecutive years allowed for comparison across time and the identification of continuities and shifts in narrative emphasis. In addition to these core documents, secondary sources such as media coverage, regulatory guidelines from the Ministry of SOEs, and public commentary were consulted to situate Telkom's communication within the broader socio-political discourse.

Although this study does not involve human participants, variables were conceptualized in order to guide the thematic analysis. Compliance-driven CSR communication was defined as narratives emphasizing regulatory alignment, reporting obligations, and symbolic association with frameworks such as GRI, ESG, and SDGs. Conversation-based CSR communication was defined as dialogic narratives emphasizing transparency, participation, and mutual engagement with stakeholders. Narrative gaps were understood as the dissonance between the corporate-intended message—often highlighting innovation, sustainability, and accountability—and stakeholder expectations for authenticity, transparency, and involvement. These conceptual definitions provided a consistent framework for coding and interpreting the texts.

The sampling procedure followed a purposive strategy, selecting Telkom as the case study because of its visibility, regulatory obligations as a dual-listed company on the Indonesia Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange, and its extensive sustainability programs. Reports from 2023 and 2024 were chosen as the data corpus because they coincide with Telkom's strategic transformation known as the Five Bold Moves (5BM), which reshaped its business model and CSR priorities. This period also included the introduction of flagship sustainability programs such as *GoZero* and *EXIST*, which are explicitly framed as contributions to ESG and SDG commitments. These features make the selected timeframe especially suitable for investigating how compliance and conversation interact in CSR narratives.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis, which involves identifying recurring patterns of meaning across textual data. The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the researcher familiarized with the documents through repeated reading of the Annual Reports, noting explicit statements on sustainability and implicit framing of responsibility. Second, the texts were coded into categories that corresponded to the conceptual variables of compliance-driven communication, conversation-based communication, and narrative gaps. Third, the codes were grouped into broader themes such as "compliance orientation," "symbolic alignment with SDGs," "promotion through digital channels," and "limited evidence of dialogic engagement." Finally, these themes were interpreted in relation to stakeholder expectations as reflected in secondary sources. This process enabled the systematic identification of how Telkom constructs its CSR narrative and where the narrative diverges from participatory ideals.

To ensure reliability and validity, several measures were adopted. Triangulation was applied by comparing corporate disclosures with secondary sources such as media coverage and regulatory documents. Transparency in the coding process was maintained by developing a coding scheme iteratively and documenting decisions at each

stage. Peer review of preliminary coding by two independent communication scholars was sought to reduce potential researcher bias. Rich descriptions of the findings, including references to specific programs like *GoZero* and *EXIST*, were provided to ensure contextual depth. While qualitative analysis does not allow for statistical generalization, these strategies support analytical generalization and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Ethical considerations were minimal since the study relied solely on publicly available documents. Institutional review board approval was not required, but ethical standards were nonetheless maintained by accurately representing sources, acknowledging authorship, and avoiding selective reporting. The analysis was conducted with attention to fairness, recognizing the official status of corporate reports while also critically examining their communicative strategies.

The overall research design is best characterized as a qualitative, single-case study employing thematic content analysis. This design is suitable for investigating the research questions because it allows for close reading of texts that embody both compliance and communicative intent. Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for identifying patterns across corporate disclosures, while the case study approach situates these patterns within the broader institutional and political context of Indonesian SOEs. Together, these methods enable the study to address its hypotheses: that Telkom's CSR communication is dominated by compliance narratives, that narrative gaps emerge between corporate intent and stakeholder expectations, and that these gaps constrain the company's ability to achieve moral and cognitive legitimacy beyond pragmatic compliance.

3. Results

The analysis of PT Telkom Indonesia's Annual Reports for 2023 and 2024 reveals consistent patterns in how the company communicates its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The findings demonstrate that Telkom's CSR narratives remain strongly shaped by regulatory compliance, symbolic alignment with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, and a reliance on top-down communication methods. Although Telkom positions itself as a leader in digital transformation and sustainability, the communication strategies employed indicate a persistent gap between the intended corporate messages and stakeholder expectations for dialogic engagement.

