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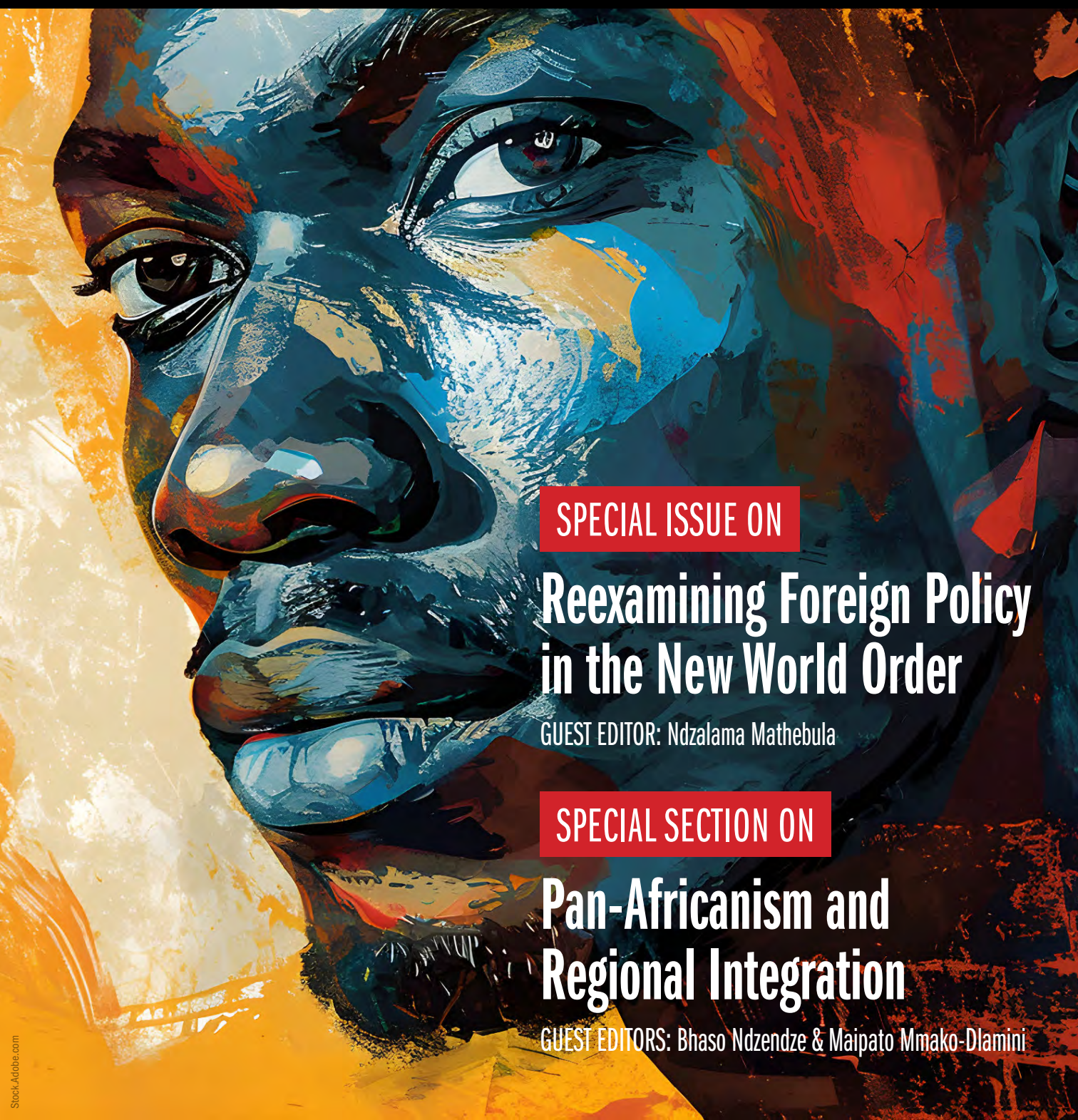
Reexamining Foreign Policy in the New World Order

GUEST EDITOR: Ndzalama Mathebula

SPECIAL SECTION ON

Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration

GUEST EDITORS: Bhaso Ndzendze & Maipato Mmako-Dlamini



The Thinker

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FOREWORD



SPECIAL ISSUE:

Reexamining Foreign Policy
in the New World Order

GUEST EDITOR: Ndzalama Mathebula, University of South Africa

Amid the changes in global politics, including interstate conflicts, coups, shifting alliances, new administrations, ambitions toward multipolarity, and the testing of international law, it has become apparent that states will always act in their own national interests, even at the expense of other states. Post-pandemic, numerous events have continued to confute the democratic peace theory and substantiate the view that realism always shapes a country's foreign policy through soft or hard power. While much of these developments in global politics threaten global peace and security and compel states to act in the best way that shields them from the geopolitical shocks that come with these changes, it becomes crucial to review and scrutinize the notion, practice, and understanding of foreign policy which can be defined as an activity of the state with which it fulfills its aims and interests within the international arena (Petrič, 2013). Although this definition depicts an uncomplicated scene, its practice has evinced how complex foreign policy can be through a series of current events. This can be attributed to the determinants of foreign policy, which often encompass diverse conditions, interests, and decisions at the state level, which may, unwittingly, yield unfavorable outcomes in the international arena. Different authors have conceptualized foreign policy in several ways, as follows.

According to Benko (1997), foreign policy is a set of actions and processes carried out by a state-organized group of people in the international sphere. It plans to use its political activities, all directed toward its interests, to influence the global scene in line with its goals and objectives. Calvert (1986) recognizes that foreign policy involves choices and actions primarily aimed at the relationships between states. Vukadinović (1981) argues that a state's foreign policy is an organized endeavor in which it seeks to maximize its interests and values in relation to other states and subjects operating in a foreign context. Crabb (1972) sums

up the two most important elements of foreign policy in his definition: "national objectives," which should be the aim, and "means," which should be employed to achieve this aim. The essence of these definitions depicts states wielding power to advance their 'national interest' through their relations with other states.

The significance of this issue lies in gauging changes and the evolution of foreign policy in the changing world order, while providing insights that can help explain and invigorate our understanding of global politics in its current form from a foreign policy angle.

AFRICA BY BUS SPECIAL SECTION:

Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration

GUEST EDITORS: Bhaso Ndzendze and Maipato Mmako-Dlamini

Pan-Africanism is a complex theory of African liberation and integration. Its pillars include solidarity, sovereignty and unity. It came about out of political conferences among African leaders, both within the continent and in the diaspora in places such as London (1900), Paris (1919); Brussels, London and Paris (1921); Lisbon and London (1923); New York City (1927), Manchester (1945); Dar es Salaam (1974); and Kampala (1994). Initially, Pan-Africanism was seized with the objective of freeing Africans from colonialism and apartheid. Its key thinkers include WEB du Bois, Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Thabo Mbeki, and Robert Sobukwe.

With the democratic transition in South Africa in 1994, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was reimagined and relaunched as the modern-day African Union (AU) in 2002 in Durban, still retaining its headquarters in Addis Ababa. The AU has a broader mandate, encompassing economic integration (seen through the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area between 2018 and 2021), human and peoples' rights, security and defence. However, it is not the sole – or perhaps even the main – driver of Pan-Africanism. There are other forms of Pan-Africanism and regional integration, including through regional economic communities (RECs) such as SADC, EAC, IGAD and ECOWAS.

The key questions confronting us today are (1) what does Pan-Africanism look like in our 21st century

context; (2) are individual countries contributors to Pan-Africanism, and (3) what role can non-state actors play in its attainment.

Against this background, a call for paper was issued to emerging scholars who participated in the 2025 Africa By Bus Programme that involved South African, Zambian and Zimbabwean institutions, wherein they were invited to write on the theme of 'Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration', subsequent to which they were subjected to double-blind peer review. The papers in this issue address the following research questions:

1. What has been the historic trajectory and main themes in South Africa-Zambia relations, and how are they evolving under the current governments?
2. How much, and in what specific ways, have

South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe contributed to Pan-Africanism and regional integration since the 1990s?

3. Does Pan-Africanism have a future and how can institutions of higher learning ensure its success?
4. How best can Pan-Africanism be critically taught and learned across multiple disciplines?

The articles make for fascinating theoretical and policy reading. Findings indicate that the three states of South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have taken a variety of noteworthy but inconsistent actions, underscoring the need for further collaboration, strategic goal alignment, and further research into the long-term effects of their regional roles. Moreover, trends signal a shift from Pan-Africanism as an elite political project to a grassroots movement driven by youth agency and creativity. Another study concludes that for Pan-Africanism to remain. Secondly, authors note

gradual progress in embedding Pan-African ideals into curriculum, but persistent challenges such as Eurocentric curricula, limited academic mobility, and resource constraints hinder deeper impact.

Finally, the research findings contained here have further indicated that Pan-Africanism and regional integration are transformative and feasible; however, practical application lacks and varies by disciplines as in economics, politics, and law. They are very theoretical as compared to medicine and science as is evident in these disciplines. The outcomes are clear: pan-Africanist pedagogies should play a pivotal role in critically examining colonial history, different cultural narratives, collaborations of African countries, and curriculum integration.

We are thankful to the authors, peer reviewers, and editorial teams at The Thinker for the tireless efforts that have gone into producing this issue, and we congratulate them all.

The University of Johannesburg acquired *The Thinker* in April 2019 from Dr Essop Pahad. Over the last decade, *The Thinker* has gained a reputation as a journal that explores Pan-African issues across fields and times. Ronit Frenkel, as the incoming editor, plans on maintaining the pan-African scope of the journal while increasing its coverage into fields such as books, art, literature and popular cultures. *The Thinker* is a 'hybrid' journal, publishing both journalistic pieces with more academic articles and contributors can now opt to have their submissions peer reviewed. We welcome Africa-centred articles from diverse perspectives, in order to enrich both knowledge of the continent and of issues impacting the continent.



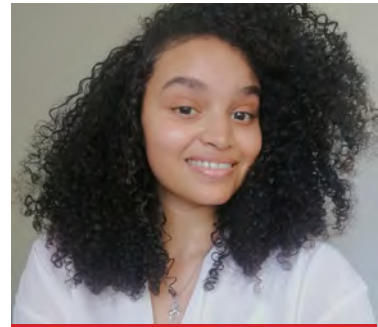
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I want to express my earnest appreciation to the journal's editorial team for ensuring the success of this issue, the peer reviewers for their rigorous and insightful feedback that ensured the high academic standard for this issue, and the contributors who shared their rich and insightful knowledge in this special issue on the reexamination of foreign policy in the changing global order. Each article contributed significantly to the issue across a range of topics, enriching it. I also extend my appreciation to the editors and contributors of the Africanism and regional integration special section, who enriched this issue with timely and relevant contributions. *Ndzalama Mathebula.*

All contributing analysts write in their personal capacity

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Balancing Act: South Africa's Foreign Policy, Peacebuilding and SDG 16 in an Era of Renewed Unilateralism

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Abstract

South Africa has established a post-apartheid foreign policy based on the principles of peace, justice, and inclusive governance, positioning itself as a supporter of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). However, renewed unilateralism in global politics, intensified by the return of a second Trump administration, is weakening multilateral institutions and placing greater pressure on middle powers to choose between normative commitments and strategic interests. This article examines how South Africa manages this dilemma by drawing on constructivism, middle power theory, and the English School to explain how identity, international norms, and strategic interests shape foreign policy behaviour. These insights inform a 2x2 scenario planning framework in which normative commitment and strategic interest alignment operate as independent variables and the resulting scenario functions as the dependent variable. The framework is applied to three case studies: the 2014 Lesotho mediation, the 2013 Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa's voting behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. The analysis finds that South Africa most often occupies the values-interests dilemma quadrant, where normative commitments are maintained rhetorically but weakened in practice by geopolitical and economic pressures. The article concludes that South Africa must recalibrate its diplomacy to remain strategically adaptive while preserving its credibility on SDG 16 in an increasingly divided international order.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals 16, Foreign Policy, Peacebuilding, Multilateralism, national interest(s), Unilateralism

Introduction

The *resurgence* of unilateralism in global politics, accelerated by a second Trump administration, poses a sharp test to countries that have historically championed multilateral diplomacy, international cooperation, and human rights (Mahmud 2025). For South Africa, this test is particularly direct. As a state whose foreign policy has long been rooted in the values of its democratic transition, peaceful negotiation, inclusive governance, and Pan-African solidarity, the new geopolitical climate demands difficult choices (Mlambo & Adetiba 2017: 1; Nyuykonge & Zondi 2017). The return of the Trump-era foreign policy, characterised by reduced commitment to international institutions, increased pressure on allies to align with the United States' (U.S.) interests, and transactional diplomacy, has reshaped the global arena in which South Africa operates. In this context, South Africa's ability to pursue Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which centres on peace, justice, and strong institutions, faces mounting constraints (United Nations (UN) 2015).

Since 1994, South Africa has positioned itself as a leading voice for democratic norms and peaceful conflict resolution, particularly in Africa (Mlambo & Adetiba 2017). Its foreign policy has emphasised Pan-African unity, multilateralism, and human rights. From Nelson Mandela's insistence that human rights should be the cornerstone of international relations to Thabo Mbeki's articulation of an *African Renaissance*¹ South Africa's global identity has been closely tied to its moral standing (Nantulya 2015). This identity has shaped its diplomatic interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, South Sudan, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, often prioritising inclusive political settlements over military force, and institutional reform over regime change. South Africa's peacebuilding efforts have also extended to its engagement with multilateral bodies, including

the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement.

But this normative stance has become increasingly difficult to maintain. South Africa's voting record in the UN, its measured silence on human rights violations in allied states, and its reliance on economic partnerships with China and Russia have led to accusations of diplomatic ambiguity or selective moralism (Graham 2016; Eduard 2016). Critics argue that the country's commitment to global norms has softened under pressure, especially when economic or security interests are at stake. The current global reordering, shaped by the U.S. inward focus² and intensified great power rivalry, further complicates these choices. South Africa now faces heightened scrutiny from the Global North and its African neighbours over how it defines its values, and when it chooses to uphold them (Habib 2025). These pressures expose two recurrent dimensions in South Africa's foreign policy behaviour: its level of normative commitment to peace, justice and multilateralism and the extent to which its strategic interests align with or conflict with these principles. These dimensions are observable in practice. Normative commitment refers to the degree to which South Africa's actions reflect the values of SDG 16, as evidenced by its voting behaviour, responses to human rights violations, and engagement in multilateral peacebuilding. Strategic interest alignment reflects the influence of economic dependencies, geopolitical partnerships, and regional security priorities on foreign policy choices. Together, these indicators reveal when South Africa acts in accordance with its normative identity and when strategic incentives drive more

¹ *Emphasis added.* The African Renaissance refers to the normative vision advanced by Mbeki in the late 1990s, centred on African renewal through democratic governance, regional integration, cultural revival and collective self-determination. See Mbeki (1998).

² President Trump has pursued the "America First" policy (inward-focused), a set of policy ideas that prioritise the interests of the United States and its citizens above all else. It emphasises national interests in matters of trade, immigration, foreign policy, and national security. It has resulted in the U.S. partially withdrawing from international organisations and initiatives that have been the cornerstones of its hegemony, creating a vacuum that Beijing will be keen to exploit. Trump's 'America First' foreign policy could accelerate China's push for global leadership. (See Mathews, 2024).

pragmatic behaviour. This article argues that renewed unilateralism intensifies the tension between these two dimensions and that South Africa's ability to advance SDG 16 depends on how it balances normative commitments with strategic interests in this constrained environment.

To analyse South Africa's foreign policy under these evolving conditions, this article adopts the Intuitive Logics scenario planning method and applies its two axes approach to develop a 2x2 matrix that maps four contrasting diplomatic scenarios. The design is theory-informed.³ The framework is built around two independent high-impact, high-uncertainty variables: (1) the level of normative commitment to peace, justice, and multilateralism and (2) the extent to which South Africa's strategic interests align with or conflict with these normative principles. In this design, the two axes function as independent variables and the resulting scenario classification serves as the dependent variable, emerging from the interaction between normative commitment and strategic interest alignment. Together, these dimensions reflect South Africa's position in the international system, whether as a principled actor grounded in the ideals of SDG 16 or as a pragmatic state adjusting to global realignments. Shifting forces, such as the United States' diplomatic pressure, the erosion of multilateral norms, commodity-linked dependencies, and regional instability, influence these variables by unsettling South Africa's traditional balancing posture. The resulting matrix provides a structured tool for assessing whether South Africa sustains principled multilateralism or moves toward interest-led diplomacy in ways that may weaken its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 16.

To illustrate how these tensions play out in practice, the paper critically evaluates three case studies. First, South Africa's mediation in Lesotho (2014) reflects a moment of principled leadership, where

3 Constructivism explains the importance of identity and norms, which underpins the variable of normative commitment. Middle power theory highlights how South Africa navigates strategic constraints and opportunities, informing the alignment of strategic interests. The English School situates these choices within a society of states where order and legitimacy shape how values and interests are balanced. Together, these perspectives justify the two variables used in the 2x2 matrix.

constitutional order was restored through values-driven diplomacy (Deleglise 2023). Second, the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC (2013) under South African command signals the country's readiness to support regional stability with a military commitment, marking a strong alignment between its interests and norms (Gbaya 2015: 3-4). Third, South Africa's voting patterns in the UN, particularly its mixed positions on Syria, Ukraine, and Palestine, highlight the growing dilemma between normative consistency and geopolitical accommodation (Dent 2022). These examples offer insight into how South Africa's foreign policy evolves in an era of intensified global pressure and diminished normative clarity.

This paper makes two key contributions. First, it advances an analytical framework for understanding middle power⁴ diplomacy under normative strain. Second, it situates South Africa's current choices within broader debates on the future of SDG 16 and the viability of values-based foreign policy in the Global South. As South Africa navigates a more fragmented and contested global landscape, its ability to remain a credible champion of peace, justice, and strong institutions will depend on how it resolves the trade-offs captured in this matrix.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it outlines the theoretical basis for the matrix, defining the key variables of normative commitment and strategic interest alignment. Second, it traces the post-1994 trajectory of South Africa's foreign policy to establish its normative foundations. Third, it presents and explains the matrix as an analytical framework. The following section applies this matrix to three pivotal case studies: Lesotho, the DRC, and South Africa's UN voting patterns, to assess how South Africa navigates the tensions between principle and pragmatism in concrete settings. These case studies are strategically selected to demonstrate how South Africa's foreign policy choices impact the advancement or erosion of SDG16 across bilateral,

4 Middle-power diplomacy refers to the foreign policy strategies employed by nations that, while not major global powers, still exert significant influence in international affairs. These countries often leverage their resources, diplomatic capabilities, and international standing to pursue multilateral solutions to global challenges, promote international norms, and act as bridge-builders between different actors (See Efstathopoulos, 2015).

regional, and multilateral arenas. The final section reflects on the risks and prospects of South Africa's diplomacy in an era of global fragmentation and declining multilateralism.

Theoretical Framework: Normative Commitment and Strategic Interest in Foreign Policy

This article adopts a constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis, drawing on elements of middle power theory and the English School to explain how South Africa navigates competing pressures in the international system (Efsthopoulos 2015). Constructivism is helpful because it focuses on how state behaviour is shaped by norms, identities, and social structures rather than by material capabilities alone (Jung 2019; Wendt 1992). States are not merely utility-maximising actors. They also act in ways that align with their ideas about who they are and what they represent (Wendt 1992). This is particularly important for a country like South Africa, which has historically framed its foreign policy in moral and ideological terms. Post-apartheid South Africa has pursued a foreign policy rooted in human rights, multilateralism, and African solidarity (Department of Foreign Affairs 1996). These are not simply rhetorical positions. They are integral to how South Africa defines its role in the world.

However, constructivist approaches are often criticised for underestimating the role of material interests and structural constraints (Palan 2000), which have significant implications for South African foreign policy analysis. This limitation is particularly relevant when assessing cases where economic or security interests, such as those in the DRC or the UN, have outweighed normative commitments, exposing the gaps between principled discourse and material-driven diplomacy. To address this limitation, the paper supplements constructivism with insights from middle power theory and the English School. Middle power theory highlights the role of states that, while not great powers, influence international outcomes through diplomacy, coalition-building, and norm entrepreneurship (Eduard 2003). South Africa fits this category, especially in African and global South forums. Middle powers often face constraints when normative ideals conflict with strategic imperatives such as economic stability or

geopolitical alignment. English School pluralism⁵ is helpful here because it acknowledges that states operate within a society of states, where coexistence, order, and sovereignty are as important as shared norms (Bain 2013). This pluralist perspective highlights that tensions between national interests and international responsibilities are not always reconciled through consensus or cooperation. Together, these theoretical traditions provide the conceptual grounding for selecting normative commitment and strategic interest alignment as the two dimensions that best capture how South Africa navigates the tension between values and interests in foreign policy.

Combining these perspectives, the paper develops a framework that recognises normative aspirations and strategic calculations in foreign policy. The framework is operationalised through a 2x2 matrix based on two key variables: normative commitment and strategic interest alignment. Each of these is defined below. Normative commitment is defined as the extent to which South Africa adheres to international norms that reflect the principles of SDG 16. These include peacebuilding, multilateral cooperation, human rights, and promoting accountable institutions. A high normative commitment is evident when South Africa acts consistently with these principles, even when doing so imposes costs. This might involve leading mediation efforts, voting for human rights resolutions, or speaking out against repression. A low normative commitment is observed when South Africa avoids engagement or adopts positions that contradict SDG 16 norms, such as remaining silent in the face of regional authoritarianism or supporting governments that undermine democratic institutions. It also becomes evident in voting behaviour at the UN, particularly when abstentions or procedural objections on major human rights or peace and security resolutions weaken the country's normative stance. Normative commitment may also soften when economic or geopolitical pressures arise, including trade partnership risks, tensions related to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) or G20

5 Pluralism emphasises sovereignty, order, and non-intervention over solidarist goals such as human rights enforcement, which clarifies why states often prioritise stability over normative consistency (See Bull 1977).

positioning, and competition for critical mineral and energy security. Because foreign policy behaviour can be interpreted differently by external actors, the framework does not treat misinterpretation as a separate category. Instead, ambiguous cases are assessed by examining whether the behaviour substantively aligns with SDG 16 principles, drawing on indicators such as voting consistency, rhetorical positioning, multilateral engagement, and the material incentives that shape or constrain South Africa's normative choices (See Tables 1 & 2).

Strategic Interest Alignment refers to whether South

Africa's material and geopolitical interests support or conflict with its normative objectives. These interests include economic partnerships, energy security, trade agreements, and regional influence. When aligned with strategic interests, actions promoting peace and strong institutions also advance South Africa's national interest. For example, supporting AU peacekeeping might reinforce regional stability and economic integration. When strategic interests conflict, acting on normative commitments may come at a cost. This can occur when taking a moral position risks alienating a key trading partner or regional ally.

Table 1. **Empirical Indicators for Normative Commitment and Strategic Interest Alignment.**

Variable	High Expression Indicators	Low Expression Indicators
Normative Commitment	<p>Regional: Active SADC mediation; support for democratic transitions; constitutional restoration (e.g., Lesotho 2014).</p> <p>Continental: Leadership in AU peace and security reforms; support for AU governance norms; backing inclusive political settlements (e.g., DRC, Burundi).</p> <p>Global: Voting for human rights and peace resolutions in the UN; public statements condemning repression; alignment with SDG 16 in multilateral processes.</p>	<p>Regional: Silence or passivity toward authoritarian drift in neighbouring states; reluctance to intervene when democratic norms are violated.</p> <p>Continental: Support for governments that undermine democratic institutions; avoiding positions that challenge influential AU partners</p> <p>Global: UN abstentions or procedural objections on key human rights or conflict-related resolutions; contradictory rhetoric; normative softening due to AGOA, G20, or great-power pressure.</p>
	Aligned	Conflicting
Strategic Interest Alignment	<p>Regional: Stability outcomes that support trade corridors, energy security, and cross-border commercial interests; SADC alignment that strengthens security cooperation.</p> <p>Continental: Participation in AU peace operations that reinforce South Africa's regional influence and security partnerships; economic complementarities through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) initiatives.</p> <p>Global: Voting alignment with strategic partners where consistent with SDG 16; actions that enhance trade or energy partnerships; protection of export markets in the US, European Union, and Asia.</p>	<p>Regional: Interventions or stances that generate economic or security costs; alienation of key SADC partners; risks to regional integration.</p> <p>Continental: Tension between peace operations and national security risks; reduced influence in AU decision-making when interests conflict with norms.</p> <p>Global: AGOA eligibility risks; pressure from China, Russia, or the US during great-power rivalry; vulnerability linked to critical mineral competition and battery supply chain politics.</p>

Source: Compiled by the author based on reviewed literature, 2025.

Note. Empirical indicators were informed by UN voting records, South African government official communication, and SADC mediation reports, which collectively provide the documentary basis for assessing shifts in normative commitments and strategic interest alignment.

The interaction between these two variables generates four possible foreign policy scenarios. First, South Africa can pursue principled and effective diplomacy when both normative commitment is high and strategic interests are aligned. Second, when normative commitment is high, but interests are in conflict, the state faces a values-versus-interest dilemma. Third, when commitment is low, but interests are aligned, diplomacy becomes more transactional and short-term. Fourth, when both variables are weak or negative, the result is policy drift or normative decline (See Figure 1). The value of this framework lies in its ability to link these conceptual dimensions to observable indicators, enabling South Africa's foreign policy choices to be interpreted systematically rather than viewed as inconsistent or ad hoc.

Post-1994 Trajectory of South African Foreign Policy

South Africa's foreign policy after 1994 was shaped by its democratic transition and its desire to project a new identity based on justice, reconciliation, and multilateral cooperation (Department of International Relations & Cooperation (DIRCO) 2023). The negotiated settlement that ended apartheid not only transformed domestic politics. It also gave rise to a foreign policy vision rooted in human rights, democratic governance, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Mlambo & Adetiba 2017). This identity positioned South Africa as a regional leader and a global advocate for a just international order.

Under President Nelson Mandela, South Africa's foreign policy prioritised moral authority and the promotion of human rights. Mandela's government viewed the international community as a partner in advancing peace and equality (Mandela 1993). South Africa's early diplomatic engagements included support for democratic transitions in Nigeria and the DRC, and firm positions against authoritarian rule elsewhere on the continent (Gbaya 2015). During the Mandela era, South Africa positioned itself as a promoter of international norms, aligning closely with international law and the UN Charter (Inglis 2009).

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idea of an African Renaissance, which aimed to promote African unity, economic integration, and institutional reform. He was instrumental in the formation of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Inglis 2009: 47). South Africa also took on a more assertive mediation role during this period. It facilitated peace negotiations in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, and the DRC (Gbaya 2015: 2). The emphasis shifted slightly from global moral leadership to African regionalism and institution-building. South Africa's growing involvement in SADC and AU structures reflected this shift.

Under President Jacob Zuma, South Africa's foreign policy became more complex and sometimes contradictory. Zuma emphasised South-South cooperation, particularly through BRICS and the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) dialogue forum (Sidiropoulos 2021: 412-413). However, domestic political challenges began to affect diplomatic choices. South Africa's approach to Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe is one example. Despite evidence of repression and electoral fraud, the government opted for quiet diplomacy rather than public condemnation (Landsberg 2016). Critics argued that South Africa's commitment to human rights had become selective. Strategic alliances and ideological solidarity often took precedence over normative principles.

The Ramaphosa administration has sought to reclaim South Africa's credibility in international

affairs, reintroducing the language of human rights, multilateralism, and democratic values into foreign policy discourse. Pretoria attempted to reassert itself as a moral actor and continental leader, balancing relationships between BRICS partners and traditional Western allies. This was evident in its active AU chairmanship, rhetorical support for conflict resolution, and continued engagement in regional institutions (Otavio 2021). Nevertheless, longstanding tensions in foreign policy practice persisted. Despite affirming support for human rights in principle, South Africa frequently abstained from key UN resolutions concerning Syria, Ukraine, Belarus, and China, often citing sovereignty, non-interference, or lack of consensus. Such positions raised questions about the inconsistency between South Africa's stated values and diplomatic actions. As Dent (2024) argues, the country has often adopted the language of principle while avoiding principled stands, especially in situations involving powerful allies or strategic interests. This pattern suggests that while the Ramaphosa era has marked a rhetorical shift, the substance of South Africa's human rights diplomacy remains constrained by geopolitical alignments and cautious pragmatism.

Two persistent forces have influenced South Africa's foreign policy throughout this period. The first is the country's normative identity as a post-conflict democracy that champions peace and justice. The second is the need to protect strategic interests in a changing global environment. These interests include economic ties, energy security, and regional influence. The tension between these forces has produced a pattern of mixed engagement. South Africa remains active in diplomacy and peacebuilding but is increasingly cautious in how it positions itself.

The Trump-era shift in U.S. foreign policy has sharpened this dilemma. The U.S. placed greater pressure on its global partners to align with its strategic agenda (Ubaydullaeva 2025). At the same time, it withdrew support for multilateral institutions and reduced funding for peacebuilding and development. This environment has made it more difficult for middle powers like South Africa to maintain their normative commitments. As the second Trump administration intensifies this trend, South Africa faces renewed pressure to choose between principle and pragmatism.

SDG 16 is central to South Africa's foreign policy identity because it aligns directly with the principles that shaped its democratic transition: peace, justice, accountable governance, and strong institutions. SDG 16 is not only a global commitment but also a strategic interest for South Africa. Stable, democratic, and peaceful regional environments support economic integration, reduce security burdens, and enhance South Africa's leadership role on the continent. Upholding SDG 16, therefore, strengthens both the normative foundations of South Africa's diplomacy and the practical conditions needed for regional stability. This makes SDG 16 an appropriate lens through which to assess whether South Africa's foreign policy remains consistent with its post-1994 aspirations in an increasingly fragmented world.

South Africa's post-1994 foreign policy has therefore evolved through three overlapping phases. The first focused on moral leadership and reconciliation. The second expanded into regional institution-building and peace mediation. The third has been marked by growing uncertainty and contested priorities. The challenge now is whether South Africa can still act as a credible promoter of SDG 16 in a world that increasingly rewards transactional and interest-driven diplomacy. This question is central to the scenarios developed in the next section of this article.