A major result of the analysis is the overwhelming dominance of compliance-oriented narratives. Across both years, CSR is framed primarily as part of the company's responsibility to fulfill Indonesian legal requirements, Ministry of SOEs directives, and international reporting standards. The reports are structured around frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and emphasize transparency in meeting obligations to regulators and investors. This framing secures pragmatic legitimacy by demonstrating conformity to rules and accountability to authorities. However, the reliance on compliance also reduces CSR to a legalistic practice, communicated as obligation rather than as voluntary or co-created social value. Interestingly, the reports attempt to elevate compliance into a source of corporate pride, presenting regulatory alignment as evidence of corporate leadership in sustainability. While this framing positions compliance as innovation, it is unlikely to resonate with stakeholders, who generally view compliance as a baseline requirement rather than a substantive achievement.

Another significant result is the strong emphasis on Telkom's symbolic alignment with SDGs and ESG frameworks. Both the 2023 and 2024 reports highlight flagship initiatives such as *GoZero* (Sustainability Action) and *EXIST* (Existence for Sustainability), which are presented as proof of Telkom's commitment to global sustainability standards. The company repeatedly emphasizes how its programs align with national and international goals, positioning itself as both a corporate and political actor in advancing sustainability. Yet the analysis shows that this alignment is largely symbolic. The reports describe the number of initiatives mapped to specific SDGs and outline general achievements, but they provide limited detail on stakeholder involvement in the design, implementation, or evaluation of these programs. By emphasizing alignment and reporting outcomes rather than processes of engagement, the reports frame CSR as a showcase of performance metrics and branding, not as a participatory endeavor.

The reports also highlight Telkom's use of digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, as part of its communication strategy. However, the analysis reveals that these platforms are used primarily for promotional purposes. The narratives focus on outreach, visibility, and the presentation of success stories through visually appealing campaigns. They rarely describe mechanisms for dialogue, feedback, or stakeholder participation. In the 2023 report, for example, Telkom highlighted campaigns related to digital education and environmental initiatives, but the descriptions focused on dissemination rather than engagement. The 2024 report similarly emphasized digital campaigns as evidence of corporate innovation without detailing how stakeholders were invited to contribute or respond. This limited use of digital platforms underscores the persistence of a compliance-driven communication model, where even interactive technologies are appropriated for one-way promotional purposes rather than for fostering genuine dialogue.

The persistence of narrative gaps emerges most clearly when comparing the company's intended narratives with stakeholder expectations. In terms of purpose, Telkom consistently frames CSR as compliance with regulation and alignment with global frameworks. While this secures accountability, it fails to address stakeholder expectations for CSR to reflect authentic commitment to societal needs. In terms of content, the reports emphasize flagship programs and quantitative achievements, while stakeholders increasingly demand transparency in processes, evidence of participation, and details about local impact. In terms of form, communication is delivered primarily through reports and promotional campaigns, which are one-directional and top-down, whereas stakeholders expect two-way interaction and opportunities for dialogue. These gaps reveal the dissonance between Telkom's emphasis on compliance and stakeholders' desire for conversation.

Some counterintuitive findings also emerged from the analysis. Despite the dominance of compliance-oriented narratives, the reports attempt to frame compliance itself as innovation. By positioning regulatory alignment as a sign of leadership in sustainability, Telkom seeks to transform what is essentially an obligation into a competitive advantage. This strategy may enhance corporate reputation among regulators and investors, but it risks being dismissed by other stakeholders as rhetorical. Another unexpected finding is the integration of CSR into the company's Five Bold Moves transformation strategy. Telkom presents sustainability not as a separate philanthropic activity but as part of its broader digital transformation agenda. This integration is noteworthy, as it reflects an effort to embed CSR into the core business model. However, without clear evidence of stakeholder participation, the integration risks being interpreted as rhetorical alignment rather than substantive practice.