Towards a Conceptual Framework: Foreign Policy Trade-offs and SDG 16

This section introduces the 2x2 analytical matrix used to assess South Africa's foreign policy behaviour under the constraints of a fragmented global order. The framework draws on the Intuitive Logics tradition of scenario planning, a method that has long been used in strategic foresight and is increasingly adopted in academic research for its structured and transparent approach to analysing uncertainty. Scenario planning is valuable because it anchors inference in clearly defined variables, documented evidence, and systematic design procedures (Wright and Cairns 2011). By organising high-impact uncertainties around theoretically informed dimensions, it enables the exploration of multiple plausible futures rather than a single deterministic forecast. Scholars such as Schoemaker (1995) and Bradfield et al. (2005) highlight that its academic strength lies

in combining historical patterns with theoretical framing to enhance analytical robustness. Following these principles, this article incorporates established behavioural trends in South Africa's diplomacy into the scenario design process to strengthen plausibility and reduce subjectivity.

The matrix builds directly on the theoretical foundations established in the previous sections. Constructivism, middle power theory, and English School pluralism together clarify why South Africa's foreign policy is shaped by the tension between normative identity and strategic calculation. These insights justify the selection of the two variables that organise the matrix: normative commitment and strategic interest alignment. Their conceptual meanings and empirical indicators have been defined, providing the basis for analysing how South Africa navigates the pressures of a divided international environment marked by weakened

multilateralism, renewed unilateralism, and intensified competition over influence (see Table 1).

The purpose of the matrix is not to predict outcomes with certainty but to map the range of plausible foreign policy configurations that emerge from different combinations of these variables. In doing so, it offers a structured tool for evaluating how shifts in global and regional pressures affect South Africa's ability to advance SDG 16. This includes external shocks, such as the resurgence of unilateralism in global politics, which is intensified by the policy orientation of a second Trump administration. This places growing pressure on middle powers to adopt clearer geopolitical positions. The scenarios developed in the next section illustrate how variations in normative commitment and strategic interest alignment have shaped South Africa's behaviour across regional, continental, and global cases, and how these historical patterns help inform the plausible futures captured in the matrix.

Scenarios of Foreign Policy Alignment and Implications for SDG 16

Strategic Interests Alignment	Aligned	Strategic Pragmatism Foreign policy is driven by material or regional goals, with limited concern for human rights or democratic norms. Peacebuilding may occur, but it lacks strong normative framing. <i>Example: DRC Force Intervention Brigade (2013).</i>	Principled Multilateralism South Africa's actions are consistent with the SDG 16 goals. It engages in diplomacy, peacemaking and multilateral cooperation that also benefit national interests. <i>Example: Lesotho mediation (2014).</i>
	Conflicting	Normative Decline Foreign policy neither prioritises peace, justice or human rights, nor serves long term national interest. Engagements may appear transactional, inconsistent or passive. <i>Example: Silence on the Zimbabwe human rights violations.</i>	Values vs Interests Dilemma South Africa maintains a strong commitment to norms, but doing so may damage key relationships or economic interests. <i>Example: Supporting Palestine while risking U.S. criticism.</i>
		Low	High
		Normative Commitment	

Source: Compiled by Author, 2025.

Figure 1. Shows scenarios of foreign policy alignment and their implications for SDG 16.

This figure outlines four scenarios based on the interaction between normative commitment and the alignment of strategic interests. Each scenario represents a dominant foreign policy orientation and its likely impacts to SDG 16 (see Table 2), including peacebuilding, institutional accountability, and democratic governance.

Principled Multilateralism

This scenario reflects South Africa's post-apartheid aspiration to act as a norm-driven and cooperative middle power. In this configuration, strategic interests and normative commitments reinforce one another, enabling foreign policy choices that advance human rights, peacebuilding, and

Table 2. Shows foreign policy orientation and its projected impact on SDG 16.

Quadrant	Foreign Policy Orientation	Impact on SDG 16
Principled Multilateralism	Norm-driven, values-led diplomacy with institutional support	Strong positive effect on peace, accountability, and the rule of law
Values vs Interests Dilemma	Selective norm adherence constrained by external pressures	Mixed effect: reinforces values in some areas, weakens credibility in others
Strategic Pragmatism	Interest-based diplomacy focused on regional stability	Limited impact: stabilises conflict zones but lacks long-term institutional investment
Normative Decline	Passive, transactional, or ambiguous diplomacy	Negative effect: undermines the rule of law and weakens South Africa's leadership role

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2025.

Note. The table summarises the four scenarios generated by the 2x2 matrix. Each quadrant represents a distinct combination of normative commitment and strategic interest alignment, illustrating how variations in these variables influence South Africa's capacity to promote peace, justice, and robust institutions.

institutional reform. Regional and multilateral bodies such as SADC, the AU, and the UN provide the institutional platforms through which South Africa can pursue both stability and principled diplomacy. Actions in this quadrant rely on mediation, rule-based cooperation, and support for inclusive political settlements, producing a coherent alignment between South Africa's values and its regional economic and security interests. The 2014 Lesotho mediation offers a clear example. South Africa, acting through SADC, restored constitutional order by facilitating a negotiated political process, thereby supporting democratic norms while safeguarding regional stability (Deleglise 2023). This reflects a moment where moral leadership and strategic interest convergence produced a constructive foreign policy outcome. This behaviour strengthens SDG 16 by reinforcing the rule of law, promoting peaceful dispute resolution, and bolstering South Africa's credibility as a principled regional leader.

Values vs Interests Dilemma

This scenario captures the increasing difficulty South Africa faces in sustaining its normative identity while operating in a polarised international system. In this configuration, normative commitment remains strong at the rhetorical level, especially in support of SDG 16 principles such as peace, justice, and human rights. However, these commitments increasingly conflict with strategic partnerships, geopolitical alignments,

and economic interests, resulting in a selective or inconsistent application of values. The pressures associated with renewed unilateralism intensify these contradictions. Major powers expect clearer political alignment, and deviation from their preferences risks trade consequences, diplomatic friction, or reduced access to key markets. The Russia-Ukraine war is a prominent example. South Africa's decision to adopt a non-aligned position and abstain from several UN resolutions drew criticism from Western partners, who interpreted neutrality as favouring Russia. Pretoria justified its stance in terms of sovereignty, dialogue, and its strategic considerations linked to BRICS.

A similar pattern appears in voting on Syria, Belarus, and China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims, where South Africa has avoided firm human rights positions through abstentions or procedural objections (Stremlau 2022). By contrast, South Africa has maintained consistent and vocal support for Palestine, even when this has generated tension with Western partners. This contrast underscores the selective application of values, shaped by ideological commitments, domestic political resonance, and strategic partnerships. The outcome is a foreign policy posture in which norms matter, but interests determine when and how they are applied. This produces reputational ambiguity and constrains South Africa's ability to advance SDG 16 in a consistent and credible manner.

Strategic Pragmatism

In this scenario, South Africa's foreign policy is shaped primarily by material interests and geopolitical calculations. Normative goals are not abandoned entirely but are selectively invoked to justify actions. Engagements are transactional, and support for peacebuilding may be motivated by economic, security, or reputational concerns rather than a consistent commitment to justice. The Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC (2013) offers an example (Gbaya 2015). South Africa contributed troops and leadership in an unprecedented peace enforcement mission. While the intervention restored some stability, it did not centre on long-term governance reform or an inclusive political settlement. The focus was on neutralising immediate threats. The announcement of a phased withdrawal of South African troops in 2025, following deadly clashes near Goma, underscores the fragility of South Africa's sustained commitment to peacebuilding (South African Government News Agency 2025). Rather than reinforcing a rules-based regional order, Pretoria's response, accompanied by a sharp deterioration in relations with Rwanda and growing scrutiny of its business interests in the DRC, raises doubts about the coherence and impartiality of its regional security role (Sanderson 2025). Taken together, these patterns point to a utilitarian approach to peace and security: one that delivers tactical gains or stabilisation but lacks the consistency, institutional foresight and normative clarity required for meaningful progress toward SDG 16. Although South Africa appears to be a capable security actor, its actions do not reliably translate into long-term governance improvements or strengthened regional norms.

Normative Decline

This scenario represents a breakdown in South Africa's foreign policy coherence. Both normative commitment and interest alignment are low. South Africa becomes reactive, avoids controversial issues, and fails to leverage its diplomatic standing. The result is increased alignment with authoritarian regimes, silence on repression, and reduced credibility in multilateral forums. This path risks turning South Africa into a passive or opportunistic actor, undermining the legacy of its democratic transition. It's quiet diplomacy in

Zimbabwe, especially during moments of political crisis, that illustrates this trajectory. Inaction or moral ambiguity diminishes South Africa's ability to defend democratic norms in the region. A similar ambiguity emerged in its neutrality on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, where abstentions and procedural explanations highlighted that geopolitical partnerships took precedence over normative commitments to international law and peaceful dispute resolution. The implications for SDG 16 are negative. Weak engagement, selective partnerships, and incoherent messaging limit progress toward accountable governance, the rule of law, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Current evidence suggests South Africa often oscillates between the value-interests dilemma and strategic pragmatism quadrants. However, specific cases vary. This analytical framework enables movement across quadrants depending on the issue, region, and timing. It does not assume fixed positions. Historical examples show moments of high normative commitment, such as the 2014 Lesotho mediation, where constitutional restoration was prioritised despite political costs. There are also moments of low normative commitment at the UN, such as muted responses to crises in Zimbabwe, Syria, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These shifts illustrate how changes in normative commitment and strategic interest alignment shape behaviour across different contexts.

In a world shaped by renewed unilateralism and global fragmentation, intensified by the foreign policy posture of a second Trump administration, the matrix provides a structured way to assess whether South Africa continues to uphold or risks drifting away from its normative foreign policy legacy. It also clarifies what is at stake for SDG 16. The following section applies this matrix to three key cases: South Africa's mediation in Lesotho, its peace enforcement role in the DRC, and its voting record in the UN. These historical patterns provide a baseline for assessing how renewed unilateralism, intensified under a second Trump administration, may shape South Africa's future ability to advance SDG 16.

Foreign Policy in Action: Navigating Norms and Interests in a Divided World

This section applies the matrix to three case studies to evaluate how South Africa balances its normative

commitments and strategic interests in foreign policy. The selected cases, including Lesotho (2014) and the DRC (2013), as well as UN voting, offer a cross-section of diplomatic engagement across bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels. Each case is situated within a different quadrant of the matrix. Together, they illustrate how South Africa moves between principled diplomacy and strategic accommodation in a changing geopolitical environment.

Lesotho (2014) – Principled Multilateralism

In August 2014, a failed coup and political crisis in Lesotho threatened to derail the country's constitutional order. South Africa intervened diplomatically as the regional hegemon and a founding member of SADC to restore stability. Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was appointed as the SADC mediator to facilitate dialogue among political actors, re-establish the rule of law, and create conditions for democratic elections. The analysis draws on SADC mediation communiqués and the official reports of the SADC facilitator, which document the process and outcomes of the intervention (South African Government 2014a; South African Government 2014b).

South Africa's role in this intervention reflected high normative commitment. The emphasis was on constitutional legitimacy, electoral integrity, and peaceful resolution. At the same time, given Lesotho's geographic proximity and economic dependency, it also served South Africa's strategic interest in regional stability (Gbaya 2015). The mediation avoided military escalation and delivered a negotiated political solution through multilateral channels. Elections were held in early 2015, with international observers confirming their credibility.

This case aligns with the Principled Multilateralism quadrant. South Africa supported the values of SDG 16, including peace, justice, and strong institutions, while securing its regional leadership and mitigating reputational risks. The coordinated use of diplomacy, institutional legitimacy, and peaceful settlement mechanisms demonstrates how values and interests can be mutually reinforcing in addressing regional crises.

DRC (2013) – Strategic Pragmatism

In 2013, South Africa joined the UN-authorized Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) under MONUSCO in eastern DRC. The FIB was an unprecedented

shift in peacekeeping practice. Unlike traditional operations, it had an offensive mandate to neutralise armed groups (Mutisi 2016: 32). South Africa provided troops, equipment, and command leadership. The intervention was successful in achieving its short-term military objectives. It reduced armed violence and helped stabilise a volatile region.

However, the operation focused on military goals rather than institutional reform or political transition (Karlsruud 2018). The FIB relied on offensive operations to defeat M23, but it did not establish a pathway for post-conflict reconstruction, inclusive governance, or justice mechanisms. Karlsruud's study, *The UN at War: Peace Operations in the New Era*, shows that regional troops in the FIB acted effectively only when military action aligned with their governments' national interests, and cooperation declined once operations no longer served these interests (Karlsruud 2018: 91). This highlights the structural limits of peace enforcement missions that depend on politically diverse contributing states. South Africa's involvement reflected these constraints. Its decisions were shaped by regional security concerns, defence industry interests, and its desire to maintain influence in the SADC and within the UN system. The intervention delivered a temporary reduction in violence, which aligns with selected SDG 16 indicators, but it did not advance the deeper goals of institutional accountability, inclusive governance, or the rule of law. The resurgence of conflict and the phased withdrawal of South African troops in 2025 further illustrate the short-term and interest-driven character of this approach.

This case fits within the Strategic Pragmatism quadrant. South Africa aligned its security interests with a form of multilateral engagement. However, its normative commitment to long-term peacebuilding and institutional accountability was limited.

United Nations Voting Behaviour (2019-2024): Values vs Interests Dilemma

South Africa's voting record at the United Nations illustrates how tensions between normative commitments and strategic interests shape its foreign policy behaviour. South Africa abstained from several high-profile human rights resolutions during its recent voting cycles, including the 2019 UNGA vote on Belarus (UN Watch 2018) and the

2022 resolution suspending Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. It also abstained from the 2022 resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine (South African Government New Agenda 2022). These decisions were often justified in terms of sovereignty, procedural objections, or the need for inclusive dialogue; however, they also reflected deeper strategic pressures linked to relations with Russia, China, and BRICS partners (Dent 2022; Stremmlau 2022).

South Africa also adopted strong normative positions on Palestine (South Africa Government News Agency 2024). It consistently condemned Israeli settlement activity and defended Palestinian self-determination. This contrast highlights the selective application of normative commitments. Human rights and accountability are vigorously defended in cases that align with South Africa's ideological identity and domestic political resonance. However, South Africa adopts more cautious or ambiguous positions when core geopolitical or economic interests are implicated, particularly in relations with strategic partners.

The emergent pattern is one in which norms are invoked but not consistently defended. This selective behaviour reflects the dilemma of values-interests at the heart of South Africa's foreign policy. The examples used in this section are illustrative rather than exhaustive, but they demonstrate a clear trend. South Africa's voting behaviour often calibrates principle and pragmatism in response to global power asymmetries. This inconsistency weakens its stance as a norm entrepreneur and limits its credibility on SDG 16 indicators related to accountability, transparency, and the rule of law.

Risks and Prospects in an Age of Strategic Fragmentation

South Africa's post-1994 foreign policy has been shaped by an enduring tension between its normative identity and strategic imperatives. This tension is now heightened by growing geopolitical fragmentation, the resurgence of unilateralism, and the erosion of multilateral institutions. The return of a Trump-style U.S. foreign policy increases the pressure on middle powers to take sides, align diplomatically, or risk exclusion. South Africa is not immune to this dynamic.

The case studies show that South Africa shifts between quadrants depending on the issue and

setting. It remains capable of principled action, particularly in the region, but increasingly defaults to strategic pragmatism or cautious neutrality in multilateral spaces. This behavioural pattern reflects both external pressures and internal political uncertainty. Coalition politics, domestic economic strain, and contested ideological direction all limit South Africa's ability to speak with a unified foreign policy voice.

Looking ahead, the risks are twofold. First, inconsistency may erode South Africa's credibility and influence in shaping global norms. Second, reliance on transactional partnerships may weaken its ability to lead regional peace and governance agendas. If South Africa abandons its post-apartheid commitments to justice, democracy, and multilateralism, it risks falling into the Normative Decline quadrant. This outcome would undermine its role as a bridge between North and South and limit its ability to advance SDG 16.

However, there are also prospects for renewal. South Africa remains a respected voice in African diplomacy. Its historical legitimacy and institutional capacity position it to lead within SADC and the AU. By reaffirming its commitment to consistent norm-based diplomacy and aligning that commitment with carefully selected strategic interests, South Africa can move closer to the Principled Multilateralism quadrant. Doing so will require more explicit policy articulation, stronger regional partnerships, and investment in institutions that anchor democratic values in foreign policy. The matrix presented in this paper provides a tool for navigating this complexity. It helps identify risks, clarify trade-offs, and outline realistic options. Most importantly, it reminds us that foreign policy is not only about diplomacy and defence. It is also about what kind of state South Africa aspires to be in the world and what values it chooses to defend in an age of increasing uncertainty.

Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

South Africa's foreign policy stands at a critical crossroads. The pursuit of normative ideals such as peace, multilateralism, and justice must be continuously weighed against shifting global realities and national strategic interests. This paper

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Domestically, political pressures within the government, economic vulnerabilities, and limited public engagement in foreign affairs weaken South Africa’s diplomatic coherence.

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has shown that South Africa’s historical identity as a peacebuilder and promoter of SDG 16 remains relevant; however, it is increasingly shaped by the complexity of contemporary geopolitics. The 2x2 matrix framework illuminated how South Africa’s policy choices move across four possible scenarios. Each scenario reflects a different alignment between its values and interests. While the country often aspires to principled multilateralism, in practice, it frequently moves between values versus interests dilemmas and strategic pragmatism.

The case studies, ranging from continental peace initiatives to quiet diplomacy with Zimbabwe and ambiguous alignments with Russia and China, demonstrate the tensions South Africa must

manage. These tensions intensify in a period of renewed unilateralism, further strengthened by the foreign policy posture of a second Trump administration, where global diplomacy is more transactional and multilateral institutions are weaker. This presents a dual challenge. South Africa must resist adopting pragmatic, values-light approaches. At the same time, it must avoid being sidelined by powerful states that are increasingly suspicious of non-alignment and normative advocacy.

Domestically, political pressures within the government, economic vulnerabilities, and limited public engagement in foreign affairs weaken South Africa’s diplomatic coherence. Internationally, closer ties with authoritarian regimes, motivated by economic or geopolitical interests, risk undermining its credibility as a norm entrepreneur and peace promoter. To maintain its leadership on SDG 16, South Africa will need a more calibrated foreign policy that recognises strategic realities while still protecting its normative foundations. Recommended actions include:

Redefine zone-specific diplomacy by focusing value-driven leadership on regions where South Africa holds leverage and legitimacy, such as SADC and the AU.

Revitalise its role as a norm entrepreneur in multilateral forums like the AU, UN, and BRICS by advancing governance reforms and conflict resolution efforts.

Diversify international partnerships while maintaining clear red lines on human rights, democracy, and institutional accountability.

Strengthen internal coherence by aligning domestic political priorities with consistent foreign policy positions that support SDG 16.

Ultimately, South Africa’s foreign policy in the Trump 2.0 era will be judged not only by the alliances it forms but also by whether it can navigate a divided world while remaining committed to the principles that have shaped its global identity since 1994. The matrix framework developed in this article offers a valuable tool for assessing future decisions. It can help ensure South Africa’s diplomacy remains rooted in peace, justice, and inclusive global governance.

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Trump 2.0, Personality and Power: Assessing Trump's Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World Order

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ABSTRACT

The evolving role of the United States on the international stage during the second presidency of Donald Trump, coupled with the trend towards a multipolar global system, necessitates a thorough reassessment of the foundational elements of U.S. foreign policy-making. Traditionally, analyses of U.S. foreign policy have been anchored in the rational actor model, which emphasises rational calculations. However, there is a noticeable gap in scholarship that incorporates the personal traits, character, belief systems, and experiences of individual U.S. leaders into this analysis. The election of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States in 2024 presents a significant opportunity to revisit U.S. foreign policy through a more idiosyncratic lens, particularly in light of the declining influence of the U.S. within the international system. This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilising a desk review as the primary source of secondary data, and applies thematic and content analysis as the principal methods for data analysis. The findings assert that Trump's inward-looking policies expressed in the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) slogan, ambitious nationalist and expansionist agenda such as the acquisition of Greenland, Canada, Panama Canal and renaming of Mexico, abrupt withdrawal from multilateral institutions, erratic trade wars among others are adversely affecting U.S. global leadership position. These actions are creating space for revisionist states such as Russia, China and BRICS bloc to occupy in the absence or relative decline of the U.S. thereby making the multipolar world imminent. This research

serves as a valuable resource for academics, scholars, and policymakers, encouraging an expansion and diversification of interpretations and analyses of U.S. foreign policy, particularly as the country navigates its position as a leading power in an ever-changing international landscape.

Key terms: Foreign policy, international system, personality traits, multipolarity, new world order

INTRODUCTION

The international system is in flux. The United States is fast receding from its global leadership position and international engagements, populism in on the rise, multilateralism and the liberal international order are under strain. The second administration of Donald Trump hereto known as Trump 2.0 is unprecedented as it happened in a tumultuous international climate, characterised by the intensification of great power rivalries, competition and shifting power tendencies. The post- Cold War order established and dominated by the U.S. is considered to be at risk (Mazarr, 2016). The post-Cold War order was one which has been described as a “unipolar moment” whereby U.S. dominance and primacy was the defining feature of the international system (Brands, 2016). Under this order, the U.S. faced no near-term rivals for global influence and power as democracy and free markets spread like never before (Ibid). But in the contemporary international system, rivals are rising with Russia and China was the principal rivals. Emerging powers from the “developing world” such as China, India and Brazil are increasingly challenging the U.S.-led international order (Vezirgiannidou, 2013). The United States is declining as the leader of the post-cold war era (Momoh & Jacob, 2023). The current structure of the international system is undergoing revision from unipolarity to multipolarity (Muzaffar et al, 2017). This multipolar tendency puts U.S. foreign policy under strain as its struggles to maintain its primacy under the leadership of Donald Trump.

The personalities of U.S. Presidents and foreign policy decision-making have gained some scholarly attention over time. Gallagher and Allen (2014) use the big five measures of U.S. President's personality traits to establish a causal link between the inherent traits of U.S. leaders and their foreign policy decision-making. The study reveals that leaders who have high tendency towards Excitement Seeking are more likely to use force in executing their foreign policy objectives while those who are more Open to Action exhibit

a greater variance around their foreign policy decision-making. Etheredge (2014) used two hypotheses from the interpersonal generalisation theory to posit that personality characteristics have probably been crucial in a number of cases in American foreign policy between 1898 and 1968. In another study, the personalities of U.S. leaders and foreign policy is approached along party lines-Republicans and Democrats wherein it is argued that Republicans tend to use hard power in the pursuit of their foreign policies while Democrats use soft power (Nicmiye, 2022). Despite this scholarship shown that personality traits matter in foreign policy decision-making of U.S. Presidents, such efforts have not be made to carve out the context of the operating international system in the analysis of this interplay. This paper therefore fills that contextual gap by examining the personal idiosyncrasies of Trump and its impact on U.S. foreign policy in a multipolar world order.

The main objective of this paper is to assess the complex interplay between President Trump's personality traits and its impact on U.S. foreign policy in a changing geopolitical context-multipolar tendency. The paper is structured into the following: a general introduction, a methodological delineation, conceptual clarification, a review of personality traits in understanding foreign policy decision-making, a discussion of U.S. foreign policy objectives, an analysis of the contemporary international system and finally how Trump's personality is impacting U.S. foreign policy in the contemporary international system.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is grounded in the qualitative research approach. It employed a desk review as a means of collecting secondary data. The purpose was to gain from the rich tapestry of insights and scholarship on the decisive role of leadership personality on foreign policy decision-making under the second Trump administration. It did so by critically reviewing literature on theories of leaders' personal traits in foreign policy-making in international politics in general before narrowing it down to

the United States under the second presidency of Donald Trump. Data on Trump's personality traits and his foreign policy approach were gathered from policy documents, news reports, institutional reports, speeches and government statements between 2017 and 2025. Themes consistent across data sources were sorted and classified. Thematic and content analysis was the analytical framework employed in the study. This methodology enabled a structured understanding of U.S. foreign policy under Trump 2.0 and its impact on the contemporary international system.

Conceptual Clarification

Trump 2.0

Generally, Donald Trump won elections to become the 45th President of the United States of America under the Republican Party in 2016 for the 2017-2021 term of office. He lost to Joe Biden in 2021. It is argued that his first presidency impacted America's domestic policies and global relations as it was ultra-nationalistic as depicted in his "America First" policy (Saliya, 2025). In fact, his first term have been described as both destructive and chaotic (Klingebiel and Baumann, 2024). In this paper, Trump 2.0 is used to refer to the second presidency of Donald Trump. Donald Trump won the 2024 U.S. presidential elections to become the 47th President of the United States of America still under the Republican banner. This second win was unprecedented especially given the circumstances which surrounded him at the end of his first tenure marked by scandals and legal prosecutions. It is posited that Trump 2.0 will be a continuity of his first presidency (Groitl, 2025). His adherence to the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) slogan and its attendant policies which characterised his first presidency continues to guide his second presidency in a more crystallised form.

New World Order

The meaning of the term new world order is not fixed. Its meaning has evolved over time to suit different contexts. In international politics, the term is often used to connote transformation in the international political and security environment (Thirlwell, 2005). The scholar argues that the term was first used around the international policy circle by Woodrow Wilson following the creation of the League of Nations and the creation of the

international regime of collective security. After that time, it has been used in several other instances such as after the creation of the Bretton Woods institution: IMF, World Bank, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, later replaced by the World Trade Organisation, WTO). It was also used by George WH Bush following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union etc. These events consequently structure and define the international system. The international system has oscillated between unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity cyclically. In the former, one state reigns preponderantly on the international system, in the bipolar order, two powers command hegemony such as U.S. and former Soviet Union before during the Cold War period. Meanwhile multipolarity reflects the existence of multiple centres of political power on the international arena.

Literature Review on Personality Traits in Foreign Policy Analysis

This section presents a critical and systematic review of the start of the art, that is to say the decisive role of leaders' personality traits in foreign policy analysis and decision-making.

In a study grounded in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic philosophy, Jooji (2022) advanced the thesis that decision makers' personalities are consequential in assessing the path of a country's foreign policy. In a Freudian framework, psychoanalytic thinkers stress various elements of personality such as genetics, sensation, perception, motivation, emotion, learning and memory. In this study, the Jooji (2022) established that extreme crisis determines leaders' foreign decision-making. During such moments of urgency, normal decision-making procedures and protocols are suspended while immediate actions are taken to arrest the emergency as decision-makers have extreme time restrictions (Ibid, p.7446). This entails that the leader becomes pragmatic and considers only what works to solve the pressing issue(s). That is why communication becomes shorter and stereotypical and material that does not meet the expectations of the leader is simply ignored because there is no time to analyse the information (Ibid).

In another study, Thiers and Wehner (2025) posit that the personality profiles of populist leaders have a strong bearing on the foreign policy behaviour of

the states. these scholars used the case studies of former U.S. President, Donald Trump (2017-2021) and former Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez (1993-2013) to underline that their personality traits explains their non-cooperative, conflict-driven and hostile behavioural patterns on the international system during the periods under consideration. They describe the attitudes and behaviour of these leaders as erratic and unpredictable (Ibid, p.2). This personal disposition, they explain amplifies the difficulties of other states to establish stable patterns of cooperation with these leaders (Ibid). they concluded that the tendency of Donald Trump and Hugo Chavez to react in hostile ways to regional and international peers and institutions stems from the psychological characteristics of the leaders and not from the type of ideology driving the populist governments around the notion of people versus elite and the general will (Ibid).

With regards to personal traits which influence foreign policy decision-making, Hermann (1980) identified four broad characteristics: belief, motive, decision style and interpersonal style. These four character traits, Hermann notes affect both the style and content of foreign policy. Belief which refers to the leader's fundamental assumption about the world considers whether events are predictable, whether conflicts basic to human interaction, whether one can have some control over events and whether the maintenance of national sovereignty and superiority is the most important objective of a nation (Ibid, p.9). Motive looks at why a political leader is doing what he or she is doing and Hermann considers the need for power to be the most discussed motive of political leaders (Ibid). Decision-making style which is the preferred method of making decisions by the leader interrogates how the political leader goes about making decisions and questions if there are certain ways of approaching a policy-making task which characterise the leader (Ibid). Finally, interpersonal style deals with the characteristic ways in which a policymaker deals with other policymakers. Two interpersonal characteristic styles identified by Hermann are paranoia (excessive suspiciousness) and Machiavellianism (unscrupulous, manipulative behaviours) (Ibid, p.10).

Zhang (2014) underlines the pivotal role leaders' personality plays in foreign policy orientation of States using the Chinese example under Mao

Zedong (1949-1978) and Deng Xiaoping (after 1978). The scholar posits that the personal traits of the above leaders played a crucial role in the disjuncture of Chinese foreign policy (Idem, p.904). Zhang identified three personality traits which impact foreign policies of states which include: degree of dominance of the leader, leader's belief systems and leader's degree of interest in foreign affairs. Drawing from Hermann (1980), Zhang (2014) argued that predominant leaders have the ability to stifle all opposition and dissent as well as the power to make a decision alone if necessary (Zhang, 2014:908). On belief system, leaders who possess strong conviction about what is true to them influence their foreign policy orientation just like Mao and Deng who believed strongly in communism as better alternative to capitalism which subsequently led to the replacement of capitalism in the People's Republic of China (Idem). And finally, a leader's interest in foreign affairs is reflected in his or foreign policy decision-making. In Zhang (2014), Chinese foreign policy was influential under Mao and Deng because of their strong interest in international affairs (p. 909).

Empirical gap in existing literature

Despite the rich literature available on the impact of leaders' personal traits on foreign policy orientation of States in general and U.S. foreign policy in particular, similar studies have not been conducted on the impact of such personal idiosyncrasies on foreign policy orientation in a changing geopolitical context and structure of the international system. More specifically, little or no such studies exist on the second administration of Donald Trump despite the impact his unprecedented return to the White House and Oval office is already having on the international system and the international world order. This paper argues that it is important to put a critical spotlight on the personality traits of Donald Trump against the backdrop of the basic guiding principle of U.S foreign policy orientation to be able to have an appraisal of the contemporary international system which is shifting towards multipolarity. The stakes of the changing international system seem to be high for the U.S as the leader of the rules-based international order.

The Personality Traits of Donald Trump

A seminal work that details the personal traits of Donald Trump is that of Immelman and Griebie

(2020). Grounded in psychology, these scholars relied on psychodiagnostics relevant data collected from biographical and media reports of Trump's post-inaugural political behaviour from January 20, 2017 until July 2020 (Ibid, 2020). This was synthesised into a personality profile using the Milton's Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC). Based on the MIDC and Milton Index of Personality Styles manuals and employing the interpretive guidelines, Trump's primary personality patterns were found to be: ambitious or self-serving (bordering on exploitative), dominant or controlling (bordering on aggressive) and outgoing or gregarious (bordering on impulsive) (Immelman and Griebie, 2020). Secondary patterns were also identified to include dauntless or dissenting. In sum, the scholars posit that these personality traits were suggestive of the suspicious, distrusting, erratic and unstable tendencies emerging during Trump's tenure in office (Ibid).