The consistency of these findings across both years is particularly striking. Despite shifts in business strategy and the introduction of new flagship programs, the overall pattern of CSR communication remains largely unchanged. Compliance dominates the framing, symbolic alignment substitutes for substantive engagement, and digital platforms are used for promotion rather than dialogue. This continuity reinforces the argument that compliance-driven communication is deeply institutionalized within SOEs, making transformation toward dialogic engagement difficult.

Taken together, the findings support the primary hypothesis that Telkom's CSR communication secures pragmatic legitimacy through compliance but fails to establish moral and cognitive legitimacy due to limited dialogic engagement. They also support the secondary hypothesis that symbolic emphasis on compliance, ESG, and SDGs contributes to perceptions of CSR as branding, potentially undermining stakeholder trust. The results show that while Telkom has succeeded in demonstrating accountability to regulators and positioning itself as aligned with global sustainability agendas, it has not yet bridged the narrative gap between compliance and conversation. This persistence of narrative gaps underscores the challenge faced by SOEs in Indonesia, where institutional pressures favor compliance but societal expectations increasingly demand authenticity and dialogue.

4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine whether PT Telkom Indonesia's CSR communication remains dominated by compliance-oriented narratives and whether narrative gaps persist between the company's intended messages and stakeholder expectations for dialogic engagement. The primary hypothesis proposed that Telkom's CSR communication secures pragmatic legitimacy through compliance but fails to establish moral and cognitive

legitimacy due to limited dialogic engagement. The secondary hypothesis proposed that symbolic emphasis on ESG and SDG alignment contributes to perceptions of CSR as branding, potentially weakening stakeholder trust.

The results provide strong support for the primary hypothesis. Across both the 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports, Telkom emphasized compliance with national regulations, ministerial directives, and international reporting standards. CSR was consistently framed as part of regulatory obligation and accountability to the state and investors. While this strategy effectively demonstrates transparency and secures pragmatic legitimacy, it does not provide evidence of authentic stakeholder engagement or voluntary commitment. Thus, the hypothesis that compliance secures only pragmatic legitimacy while limiting moral and cognitive legitimacy is confirmed.

The secondary hypothesis is also supported. The reports placed heavy emphasis on SDGs and ESG frameworks, showcasing flagship programs such as *GoZero* and *EXIST* as markers of sustainability. However, the alignment was largely symbolic, focusing on mapping initiatives against global goals rather than detailing participatory processes. This symbolic use of frameworks supports earlier research by Schultz, Castelló, and Morsing (2013), who noted that global sustainability discourses often serve as branding tools rather than dialogic practices. The findings confirm that symbolic alignment may strengthen corporate reputation in formal terms but risks being perceived as superficial by stakeholders, thereby weakening trust.

When situated in the broader literature, these findings both confirm and extend existing scholarship. They confirm Jamali and Mirshak's (2007) observation that CSR in developing countries is often shaped by institutional pressures rather than stakeholder needs. They also align with Waagstein's (2011) argument that Indonesia's CSR law has institutionalized compliance at the expense of voluntarism. At the same time, this study extends the concept of narrative gaps proposed by Golant and Sillince (2007), demonstrating how these gaps persist even in digital contexts where opportunities for engagement exist. By analyzing the use of digital platforms, this study shows that compliance-oriented narratives constrain not only traditional reporting but also the potential for dialogic communication in online spaces.

Nevertheless, the results must be interpreted with caution. As a document-based case study, the analysis is limited to publicly available reports and secondary sources. This introduces potential bias because the reports represent Telkom's intended corporate narratives rather than stakeholder perceptions. While secondary sources were consulted to provide contextual interpretation, the absence of primary stakeholder data means that conclusions about reception are inferred rather than directly measured. This limitation raises questions about internal validity, as the analysis may overemphasize corporate intent relative to stakeholder response.

Another limitation concerns the imprecision of measurement. Thematic content analysis relies on coding and interpretation, which, although systematic, involves subjective judgment. While reliability was enhanced through peer review of coding, interpretive bias cannot be entirely eliminated. Furthermore, the study examined only two years of reports, which, while sufficient to identify patterns, may not capture longer-term changes in communication practices.