Immelman and Griebie (2020) provide some conceptual clarifications to the above personality traits. First, they explain that ambitious individuals are bold, competitive and self-assured. They easily assume leadership roles, expect others to recognise their special qualities and often act though entitled. Second, dominant individuals on their part enjoy the powers to direct others and to evoke obedience and respect; they are tough and unsentimental and often make effective leaders. Third, outgoing individuals are dramatic attention-getters who thrive on being the centre of social events, go out of their way to be popular with others, have confidence in their social abilities, tend to be impulsive and undisciplined and become easily bored especially when faced with repetitive or mundane tasks. And, dauntless individuals tend to flout tradition, dislike following routine, sometimes act impulsively and irresponsibly and are inclined to elaborate on or shade the truth and skirt the law (Ibid). These personal traits, together with those provided by Hermann (1980) will be analysed subsequently considering Trump 2.0. To proceed, it is imperative to examine the U.S. foreign policy-making process.

U.S. Foreign Policy Orientation.

U.S. foreign policy is not static but has evolved over time and in strategic contexts. The U.S. has historically relied on geopolitical isolation and

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neutrality as its foreign policy orientation until the outbreak of the Second World War (Paterson, 2018). In this orientation, the U.S. under different administrations sought to protect and defend U.S. interests by not intervening in issues outside the U.S. This is often characterised by U.S. disengagement and retrenchment from international politics. However, this orientation shifted after the Cold War which saw U.S. foreign policy dabble between engagement and retrenchment (Ibid:45). The latter has continued to serve as a core strategic consideration for U.S. foreign policy. Studies have shown that irrespective of the political party from which the President emanates, whether Republican or Democrats, geopolitical realities greatly influences U.S. foreign policy options.

The foreign policy goals and objectives of the U.S. have been influenced over time by four core philosophical schools of thought. These schools of thought include: Jeffersonism, Hamiltonism, Jacksonism and Wilsonism (Paterson, 2018:10). All except Alexander Hamilton being former U.S. Presidents, Jeffersonism, named after Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809) the core foreign policy objectives included advocacy for the preservation of democracy, warned against the cost of maintaining a large and expensive standing military and avoided wars especially with war-prone Europe during that

era (Ibid). Hamilton's foreign policy ideas were based on extensive overseas trade and non-intervention in overseas political adventures (Ibid, p.11). Andrew Jackson President (1829-1837) anchored his foreign policy objectives on maintaining a strong army to defend U.S national interest, non-intervention in international wars perceived as unwinnable, unnecessary and not vital to American interest (Ibid). Finally, Woodrow Wilson, President of the U.S. from 1913 to 1921 emphasised that U.S foreign policy should be focused on the promotion of democracy and human rights. According to him, democracies advance U.S interest as it makes more partners than tyrannies. Thus he argued for global governance based on law and morality, which led to the formation of international organisations such as the defunct League of Nations (Ibid,p.12). The above literature portrays that the U.S. foreign policy orientation of the U.S. oscillates between isolationism or neutrality and engagement depending on the administration in place. By inference, U.S. foreign policy is principally guided by national interest and rational calculations. According to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. foreign policy is guided by seven national interests which are: national security, economic prosperity, American citizens and border security, law enforcement, democracy, humanitarian response and global issues which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing (U.S. Department of State).

The post-Cold War order, which is the liberal and rules-based international order is U.S.-led and is marked by the military, economic and technological preeminence of the United States. This period is generally referred to as the unipolar world order. Under U.S. preponderance, major powers such as China and Russia acquiesced to the U.S.-led international order by not attempting to balance power against the U.S partly because the U.S. was too far ahead in terms of raw power and perhaps because they were not yet dissatisfied with the status quo (Blackwill & Wright, 2020). But in the contemporary international order, the international system is witnessing a major shift characterised by Great Power Competition (GPC). The strategic competition from China and Russia is projected to greatly orient U.S. national security strategy (Mazarr, 2022). This revisionist tendency is having an eroding impact on U.S. leadership role in the international system. This is further

compounded by the retrenchment of the U.S. from international engagements under the Trump administration.

How Trump's Personality Traits are Impacting U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order-Multipolarity

This section builds on the personal characteristic traits already identified and emerging ones in order to analyse the extent to which Trump's personal traits are impacting U.S. foreign in a context marked by Great Power Competition (GPC). The point of departure is that from historical antecedents, U.S. foreign policy is assumed to be based on rational calculation wherein national interest takes precedence.

To begin, Trump's ambitious nationalist agenda has damaging effects on the image of the United States as the leader of the liberal international order which the U.S. has led for decades. Trump's nationalist policies project an inward-looking United States, unconcerned with issues in the international system. In the first 100 days of Trump's second administration, a raft of Executive Orders (EO) have been signed underlining the ambitious nationalist path Donald Trump is orienting U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. under Trump 2.0 has withdrawn from a number of international commitments and engagements. On January 20, 2025, Trump signed an Executive Order indicating the withdrawal of the U.S. from the World Trade Organisation significantly reducing funding to the UN agency (Yamey and Titanji ,2025). The "Make America Great Again" slogan was instrumental in Trump's first presidential run in 2016. This slogan, it is argued emphasises defence of U.S. national interest and security in the first place, economic protectionism, enhancement of traditional American values and reduction of irregular immigration (Ochao De Olza, 2025).

In addition, Trump's personal ambitions is orienting U.S. foreign policy towards expansionism and imperialism. Trump's public statements indicate his desire to have control or influence over certain areas which according to him would be strategic to the United States (Ibid, p. 7). Trump 2.0 has made references to this tendency in relation to Canada, Greenland and Panama Canal and the renaming of Mexico. In Canada, Trump has proposed the buying

of Canada and making it the 51st State of the U.S. He also expressed desire to buy Greenland from Denmark, aligning it with her national security priority and strategic interest of the U.S. (Ibid). This is not new because Trump had echoed these ambitions during his first tenure. Thus, it is just a reiteration under Trump's second administration.

Furthermore, President Trump's contradictory personal traits also translate to the contradictory content of his foreign policy. This is reflected in his desire to achieve peace in the war between Ukraine and Russia and Israel and Palestine and his simultaneous use of rhetoric which instead increases international tension. It is posited that one of the most characteristic features of President Trump is his permanent contradiction between goals and means in that he seeks peace but his rhetoric creates confusion along the way, between his words and deeds (Ochoa De Olza, 2025:11). This scholar adds that the change in his rhetorical style stands out as he is much more combative and is willing to play with the fantasy of others in his own words (Ibid). Media reports have presented Trump as an ally of Vladimir Putin than Vlodimir Zelenski. However Trump's recent pressure on Putin to sign a peace deal proves the contrary. This strategy appears to weaken V. Zelenski by pressurising Ukraine to sign a peace deal thereby gaining Russia to its side (U.S.) and separating it from China. By doing so, the U.S. would be employing the same imperialist strategy as Russia and China its great counterparts. Thus, it appears rhetoric undergirds Trump 2.0 foreign policy decision-making.

It can be added that Trump's belligerent and confrontational personal style influences his foreign policy objectives. Donald Trump's second administration escalated trade wars with major trading partners. On 16 April 2025, U.S.-China trade relations escalated. Trump imposed a 34% reciprocal tariff on Chinese imports, sparking a trade war between the two countries. On April 10, 2025, tariffs on Chinese goods were raised to a minimum of 145%, marking the highest rate in modern U.S. trade policy (Stober, 2025). China retaliated by equally imposing 34% tariff on all U.S. goods starting 10 April 2025 and suspended negotiations regarding the sale of Tiktok. China also introduced export control on minerals critical to defence and technology and equally escalated customs checks on U.S. agricultural imports (Ibid).

This has had reverberating repercussions on the global economy. This has made U.S foreign policy objective which promotes economic liberalism to take a protectionist and confrontational turn.

Implications of Trump 2.0 on the World Order

U.S. foreign policy under Trump 2.0 is adversely affecting the world order established after the Cold War, the liberal international order championed by U.S. preeminence in the international system. By adopting an inward-looking foreign policy path, Donald is escalating the rapid decline of the U.S as the leader of the liberal international order. Major Powers like China and Russia are rising with revisionist tendencies. International relations pundits and analysts have started pondering the new centre(s) of power in international system. Could it be the East? Could it be Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)? These among other questions, preoccupy international relations enthusiasts as Trump 2.0 is yet to even complete just one year in his return to the White House and Oval office. The world order is fast shifting from unipolarity to multipolarity as the U.S is rescinding from its decades-old position as the hegemon of the post-Cold War era.

Signals of the shifting international order include: the rise of Russia and China, Brazil, India and South Africa (BRICS) bloc among others. These states and blocs are rising to challenge the status quo dominated by the western alliance. The renowned IR scholar, John J Mearsheimer had argued in 2019 that the liberal international order was bound to fail. He posited that this doom was evident since 2019 due to the shifting tectonic plates and internal contradictions within the system itself. To him, this failure is irreparable and cannot be rescued (Mearsheimer, 2019:7). On 17 June, 2025, China announced a zero-tariff access to all 53 African countries with which it maintains diplomatic relations (AGOInfo, 2025). This move is projected to boost export opportunities across the continent by positioning Africa to better compete in the world's second largest economy (Ibid). It goes without saying that as the U.S. increasing looks inward via trade protectionism, Africa would pivot Eastward, thereby exacerbating the decline of U.S hegemony in the liberal international order and hastening the eventuality of the multipolar world order.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper sought to analyse the unprecedented return of Donald Trump to the White House and Oval Office and the complex interplay between his personal leadership style and U.S. foreign policy in a context marked by a shifting international system towards multipolarity. Studies in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to be specific, have established the intricate dynamic of idiosyncratic traits of leaders on the foreign policy orientation of states. In these studies, it is revealed that the foreign policy path adopted by some Presidents like Donald Trump is positively linked to some extent to their personal style and idiosyncratic traits. Under Trump 2.0, his nationalist ambitions like the MAGA slogan are tilting U.S. foreign policy towards expansionism, imperialism and protectionism. His contradictory rhetoric simultaneously contradicts U.S. peace diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine war and the Middle East conflicts by instead increasing tensions. These traits and policies are quickly eroding U.S. stature and status as the leader of the post-Cold War liberal international order. Another repercussion is the emergence of strategic competitors such as China, Russia, the BRICS bloc among others. The ultimate assessment is that the multipolar world order is a reality and Trump 2.0 may hasten it. The next four years of Trump's presidency will determine and pattern and pace of this reality.

However, this study does not claim to absolutely capture the entire personality traits of Donald Trump but rather attempts an analysis of the most obvious and trendy. This entails that further

research is indispensable to unpack the personal idiosyncrasies of Donald Trump and its bearing on U.S. foreign policy in a drifting geopolitical context. This makes the study relevant for future research to enrich the literature. Moreover, behaviour is not static but evolves over time and context. By implication, the findings of this study are only plausible. In the entire matrix, U.S. state interest is central in the study of Trump's personality trait and foreign policy orientation. Since realism is a core theory in understanding state behaviour on the international system, this paper induces expanding the realist trend to focus on the personality of state leaders like the U.S. president, a superpower in appreciating their foreign policy orientation in a multipolar world order.

As a recommendation, policy makers should factor the critical role of leaders' personality traits in their consideration for policymaking, analysis and implementation, especially foreign policy. The rational calculation model which has been primary in foreign policy calculations despite its strengths increasingly needs to be complemented by other approaches such as the personal idiosyncrasies of foreign policy leaders. The approaches should be used in congruence and not in isolation so as to permit a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the dynamics in foreign policy directions in shifting geopolitical contexts like the contemporary international environment marked by great power competition and revisionism. In this case, actors in the international system especially States must pay a rapt attention to the personal traits of the U.S. President, Donald Trump in order to be adaptable and pragmatic in their foreign relations.

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Brazil-Russia-China-South Africa (BRCS) Paradox: Reconciling Normative Ambitions with Strategic Interests in the United Nations

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the strategic tactics used by Brazil, South Africa, China, and Russia within the United Nations to promote their interests. An analysis of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Reform (2017–2019), United Nations Development System Reform (2018–2021), and International Court of Justice (ICJ) Judicial Selection (2023) uncovers four tactics of normative realpolitik: (i) procedural contestation, (ii) personnel placement, (iii) financial leverage, and (iv) coalition coordination. The argument challenges traditional international relations theories by demonstrating that states combine normative rhetoric with material and procedural strategies to promote institutional change in ways that exceed the explanatory scope of both realism and constructivism.

Keywords: normative realpolitik, multilateral instrumentalisation, institutional entrepreneurship, governance revisionism, coalition diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Rising and emerging powers utilise access to the United Nations (UN) to gain geopolitical leverage through strategic normative discourse (Rached

& Rodrigues de Sá, 2024; Abdenur, 2016; Weiss & Abdenur, 2018). Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa (BRCS) reshape normative hierarchies in multilateral institutions using methods that existing

scholarship cannot fully explain (Pant & Scholz, 2022; Stefan, 2021). This paper argues that this practice, namely normative realpolitik, combines normative claims with procedural manipulation, material incentives, personnel positioning, and coalition-building. Three cases illustrate different tactics: (i) Brazil and South Africa's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (2017–2019) demonstrates collaborative resistance; (ii) China's United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform (2018–2021) exemplifies technocratic institutional influence; and (iii) Russia's International Court of Justice (ICJ) judicial selection (2023) indicates adversarial disruption. The BRCS grouping (excluding India from this analysis) functions as a tactical subset within the broader BRICS+ framework, which expanded in 2024 with Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, followed by Indonesia in January 2025. Across these cases, BRCS members treat universal principles as tools for narrow gains: norms are used as instruments of foreign policy.

THREE ARENAS OF NORMATIVE REALPOLITIK

Brazil and South Africa: Responsibility to Protect Reform (2017-2019)

Between 2017 and 2019, Brazil and South Africa worked together to challenge the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine (Cüre, 2025; Da Costa, 2022). Both governments considered Western interventions in Libya (2011) and Côte d'Ivoire (2011) as illegal breaches of state sovereignty (Clark, 2019). The Libya case influenced later debates, as Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorised civilian protection in Benghazi, expanded into a NATO-led campaign that resulted in regime change. This outcome heightened concerns that R2P could be applied selectively and used to justify external intervention.

Brazil proposed 'Responsibility while Protecting' (RwP), aiming for stricter procedural controls to prevent the selective enforcement of R2P (Tourinho, Stuenkel, & Brockmeier, 2016). This initiative sought to position Brazil as (i) a responsible humanitarian actor, (ii) a supporter of sovereignty principles central to Latin American regionalism, and (iii) a bridge between North and South blocs (Kenkel & Cunliffe, 2016). South Africa advocated for AU leadership in addressing continental crises (Smith,

2016), emphasising that R2P should concentrate on enhancing regional organisations' capacities. This approach reflected pan-African solidarity and aspirations for regional influence (Brosig & Zähringer, 2015).

Brazil and South Africa jointly sponsored amendments at the General Assembly that included language protecting sovereignty in resolutions (UNGA, 2017). They also coordinated interventions at the Human Rights Council, which delayed the development of implementation guidelines and elevated regional bodies as primary responders to civilian protection crises (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). Through G77 forums, they fostered flexible partnerships with Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico (Sawada, 2018; Kenkel & Stefan, 2016). Resolutions passed between 2017 and 2019 feature stronger sovereignty protections than those from 2014 to 2016 (Taleski, 2018; UNGA, 2017). This coalition structure complicated Western efforts to frame interventions in Syria and Venezuela as purely humanitarian (Modeme, 2018). Syria experienced Russian and Chinese vetoes blocking R2P-based Security Council resolutions thirteen times from 2011 to 2019. Venezuela's humanitarian crisis, documented by the UN Fact-Finding Mission in 2020 as crimes against humanity, did not prompt collective R2P action despite Western pressure. Both countries expanded their outreach beyond traditional South-South partnerships, engaging with states such as Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The collaborative approach led to three outcomes. First, procedural precedents curtailed Western humanitarian interventions by imposing stricter authorisation criteria (UNGA, 2017). Second, sovereignty-focused positions gained credibility, shifting the debate from 'intervention versus non-intervention' to 'responsible intervention with safeguards' (Stefan, 2017). Third, both nations bolstered their individual strategic positions: Brazil as a moderate humanitarian voice supporting its UNSC seat bid, and South Africa as the AU's leader resisting external interference (Smith, 2016).

China: United Nations Development System Reform (2018-2021)

China's involvement in UNDS reform (2018 and 2021) reshaped global development governance (Lam & Fung, 2024). Beijing leveraged UN reform

momentum to establish its own development philosophy, promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and challenge Western development orthodoxy (Haug, 2024). Chinese representatives positioned themselves as reform advocates within the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), championing development systems based on state-led approaches (Worden, 2019). Beijing's emphasis on national ownership principles and South-South cooperation (SSC) reflected efforts to introduce alternative development logics (Haug, 2021). This dual stance allowed China to present itself both as a champion of developing countries and as a revisionist power (Boon, 2018).

China's UNDS contributions (2013-2017) grew by 33.8% annually, reaching USD \$325.869 million by 2017 (Mao, 2020:4). This included USD \$120.157 million in assessed contributions, USD \$38.778 million in voluntary core funding, and USD \$166.934 million in voluntary non-core funding (Mao, 2020:6), contrasting with Western donors relying on earmarked contributions (Zhang & Jing, 2024:123-125). This three-part funding structure created layered influence: assessed contributions provided structural support, core voluntary funding ensured institutional backing, and earmarked funding enabled targeted influence over programmes (Zhang & Jing, 2024). China's financial strategy matched its work through the New Development Bank (NDB), which by 2024 had approved over \$39 billion across more than 100 projects - matching established multilateral development banks despite operating for less than a decade. The NDB's 2024 bond issuances of \$16.1 billion, secured at spreads of only 0.24% above benchmark rates for renminbi bonds, demonstrated market confidence in Chinese-led financial architecture.

Chinese experts have revised the UN's operational procedures and programming standards within UN development agencies (Baumann *et al.*, 2024). China has advanced alternative metrics that focus on infrastructure connectivity, the capacity for state investment and SSC, replacing traditional governance indicators and private-sector development benchmarks (Liu & Li, 2025). These technical updates appeared as neutral institutional changes but favoured development models aligned with Chinese economic practices and BRI priorities (Gülseven, 2023). China promoted 'complementary metrics' that aim to measure

infrastructure readiness and reflect diverse development paths. This framing made opposition difficult as it favoured state-led, infrastructure-heavy approaches.

Russia: International Court of Justice (2023)

Russia's intervention in the 2023 ICJ judiciary elections challenged Western legal dominance within UN frameworks (Aram, 2024). Russia exploited ICJ electoral procedures and applied diplomatic pressure to undermine Western confidence in international legal institutions (Stahn, 2023). This analysis examines Russian behaviour within UN institutional settings without assessing the legality or morality of Russian actions in Ukraine. The focus is on how states use multilateral forums to advance strategic objectives.

During the 2023 ICJ judicial elections conducted by both the UNGA and UNSC, Russia cast its vote, but the incumbent Russian judge, Kirill Gevorgian, did not secure re-election. Judges from Australia, Romania, the United States, Mexico, and South Africa were appointed instead (UN, 2023a; ICJ, 2023; UN, 2023b; UNOG, 2023). This outcome concealed Russia's achievement of other strategic objectives through procedural disruption. Records show Russian engagement with non-aligned delegations during procedural sessions, consolidating support for candidates sympathetic to state sovereignty perspectives (UNOG, 2023). Russia participated in Sixth Committee procedural debates concerning nomination timelines and regional representation, exploiting institutional rules to maintain a strategic presence (ICJ, 2023; UN, 2023a).

Russian diplomatic efforts centred on three interconnected strategies. First, Russia challenged the credentials and selection processes of Western-nominated judges, asserting that these contravened principles of fair regional representation. Russian officials formally raised objections during procedural sessions, causing delays and highlighting perceived inequalities, thereby impacting debates on institutional fairness (Labuda, 2023; Frulli, 2023). Second, Russia collaborated with other states from the Global South to propose reforms to the ICJ electoral system, emphasising greater representation for the Global South to counter Western dominance. Third, Russia endorsed regional institutions and bilateral dispute resolution mechanisms over the ICJ's

authority, encouraging peer states to adopt similar strategies to limit the ICJ's capacity to constrain Russian foreign policy through unfavourable rulings (Allison, 2022). Russia also backed candidates from the Global South who expressed scepticism towards Western interpretations of international law, underlining the importance of state sovereignty.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: NORMATIVE REALPOLITIK

Traditional international relations theories fail to explain BRCS behaviour across humanitarian, development, and judicial spheres. Realist perspectives dismiss normative discourse as mere window-dressing (Brütsch & Papa, 2013; Yang, 2019). Constructivist frameworks presume genuine normative commitment (Lagutina, 2019; Weins, 2016). Neither approach accounts for instances where Brazil-South Africa R2P advocacy, Chinese UNDS promotion, and Russian legal discourse shift to serve evolving geopolitical aims (Wunderlich, 2020; 2022).

Realism explains elements of BRCS behaviour. Brütsch and Papa (2013) argue that BRCS members use UN institutions instrumentally to constrain Western hegemonic power and advance individual state interests through coalition-building. This perspective views BRCS advocacy for institutional reform as a challenge by a rising power to established hierarchies (Yang, 2019). Realism accounts for Brazil and South Africa's R2P reform resistance, China's repositioning of SSC frameworks, and Russia's ICJ intervention as attempts at power balancing against Western legal dominance (Peitz, 2015). However, realism cannot explain ongoing cross-case coordination: Brazil and South Africa coordinate R2P resistance while China influences development institutions and Russia promotes judicial influence, even as BRCS members compete over territorial claims and spheres of influence (Skak, 2011). The theory offers no tools to understand this cooperation amid persistent mutual suspicion (Pruitt, 2022).

Liberal institutionalism does not account for Brazil and South Africa's R2P engagement, China's involvement in UNDS reform, or Russia's manipulation in ICJ selection (Vadell, 2020). While liberal frameworks assume that institutional

participation fosters genuine commitment to institutional goals, they overlook cases where states exploit institutional rules for purposes that oppose the institutions' missions (Guerrero, 2022). Constructivist scholarship ignores cases where Brazil-South Africa R2P advocacy, China's promotion of its development system, and Russian legal discourse contestation serve instrumental objectives (Wunderlich, 2020). Constructivist perspectives are limited when norm-based language is repurposed to support shifting geopolitical goals, raising questions about normative alignment (Wunderlich, 2022). Relying on norm internalisation ignores the instrumental manoeuvring used by states to influence institutional outcomes in humanitarian, development, and judicial spheres (Bloomfield & Scott, 2017).

Critical international relations theory views BRCS institutional engagement as opposition to Western hegemonic governance structures (Valdir & Elena, 2022). Critical theorists highlight the emancipatory potential of BRCS institutional challenges, arguing that Brazil-South Africa R2P resistance, China UNDS reform intervention, and Russia ICJ intervention represent alternatives to Western-dominated global governance (Yang, 2019). However, critical analysis often overstates the transformative power

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Traditional international relations theories fail to explain BRCS behaviour across humanitarian, development, and judicial spheres.

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of BRCS institutional engagement, neglecting cases where Brazil, South Africa, China, and Russia seek individual benefit within collective resistance patterns (Van Noort, 2019; Boland, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explores three cases exemplifying different engagement strategies: Brazil-South Africa's R2P reform (collaborative resistance), China's UNDS participation (technocratic positioning), and Russia's ICJ intervention (adversarial engagement). India's exclusion reflects its limited involvement in these institutional settings during this period. India exerted influence through peacekeeping leadership by contributing over 250,000 personnel to UN operations since 1948, making it the largest cumulative contributor. Additionally, India participated in climate diplomacy, notably via the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. India's 2023 G20 presidency reflected its preference for agenda-setting through inclusive multilateralism over institutional contestation.

Data Collection

Data sources include academic research, UN documentation (GA/SC resolutions, ECOSOC records, and financial data), legal materials, and policy analysis. The data collection for each case consisted of:

- Brazil-South Africa (R2P, 2017-2019): UNGA/GA resolutions and meeting records (A/RES/71/248), Security Council debates on Syria and Venezuela, joint G77 statements, government position papers, and secondary analyses cited in text.
- China (UNDS, 2018-2021): ECOSOC records, UNDS reform resolutions, UNDP programme documents, assessed/voluntary contribution records, and technical guidance documents.
- Russia (ICJ, 2023): UN Journal entries for judicial elections, Sixth Committee records, ICJ nomination filings, legal commentaries, and contemporaneous diplomatic reporting.

This combination of primary UN documents and secondary scholarship facilitated triangulation. UN documents offered official positions and voting records; scholarly analyses provided interpretive context and insights into informal diplomatic processes not captured in official records.

Data Analysis

Analysis was carried out using inductive thematic coding founded on grounded theory principles.

- Open coding: Documents were analysed to identify diplomatic actions, normative claims, and institutional changes, resulting in 25 initial codes that describe behaviours (e.g., 'procedural objection filed,' 'funding increase announced,' and 'coalition meeting convened').
- Axial coding: Preliminary codes were organised into categories that linked behaviours to strategic objectives, reducing 25 codes to 17 categories (e.g., 'sovereignty protection tactics,' 'financial leverage deployment,' and 'coalition coordination').
- Selective coding: Categories were grouped into four main themes illustrating patterns of normative instrumentalisation: sovereignty maximisation, institutional positioning, coalition coherence, and strategic instrumentalisation.

The coding process moved between data and emerging themes. Early codes shaped subsequent data collection; new data prompted recoding of earlier material. This iterative approach allowed patterns to emerge from the data.

Scope and Limitations

Language barriers restrict this study. Reliance on English-language secondary sources and official translations may obscure nuanced policy positions. Future research, including primary sources in Chinese, Russian, Portuguese, and Arabic, would strengthen the evidence, particularly in understanding domestic policy debates shaping BRCS positions. This study omits BRCS coordination through regional organisations, bilateral channels, and informal networks by focusing on UN institutions. Such an approach enables detailed institutional analysis but cannot capture all multilateral engagement methods. BRCS members likely coordinate via meetings, bilateral summits, and informal diplomatic channels not recorded in UN archives. The October 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, which established a new 'partner country' category for 13 nations and promoted BRICS+, exemplifies these efforts. Cross-border settlement infrastructure reveals coordination structures operating outside the UN's scope but affecting member state positions within multilateral forums.

FINDINGS: THREE MODALITIES OF NORMATIVE REALPOLITIK

The findings present three different approaches to institutional engagement, each tailored to different power positions and threat environments. The findings that follow show how BRCS members have developed repertoires for transforming normative discourse into institutional leverage.

Sovereignty-focused contestation in humanitarian governance (Brazil and South Africa)

The Brazil-South Africa partnership demonstrates sustained procedural resistance. Both countries

recognised that outright rejection of R2P would marginalise them within humanitarian governance debates. The approach succeeded because it appeared to strengthen R2P but limited its interventionist potential. Brazil's 'Responsibility while Protecting' did not condemn humanitarian intervention. It endorsed the principle and added so many procedural safeguards that implementation became almost impossible. This exemplifies collaborative normative realpolitik at its finest: building Global South coalitions to incorporate sovereignty protections into humanitarian governance frameworks and maintaining the facade of constructive engagement.

Table 2: **Tactical Deployment Across Modalities of Normative Realpolitik**

Tactic	Collaborative (Brazil–South Africa)	Technocratic (China)	Adversarial (Russia)
Procedural contestation	Joint GA amendments and multilateral negotiation delays	ECOSOC procedural revisions	Sixth Committee objections and nomination-blocking tactics
Personnel placement	Strategic delegation positioning	High-level UNDP and agency appointments	Alignment with sovereignist judiciary networks
Financial leverage	Regional capacity building contributions	Restructured core + voluntary contributions and South-South trust funds	Targeted bilateral incentive diplomacy
Coalition coordination	G77 + China Non-Aligned Movement; and AU	SSC forums and Global South negotiation groups	Non-aligned sovereign cluster (Iran, Venezuela, and Syria)

The procedural architecture they created operated across multiple institutional venues simultaneously. First, they co-sponsored General Assembly amendments that incorporated language reinforcing sovereignty in R2P resolutions. Textual analysis shows that resolutions adopted between 2017 and 2019 include more extensive sovereignty provisions than those from 2014 to 2016, with language noticeable to advocacy by Brazil and South Africa (UNGA, 2017). Second, they coordinated interventions within the Human Rights Council that delayed the implementation of the guidelines for R2P and introduced additional sovereignty safeguards. The effectiveness of these interventions relied less on their number and more on their timing – they raised strategic objections at critical moments during drafting when substantive

changes were still negotiable. These interventions highlighted regional organisations as key actors in civilian protection, shifting authority from the Security Council to regional bodies (GCRP, 2025).

Third, they engaged with G77 forums to shape R2P implementation guidelines, carefully forming coalitions that extended beyond traditional South-South partnerships. Their alliances with Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico showed an understanding that legitimacy in humanitarian governance depends on broad partnerships, not solely South-South solidarity. Fourth, they sustained contributions to UNSC debates by referencing regional bodies as primary responders in humanitarian crises. This was not rhetorical, as each intervention established precedents that limited Western member states'

ability to advocate for expansive humanitarian intervention interpretations during discussions on Syria (2017-2018) and Venezuela (2019).

The institutional outcomes highlight the results of this patient, multi-venue strategy. First, concrete procedural precedents now limit Western humanitarian intervention in ways that would have been unimaginable before 2017. R2P resolutions adopted between 2017 and 2019 include stricter approval criteria and strengthen the authority of regional organisations (UNGA, 2017). Second, Brazil and South Africa succeeded in presenting sovereignty-maximising positions as legitimate reform proposals rather than as obstructionism. By framing opposition as constructive reform, they shifted the debate from ‘intervention versus non-intervention’ to ‘responsible intervention with appropriate safeguards’ (Stefan, 2017). This discursive shift was more influential than any single resolution. It transformed the entire framework of humanitarian governance discussions. Third, both nations strategically reinforced their individual positions within distinct diplomatic constituencies. Brazil solidified its reputation as a moderate voice on humanitarian issues to support its campaign for permanent UNSC membership. Meanwhile, South Africa strengthened its AU leadership credentials through resistance to external intervention. Thus, collaborative *realpolitik* produced both collective institutional change and individual strategic advantages - a combination that explains its sustainability over time.