From the perspective of external validity, the findings are specific to Telkom and cannot be generalized automatically to all Indonesian SOEs. Telkom is unique as a digital and telecommunications company with dual listing on the Indonesia Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange, making its reporting more sophisticated than that of smaller SOEs. Nevertheless, the persistence of compliance narratives suggests broader institutional pressures that likely affect other SOEs as well. The findings should therefore be seen as illustrative rather than definitive for the SOE sector.

The unexpected findings further enrich the discussion. The attempt to frame compliance as innovation highlights an adaptive strategy where regulatory alignment is positioned as leadership in sustainability. This is a creative use of narrative but risks being counterproductive if stakeholders interpret it as rhetorical. Similarly, the integration of CSR into the Five Bold Moves strategy represents an effort to mainstream sustainability into corporate transformation. This approach moves beyond traditional philanthropy and aligns with calls for embedding CSR into core strategy (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Yet without dialogic practices, such integration may remain symbolic.

These counterintuitive findings suggest that while Telkom seeks to modernize its CSR narratives, institutional constraints and communication habits limit the depth of transformation.

The theoretical implications of these findings are significant. They reinforce the importance of distinguishing between pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy in legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995). CSR communication that emphasizes compliance may succeed in securing pragmatic legitimacy but cannot guarantee deeper legitimacy forms. The findings also contribute to CSR communication scholarship by demonstrating how narrative gaps operate in SOEs, where political and corporate imperatives intersect. Finally, the study underscores the relevance of dialogic theory in public relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002), showing that its absence continues to undermine trust in contexts where stakeholders expect engagement.

The practical implications are equally important. For Telkom, the results highlight the need to transition CSR communication from compliance to conversation. This requires moving beyond reporting obligations to actively engage stakeholders in shaping CSR agendas. Digital platforms, which are currently used primarily for promotion, offer opportunities for two-way dialogue that should be more fully exploited. By adopting dialogic communication strategies, Telkom could reduce narrative gaps, strengthen trust, and enhance long-term legitimacy. For policymakers, the findings suggest that CSR regulations should go beyond mandating activities to encouraging participatory communication practices. Guidelines could require evidence of stakeholder consultation, mechanisms for feedback, and reporting on how stakeholder input is integrated.

Barriers to transformation must also be acknowledged. SOEs operate within bureaucratic frameworks that emphasize compliance and risk aversion. This institutional environment reinforces habits of reporting rather than conversation. Moreover, the political role of SOEs means that CSR is often framed to align with state agendas, leaving limited space for stakeholder-driven narratives. Overcoming these barriers requires cultural and institutional change, both within corporations and in the regulatory environment.

In terms of generalizability, while the findings are specific to Telkom, they have implications for other SOEs in emerging economies facing similar pressures. The balance between compliance and conversation is a common challenge for state-owned firms that must satisfy government mandates while engaging increasingly vocal stakeholders. The persistence of narrative gaps suggests that without deliberate transformation, SOEs risk losing credibility in the eyes of their publics.

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm both the primary and secondary hypotheses. Telkom's CSR communication remains dominated by compliance narratives that secure pragmatic legitimacy but fail to establish moral and cognitive legitimacy. Symbolic alignment with ESG and SDGs reinforces perceptions of CSR as branding, limiting trust. These findings highlight the theoretical importance of legitimacy theory and narrative gaps in understanding CSR communication and underscore the practical need for SOEs to embrace dialogic strategies. The broader implication is that moving from compliance to conversation is not merely a corporate choice but a societal necessity, as CSR communication plays a vital role in shaping the legitimacy of state institutions in the eyes of the public. By bridging narrative gaps, SOEs can strengthen both corporate and political legitimacy, positioning themselves as genuine partners in sustainable development rather than as bureaucratic actors fulfilling minimum requirements.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication is framed in Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and to analyze the narrative gaps that emerge between compliance-driven reporting and stakeholder expectations for dialogic engagement. Focusing on PT Telkom Indonesia as a case study, the research examined two consecutive years of Annual Reports (2023–2024) through thematic content analysis. The study hypothesized that Telkom's CSR communication secures pragmatic legitimacy through compliance but fails to establish moral and cognitive legitimacy due to limited dialogic practices, and that symbolic alignment with SDGs and ESG frameworks contributes to perceptions of CSR as branding rather than authentic engagement.