Developmental Recalibration Through Institutional Engineering (China)

Brazil and South Africa engaged in procedural contestation. China pursued the reconstruction of development governance from within. China demonstrates technocratic *realpolitik* by embedding alternative development standards through incremental institutional engineering that appears as neutral technical reform. China’s UNDS engagement operated mainly below the threshold of political controversy, reshaping institutional DNA through financial leverage and technical expertise.

Consider the financial structure. China’s tripartite funding system creates multiple levels of influence: assessed contributions offer structural support, core voluntary funding provides institutional backing, and earmarked funding allows for

targeted influence. Western donors mainly use earmarked funding, which gives them control over specific projects but not over institutional priorities. China understood what Western donors did not: that institutional power stems not from controlling individual projects but from shaping the systems that decide which projects receive funding, how they are evaluated, and what is deemed successful. China’s financial approach reflects its work with the New Development Bank (NDB), which by 2024 had approved over \$39 billion across more than 100 projects—comparable to established multilateral development banks despite being in operation for less than ten years. The NDB’s 2024 bond issuances of \$16.1 billion, secured at spreads of only 0.24% above benchmark rates for renminbi bonds, showed market confidence in Chinese-led financial architecture.

Personnel deployment formed the second pillar of China’s strategy, operating through three reinforcing channels. Firstly, China secured direct appointments of Chinese nationals to senior positions within UNDP and related agencies, gaining not only symbolic representation but also insider knowledge of decision-making processes and informal power dynamics (Fung & Lam, 2021). Secondly, China sponsored SSC forums and technical exchanges that showcased Chinese development experiences as solutions to development challenges (Chen *et al.*, 2018). These efforts fostered epistemic communities of development practitioners from the Global South trained in Chinese approaches, who spoke the language of infrastructure-led development and carried these frameworks back to their national governments and regional institutions. Thirdly, China implemented capacity-building initiatives that conveyed Beijing’s governance models to actors in the Global South. The cumulative effect was noteworthy: Chinese-sponsored training programmes, technical exchanges, and educational partnerships established networks of officials who viewed Chinese development models not as foreign impositions but as proven solutions they had experienced first-hand.

The third pillar, which is the technical revision of UN operational procedures, proved the most consequential because it appeared the least political. Chinese technical experts engaged UN development agencies to revise operational

procedures and programming criteria. This approach proved effective because of how China framed its interventions: not as challenges to existing development orthodoxy but as 'complementary metrics' that would 'better capture infrastructure readiness' and 'reflect diverse development trajectories.' China promoted alternative development metrics emphasising infrastructure connectivity, state investment capacity, and SSC, steadily displacing traditional governance indicators and private-sector development measures (Liu & Li, 2025). These technical revisions appeared as neutral institutional improvements – who could object to more comprehensive measurement? – but favoured development approaches consistent with Chinese economic models and BRI priorities. Opposition proved difficult because China never explicitly attacked Western development models. China advocated for additional metrics that happened to privilege state-led and infrastructure-intensive approaches.

This technical-political duality extended to China's alignment of UN development programmes with BRI. China supported UN inter-agency initiatives integrating connectivity and infrastructure development (UN, 2018), working through ECOSOC coordination with developing-country blocs to promote frameworks linking development financing, infrastructure connectivity, and SSC under institutional umbrellas favourable to Chinese interests. Chinese officials framed UNDS reform as an institutional rebalancing towards multipolar development governance. This characterisation positioned China as both a defender of developing countries and as a revisionist power. China pursued normative repositioning through dual tracks: technocratic involvement in UN development reform combined with political alignment with Global South coalitions advocating institutional restructuring. The focus on repositioning SSC as the primary development modality, favouring state-to-state development over multilateral frameworks and capital-intensive projects over governance reform, reshaped the normative contours of global development cooperation.

The institutional outcomes generated by China's technocratic approach differ from those produced by collaborative or adversarial realpolitik. First, China succeeded in legitimising its economic model

as an internationally recognised development approach (Mao, 2020). By embedding Chinese development philosophy within UN frameworks, China transformed the 'Beijing Consensus' from a controversial alternative into an officially sanctioned UN development practice. This represents a profound form of institutional power – the power to determine not just which projects get funded but what counts as development itself.

Second, Chinese developmental framing became mainstreamed in multilateral negotiations, reflecting emerging competition within global norm-setting processes. The incorporation of China-led modalities into UN resolutions introduced new metrics for evaluating partnership outcomes – metrics that emphasise state infrastructure readiness over governance quality, economic corridors over private sector development, and bilateral partnerships over multilateral frameworks. These shifts reinforced the normative authority of Chinese state-led aid practices while gradually marginalising Western emphasis on democratic governance, civil society participation, and market-led growth.

Third, China introduced institutional changes across multiple UN agencies and programmes that will endure beyond any specific political moment. China's engagement with the UNDS reflected an understanding that technical-level reforms and financial influence lead to more lasting change than high-profile political declarations. Development approaches revised through UNDS reform procedures generated institutional momentum favouring Chinese development models that will persist long after individual reform debates end. This durability does not stem from these models winning intellectual debates but from becoming embedded in bureaucratic routines, training programmes, and evaluation frameworks. Technical changes last longer than political victories because they shape the taken-for-granted assumptions about how development work is carried out.

Fourth, China strengthened its position within UN governance structures while changing what that governance produces. By presenting itself as a reform leader and a major financial contributor, China claimed greater institutional authority and positioned itself as a responsible stakeholder in

global development cooperation (Fung & Lam, 2022), supporting its wider diplomatic aim of reshaping international institutions to mirror multipolar power distributions. However, the real achievement lies not in China's increased institutional status but in how China exploited that status to reconfigure development governance itself. This transformed the UN system from a tool used to promote Washington Consensus reforms into a platform for legitimising state-led development alternatives.

Procedural Disruption Within Judicial Governance (Russia)

Russia's approach to the ICJ exemplifies a third modality – adversarial realpolitik that prioritises disruption, delay, and delegitimisation over institutional capture or incremental reform. Russia faced legal challenges from Ukraine at the ICJ. Russian officials targeted not specific rulings but the procedural legitimacy of the entire international judicial system. The 2023 ICJ judicial elections served as a suitable platform: highly procedural, reliant on complex voting arrangements between the General Assembly and Security Council, and sufficiently technical that minority coalitions could exploit procedural chokepoints to exert disproportionate influence.

Russian diplomatic engagement focused on three interconnected tactics. First, Russia challenged the credentials and selection processes of Western-nominated judges, presenting these challenges not as obstructionism but as principled objections to violations of fair geographical representation. Russian representatives formally lodged objections during procedural sessions, causing delays while highlighting perceived imbalances in judicial representation (Labuda, 2023). The tactic was effective in achieving its objectives because it weaponised claims of procedural fairness. These arguments resonated with non-aligned states, which had their own grievances about Western dominance in international institutions.

Second, Russia collaborated with states from the Global South to propose reforms to the ICJ electoral procedures, stressing greater representation for the Global South and rotation schemes aimed at countering Western dominance. Third, Russia promoted regional institutions and bilateral dispute resolution arrangements over

ICJ authority, encouraging peer states to adopt similar strategies with the clear aim of limiting the ICJ's ability to restrict Russian foreign policy through unfavourable rulings (Allison, 2022). Throughout, Russia supported candidates from the Global South who were sceptical of Western interpretations of international law, presenting this not as anti-law but as backing legal pluralism and state sovereignty.

Russia's coalition structure highlights a key difference between adversarial and collaborative realpolitik. Official UN General Assembly voting records show engagement with countries such as Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela. These states are united not by shared development goals or regional solidarity but by a common threat perception and mutual grievances against Western legal frameworks. This coalition structure contrasts with Brazil-South Africa's adaptable partnerships or China's development-focused networks. Russia's alliances concentrate on states undergoing similar Western legal pressures, forming a defensive coalition of those legally challenged.

Russia compensated for limited economic leverage or technical expertise through procedural manipulation. The Russian approach demonstrated an understanding of UN procedural complexities, showing how minority coalitions can disrupt majority preferences by strategically employing parliamentary tactics (Mik, 2022). Russian UN mission statements confirmed the existence of procedural education programmes that train sympathetic delegations in delaying tactics. These programmes instruct allies on exactly when to raise points of order, how to request recesses for consultation, and which procedural objections would maximise delay while still appearing formally appropriate. This constitutes institutional engagement as tactical resistance: leveraging detailed knowledge of procedural terrain to offset material disadvantages.

The adversarial modality produced three outcomes that reveal both the possibilities and limits of disruptive realpolitik. First, Russia caused procedural delays and increased uncertainty in judicial selection processes – the 2023 ICJ judicial selection experienced multiple postponements and procedural challenges linked to Russian interventions. Gevorgian lost

re-election, which indicates a tactical failure. However, focusing solely on individual outcomes overlooks the strategic achievement of Russian geopolitical interests. The process itself became a contested arena, undermining confidence in ICJ institutional integrity and setting precedents for procedural resistance.

Second, Russia facilitated the discursive reframing of judicial selection as being geopolitically influenced instead of legally neutral. Russian officials described the outcome as necessitating 'judicial rebalancing' towards 'multipolar legal interpretation' (Miles, 2024; Allison, 2022). This reframing matters because it shifts the focus from whether Russia breached international law to

whether international law itself reflects Western preferences in a universal guise. Even allies who oppose Russian positions on Ukraine may share concerns about Western legal dominance. Russia exploited this division.

Third, Russia set precedents for procedural resistance tactics that other states can deploy. Russia's tactical combination of formal objections, coalition coordination, and alternative institution-building provided a replicable playbook for revisionist powers seeking to constrain ICJ authority without formally withdrawing from it. This represents a distinct form of institutional power – not the power to shape institutional outputs but the power to render institutions less effective as constraints on state behaviour.

Strategic Behaviour and Institutional Power

Table 3: Generalisable Strategic Patterns

Dimension	Collaborative	Technocratic	Adversarial
Strategic Logic	Sovereign Maximising coalition	Institutional engineering	Contestation and procedural disruption
Institutional arena	Humanitarian governance	Development governance	Judiciary governance
Mechanism	Procedural resonance	Technical embedding through metrics, staffing and funding	Negative agenda setting and barriers
Expression of power	Middle power brokerage	Structural influence via budgets and expertise	Revisionist pressure targeting procedural vulnerabilities
Resulting institutional effect	Consensus-driven sovereignty language	Recalibration of development indicators	Uncertainty, delay, and contested judicial processes

There are patterns beneath the surface differences across these three cases. The three modalities share characteristics: instrumental use of normative claims, leveraging institutional procedures, coalition-building, and ongoing engagement over time. However, they differ in ways that show the connection between power resources, strategic settings, and institutional tactics.

The divergence occurs across three key dimensions. First, the relationship to institutional authority reflects different theories of institutional change. The collaborative approach operates

within institutional frameworks to achieve gradual change through consensus-building. It accepts institutional legitimacy and reconfigures its substantive content. The technocratic mode reshapes institutional frameworks through technical establishment that appears as a neutral improvement. It preserves institutional structures and transforms their substance. The adversarial approach challenges institutional authority through delegitimisation and disruption. It prioritises constraint over capture when the institution poses direct threats.

These differences reflect distinct strategic contexts. Brazil-South Africa sought institutional influence without triggering backlash, requiring approaches that appeared as constructive engagement. China possessed resources to reshape institutions through financial and technical influence, enabling institutional penetration. Russia faced institutional hostility, requiring defensive disruption to prevent institutions from constraining Russian foreign policy. The approach selected depends less on ideological commitment than on the opportunity structure presented by specific power positions and threat environments.

Second, coalition architecture reflects varying power resources and strategic objectives. Collaborative mode builds flexible, issue-specific partnerships activated for particular normative battles without permanent commitments – enabling states with limited material resources to punch above their weight through skilled diplomatic brokerage. The technocratic mode creates development-focused networks with economic incentives that bind partners through material dependencies. This transforms financial contributions into institutional loyalty. Adversarial mode assembles sovereign clusters united by shared threat perception and mutual grievance against Western institutional dominance. This mobilises defensive solidarities when positive inducements prove unavailable.

These differences highlight different approaches to forming alliances. Brazil and South Africa used diplomatic skills and strategic connections to form adaptable coalitions suitable for various institutional settings. China relied on economic incentives and technical knowledge to establish long-lasting networks that extended multiple issue areas. Russia, on the other hand, invoked shared grievances and perceived threats to form defensive alliances. These alliances are less integrated than China's economically driven networks, but suffice for disruption in building partnerships.

Third, temporal orientation clarifies how different modalities conceptualise institutional change. The collaborative approach emphasises gradual change through persistent accumulation of small victories that build over time. This assumes that sovereignty protections in humanitarian resolutions limit intervention options in the future. The technocratic

approach focuses on the long-term integration of alternative standards into institutional routines, training programmes, and evaluation frameworks. It assumes that bureaucratic change outlasts political victories because it influences assumptions guiding daily work. The adversarial approach emphasises immediate disruption with lasting delegitimisation effects that weaken institutional authority. It aims to prevent institutions from constraining state behaviour even when they cannot reshape institutional outputs.

These orientations correspond to different strategic objectives. Brazil-South Africa sought gradual norm evolution favouring sovereignty protection. China aimed for structural transformation, promoting Chinese development models as global standards. Russia required immediate constraints on Western legal instruments threatening Russian interests. The temporal limit chosen exposes what states want from institutions: evolutionary adaptation, fundamental transformation, or strategic neutralisation.

Understanding when and where normative realpolitik emerges requires defining the institutional conditions that support it. Normative realpolitik arises under three main conditions. First, when institutions have complex procedural rules that allow contestation without confrontation. Simple majority-vote institutions offer limited opportunities for minority influence. However, institutions with multiple decision-making bodies create procedural choke points that some actors can manipulate. The UN system, with its General Assembly, Security Council, ECOSOC, Human Rights Council, and Sixth Committee, provides various venues where the same issue can be debated, where procedural objections can cause delays, and where coalition-building across venues enhances influence. This institutional complexity turns procedural knowledge into a powerful resource as valuable as material capabilities.

Second, when multiple coalitions compete for influence within the same institutional space, hegemonic institutions dominated by single powers offer limited scope for normative realpolitik – the hegemon can override opposition. Multipolar institutions with fluid coalitions create opportunities for strategic alliance-building and normative repositioning. The contemporary

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UN system exemplifies this condition: Western dominance has eroded but not disappeared, rising powers are influential but not hegemonic, and middle powers possess sufficient diplomatic skill to sway contested votes. This results in competitive pluralism – no single coalition can impose its will, forcing all actors to compete for institutional influence through strategic engagement rather than material dominance.

Third, when states have sufficient material resources to maintain engagement over time, normative realpolitik necessitates multi-year campaigns, technical expertise, coalition management, and financial support. It is not a tactic available to all, as shown in this paper's cases. This explains why middle powers (Brazil and South Africa) and rising powers (China and Russia) excel at these tactics, while weaker states resort to simple blocking strategies. Brazil and South Africa deploy diplomatic capital and professional expertise; China leverages financial resources and technical capacity; Russia exploits procedural knowledge and coalition coordination. All possess the institutional know-how required for sustained engagement. This is a threshold many states cannot reach.