The results provide strong support for these hypotheses. The analysis showed that Telkom's CSR communication is dominated by compliance-oriented narratives, emphasizing regulatory obligations, reporting frameworks, and accountability to state authorities. These narratives are reinforced by symbolic use of SDGs and ESG frameworks, where flagship programs such as *GoZero* and *EXIST* are positioned as evidence of sustainability leadership but are communicated primarily in terms of outcomes and alignment rather than participatory processes. The study also found that digital platforms, despite their potential for dialogue, were used mainly for promotional purposes, limiting opportunities for stakeholder engagement. As a result, persistent narrative gaps were observed across both years, reflecting a dissonance between the company's intended messages of innovation and accountability and stakeholders' expectations for transparency, authenticity, and participation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to legitimacy theory by illustrating how different forms of legitimacy are unevenly secured through CSR communication. While compliance ensures pragmatic legitimacy, the absence of dialogic engagement constrains the achievement of moral and cognitive legitimacy. This supports Suchman's (1995) argument that legitimacy is dynamic and socially constructed, and it highlights the need for organizations to adapt communication strategies as stakeholder expectations evolve. The findings also extend the concept of narrative gaps, demonstrating how they operate in the context of SOEs, where political and corporate imperatives intersect. By confirming that symbolic alignment with global frameworks does not substitute for stakeholder dialogue, this study adds to CSR communication scholarship on authenticity and trust.

The practical implications are equally important. For Telkom, the results highlight the necessity of transforming CSR communication from compliance to conversation. This requires adopting dialogic strategies that go beyond reporting obligations, engaging stakeholders directly in the design and evaluation of CSR initiatives, and leveraging digital platforms for genuine two-way communication. By doing so, Telkom could strengthen public trust, enhance its reputation, and secure long-term legitimacy beyond regulatory compliance. For Indonesian SOEs more broadly, the findings suggest that regulatory frameworks should not only mandate CSR activities but also encourage participatory communication practices. Policymakers could establish guidelines for stakeholder consultation, public feedback mechanisms, and transparent reporting on how stakeholder input is integrated into CSR decision-making.

The study is not without limitations. Because the analysis relied on corporate reports and secondary sources, it reflects primarily the organization's intended narratives rather than direct stakeholder perceptions. Future research could complement this approach with surveys, interviews, or focus groups to capture stakeholder voices more directly. Moreover, the study focused on a single case, which, while illustrative, limits generalizability. Comparative studies across multiple SOEs or across sectors could provide broader insights into the persistence of compliance narratives and the potential for dialogic transformation.

Despite these limitations, the study underscores the importance of addressing narrative gaps in CSR communication. For SOEs, which operate at the intersection of corporate and political legitimacy, the stakes are especially high. Moving from compliance to conversation is not merely an option but a necessity for maintaining legitimacy in the digital era, where stakeholders demand authenticity, transparency, and participation. By embracing dialogic CSR communication, SOEs like Telkom can bridge the gap between state mandates and societal expectations, thereby reinforcing both corporate credibility and public trust.

In conclusion, the study confirms that CSR communication in Indonesian SOEs remains dominated by compliance-oriented narratives, creating persistent gaps that undermine moral and cognitive legitimacy. Addressing these gaps requires a paradigm shift toward dialogic communication, where stakeholders are not passive audiences but active participants in shaping CSR agendas. Such a transformation would not only strengthen the legitimacy of individual corporations like Telkom but also enhance the role of SOEs in contributing to sustainable development and democratic accountability in Indonesia. The broader implication is that CSR communication should be understood not only as a tool of corporate strategy but also as a vital mechanism for fostering social trust and political legitimacy in emerging economies.

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