The concept of normative realpolitik has inherent theoretical limitations that warrant acknowledgement. First, it pertains to middle and emerging powers aiming for influence within institutions, rather than to hegemons or weaker states. Hegemons possess sufficient power to reshape institutions through direct pressure, rendering procedural manipulation unnecessary – why control the committee system when

compliance can be demanded? Weak states lack the resources for sustained normative efforts, confining them to occasional blocks or principled objections without the capacity to alter institutional outcomes. Normative realpolitik operates in the middle: too weak for direct enforcement, yet too strong for mere resistance, and precisely where strategic institutional engagement provides the greatest returns.

Second, it requires institutions that are open to procedural contestation and coalition formation. Institutions with rigid decision-making rules or limited membership offer fewer opportunities for normative realpolitik. There are fewer procedural avenues to exploit. The UN system's complexity, diverse membership, and multiple decision-making bodies create fertile ground for strategic engagement. Every additional committee, procedural step, and coalition possibility presents a potential venue for influence. This explains why normative realpolitik thrives at the UN but struggles in more streamlined institutions like the International Monetary Fund, where voting is weighted by financial contribution and procedural complexity is deliberately limited.

Third, it relies on sustained engagement over multiple years as opposed to just months. Sporadic blocking actions or opportunistic forum-shopping are not genuine forms of normative realpolitik; they are tactical moves which are not part of a long-term strategic plan. Normative realpolitik involves multi-year efforts combining normative claims, procedural tactics, coalition building, and resource allocation. For example, Brazil and South Africa's R2P engagement lasted from 2017 to 2019, China's UNDS reform spanned 2018 to 2021, and Russia's ICJ intervention was based on years of preparatory work. This time component sets normative realpolitik apart from simpler forms of institutional resistance, showing it as a complex, long-term strategy instead of reactive opposition.

Implications for Global Governance

The three cases demonstrate a shift in how emerging powers engage with multilateral institutions. It is a shift that existing theoretical frameworks cannot adequately explain. BRCS engagement with UN institutions signifies not opportunistic manoeuvring but the use of governance norms for national goals. This finding challenges

assumptions in traditional international relations theory. Neorealist balance-of-power expectations predict military build-ups, alliance formation, or institutional withdrawal, but miss the patient procedural contestation and technical embedding documented here. Why withdraw from institutions when it is possible to reconfigure them from within? Liberal institutionalist confidence in shared-norm cooperation overlooks how institutions serve as arenas of strategic manoeuvring where states exploit institutional rules for strategic ends while giving the appearance of cooperative engagement.

What emerges is a strategic revisionism in governance: engaging multilateral institutions to promote interests through reconstructing governance norms. This marks a shift in how emerging powers approach international institutions, emphasising instrumentalisation rather than normative commitment. Each BRCS member has built alternative alliance networks that provide multilateral legitimacy for institutional engagement, preventing Western powers from isolating revisionist behaviour through traditional diplomatic pressures. The claim of norm violation becomes less convincing when the accused can point to numerous co-sponsors, cite procedural legitimacy, and present their positions as representing Global South perspectives as opposed to narrow national interests.

BRICS+, comprising nine full members and nine partner countries, represents around 4 billion people and 41% of global GDP at purchasing power parity. This enhances BRICS members' legitimacy when advocating for sovereignty-optimising positions. The 2024 Kazan Declaration's emphasis on 'strengthening multilateralism for equitable global development and security', along with the launch of BRICS Clear, an autonomous cross-border settlement system aimed at reducing dollar reliance, exemplifies this dual strategy of normative appeal paired with tangible institution-building. This duality reveals modern governance reformism: never dismiss the system, always seek to improve it, but develop alternatives that decrease dependence on existing institutions.

The pattern outlined here demonstrates how emerging powers develop governance models that rival Western institutions through three interconnected strategies: gradual recalibration

that appears as reform rather than rejection, technical integration that subtly reshapes institutional DNA without provoking political backlash, and procedural disruption that limits institutional effectiveness without formal withdrawal. Collectively, these strategies form a cohesive approach to institutional change that operates beneath the threshold of confrontation while delivering substantial revisionist outcomes.

The implications for global governance are substantial. If normative realpolitik becomes the primary mode of institutional engagement, multilateral institutions will increasingly function as venues for strategic rivalry instead of cooperative problem-solving. Norms will be viewed as tools to be used. Commitments will not be honoured. Procedural rules will be exploited for tactical gain without regard for institutional functioning. Coalitions will be formed based on strategic interests. Shared values will not determine coalitions. This does not mean institutions become irrelevant as they still function as arenas where power is contested, and legitimacy is built. However, institutions will operate differently than liberal theory suggests, acting less as mechanisms to socialise states towards shared norms and more as spaces where states pursue interests through normative language. Recognising this shift is important for policymakers managing contemporary multilateral governance.

CONCLUSIONS

BRCS nations reshape global governance through three distinct but related strategies: collaborative resistance (Brazil-South Africa), technocratic positioning (China), and adversarial contestation (Russia). This challenge tests both realist and liberal institutionalist ideas about how states use multilateral institutions. Realists underestimate how institutions act as forums for projecting power beyond military strength. Liberals overestimate how institutions encourage states to adopt shared norms. Both overlook the strategic middle ground this study highlights.

This paper offers an operational definition of normative realpolitik: the strategic use of normative claims and institutional procedures to maintain lasting influence within multilateral organisations without provoking the backlash

that open confrontation might cause. The cases of Brazil-South Africa, China, and Russia illustrate three modalities of this approach (collaborative, technocratic, and adversarial), showing how emerging powers turn normative competition into institutional influence. These modalities differ in tactics, coalition structure, and timing, but they share core features: purposeful norm deployment, procedural manipulation, coalition building, and ongoing engagement.

The three cases show a tension: BRICS members invoke universal principles to advance narrow interests, use multilateral forums to limit multilateralism's transformative potential, and advocate for global governance while resisting normative constraints. This tension is not a flaw in the concept but an inherent part of normative realpolitik itself. The approach relies on maintaining a gap between normative rhetoric and strategic practice by selectively invoking norms, exploiting procedural rules opportunistically, forming pragmatic coalitions, and engaging strategically.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore whether the significant BRICS expansion – from five founding members in 2009 to nine full members and nine partners by 2025 – affects normative realpolitik dynamics. The inclusion of major fossil fuel producers (UAE, Iran) and geopolitically crucial states (Egypt, Ethiopia) introduces actors with differing regional interests and ties to Western powers. Does expansion weaken BRICS's tactical coherence or increase their collective influence? The October 2024 creation of the “partner country”

category, providing observer status to nations including Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, indicates BRICS+ is prioritising breadth over ideological consistency. However, Brazil's veto of Venezuela's accession – citing the disputed 2024 election – shows that even with expanded membership, internal tensions over normative boundaries remain.

Additional research priorities encompass five key areas. First, monitoring normative realpolitik tactics beyond 2023 to evaluate their sustainability and how they adapt during the 2024-2025 expansion, alongside the rise of BRICS, the Interbank Cooperation Mechanism, and local currency settlement platforms that could decrease reliance on dollar-based institutions. Second, comparing failed and successful attempts at normative repositioning. Third, examining Western counter-tactics aimed at opposing institutional reconfiguration – specifically through the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and revamped multilateral development bank lending, which compete with NDB and BRI frameworks. Fourth, analysing India's unique influence through peacekeeping and climate diplomacy, including its 2023 G20 presidency's “Voice of the Global South” initiative and its mediating role between BRICS members (notably China) and Western groups (Quad, I2U2). Fifth, assessing how smaller states like Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico navigate their positions between BRICS-led and Western-led normative systems – especially those with BRICS partner status – balancing competing institutional loyalties.

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Reframing South Africa's
Energy Diplomacy:
An African imperative and
geopolitical strategy
for Just Energy Transition

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Abstract

In response to the ongoing threats posed by climate change, South Africa has joined the rest of the world in advancing decarbonisation efforts. As one of the signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and to the Paris Agreement, South Africa is committed to a transformational transition to a net-zero emission economy by 2050 through its energy diplomacy. This article presents a comprehensive examination of the important role of energy diplomacy in the current geopolitical context. As nations increasingly face challenges related to energy security, sustainability, and climate change, energy diplomacy has emerged as a vital instrument for fostering international cooperation and collaboration. This study, therefore, showcases South Africa's successful energy diplomacy initiatives, including strategic partnerships between the Global North and the Global South. It also examines the impact of multilateral agreements such as the five-year Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) from 2023-2027. However, given the existing socio-economic challenges that are exacerbated by the climatic changes, it is imperative to conduct a qualitative content analysis of South Africa's energy diplomacy. A content analysis is adopted as a research methodology to uncover

pathways that can enhance trade relations and facilitate conflict resolution to climate-induced conflicts. This study identifies key factors driving South Africa's energy diplomacy, including economic interests, technological advancements, and regulatory frameworks that contribute to a Just Transition. The findings suggest that effective energy diplomacy can pave the way for innovative approaches that can meet the global energy demands positively, whilst influencing international relations. In conclusion, this article makes recommendations for policy implementation and future research. It also emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of energy diplomacy's role in strengthening global energy governance when addressing critical environmental challenges. Thus, advocating for a leveraged energy diplomacy as an imperative strategic tool to create sustainability in future energy transformation through regional and global collaborations.

Keywords: Climate Change, Decarbonisation, Energy diplomacy, Energy Transition Plan, South Africa

Introduction

South Africa is undeniably rich in mineral resources, just like the bulk of other African nations. The distinction, however, lies in the fact that, unlike other African states such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe, since its democratic transition, South Africa has been able to retain and exploit its political stability to advance numerous national and regional strategic interests in a bid to transform its energy sector. For decades, nations of the world, both in the Global North and the Global South, have been relying on a mix of sources of energy dominated by fossil fuels. However, with the increased modernisation processes in the energy sector, the dependency on fossil fuels has decreased substantially. In fact, since the 1970s, there has been a consistent drop in the reliance on fossil fuels due to the environmental implications of carbon dioxide emissions (Griffiths, 2019). In the case of South Africa, despite embarking on a renewable energy project since 1998, the dividends for a Just Energy Transition are still ongoing, given its continuous renewable energy transformation journey. It has become increasingly significant to accelerate South Africa's renewable energy production to counter its heavy reliance on coal-fired power plants. By 2021, studies on South Africa's renewable projections indicated that only 5% of South Africa's renewable electricity was drawn from hydroelectric power, while coal-fired power plants made up 90% of energy generation (Besada, 2021).

By 2023, South Africa embarked on a slight transition from coal dependency to a diversified use of renewable energy sources, ranging from solar power, wind, hydroelectric plants, nuclear, to open-cycle gas turbine (Ukoba, Jen and Yusuf, 2025 and CSIR, 2025). As a result, South Africa has been able to balance its national electricity

demands with power generation of about 245,000 GWh, which enables it to export about 12,300 GWh to Southern African neighbouring states such as Botswana and Zimbabwe whilst maintaining its power imports from Mozambique to 10,800 GWh (Ukoba, *et al.* 2025). South Africa plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional energy security imperatives through its energy diplomacy. Thus, enabling it to navigate the complexities of the ongoing just energy transition in South Africa, through energy diplomacy. Therefore, South Africa seeks to secure energy resources by fostering international partnerships to attract global investments in renewable technologies. This article reframes South Africa's energy diplomacy employing a qualitative content analysis of peer reviewed documents whereby with a narrative review will aid the study to explore the significance of energy diplomacy. As a critical component of the nation's strategy to transform South Africa's energy sector while addressing socio-economic concerns and promoting equitable development, this study is three-fold. Firstly, it provides guidelines on the study's methodology and contextualises South Energy Diplomacy. Secondly, it examines South Africa's multilayer governance approach and key factors advancing the Just Energy Transition as critical pathways for sustainability, diversity, and internationally supported energy solutions that adhere to climate actions. Finally, this paper concluded with valuable recommendations that offer insights for policy implementation and discussions for future research strategy.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology adopting a narrative approach to content analysis of South Africa's Energy Diplomacy. To carry out

this study relevant documents were reviewed drawn from scholarly databases such as JSTOR, ACADEMIA, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, in addition to Institutional Repositories from Emeris and the University of South Africa. These databases were instrumental in enabling extensive analysis of Agenda 2030 SDGs, the African Union Agenda 2063 bulletins and EU-SA partnership agreements supporting the Just Energy Transition. Other Peer reviewed materials such as journal articles and books were also analysed to further engage the study with the unfolding energy diplomacy engagements in international relations. The subsequent section delves into the conceptualisation of South Africa's Energy Diplomacy which also elucidates realist theory as an underpinning theoretical framework.

Conceptualising South Africa's Energy Diplomacy

Energy diplomacy has emerged as a vital aspect of international relations, underscoring the intersection of states' production of source of energy, consumption, and trade that the geopolitical dynamics of both the Global North and the Global South countries (De Pous, Heilmann, and Fischer, 2020). Traditionally, diplomacy has been practiced by states as the main actors. However, with the increased multilateral engagements in international relations, a state-centric approach to international affairs has become increasingly complex due to multiple actors that influence the outcome of diplomacy.

On the one hand, realists view states are rational actors with reasonable power and security interests capable of recognising risks and opportunities in international relations (Grieco, Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2022). Essentially, this theory frames South Africa's energy diplomacy as a strategic move driven by national interests and power struggles required to advance its economic development and sustainability. Since Realism emphasizes the role of state actions in a competitive global system, its theoretical underpinnings also demonstrate how energy resources can enhance national security and economic power. South Africa's participation in energy diplomacy, can be interpreted seen as a strategic quest for influence amid a changing geopolitical landscape.

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On the other hand, energy diplomacy remains an “under-operationalized and under-defined” concept (Chaban & Knodt, 2015: 458). This is the case despite conceptually presenting a relevant multistakeholder model of diplomacy. A model that illustrates the dynamics of energy interactions between a supranational actor, such as the European Union (EU) with major energy consumer countries from the Global South, such as South Africa.). These major Global South countries also happen to be members of the BRICS bloc, specifically the main founding nations, including Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. Although, according to Najam (2020), the Global South is made up of two distinct organisational memberships from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 (G77) that continue to complement the self-determination interests and economic development agenda of the Southern Hemisphere.

Through energy diplomacy, both supranational nations and resource-producing countries use state power to enable their energy-producing companies to attain a competitive leverage whilst accessing energy markets. In the case of South Africa, the country's energy landscape comprises both traditional and renewable sources as the country navigates growing energy demand,

coupled with rising reliability concerns, and a decisive transition plan toward sustainability.

Nonetheless, at its core, energy diplomacy refers to the strategic negotiation and collaboration among countries to secure energy resources, to address energy security concerns, such as energy poverty experienced in South Africa due to periodic “major electricity cuts and prices soaring 10% in real terms” (Bond and Rempel, 2024:136). As such, finding mechanisms to foster sustainable energy transitions through energy diplomacy has become vital, specifically as the world grapples with climate change. The urgent need for renewable energy transition has equally become increasingly paramount, in international relations, given its ability to not only to contribute to global economic development but also to sustain equitable energy sources that are less environmentally harmful to the ozone layer (Merdjanova, 2020 & Adeniran and Onyekwena, 2020).

The shift to a green and clean energy approach to sustainable development sets the tone for an effective Just Energy Transition (JET). As states strengthen their energy diplomacy through various levels of engagement, they also endorse international cooperation and multilateral agreements that support the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, South Africa's JET plan can only be sustainable with strong regional and international partners. Regionally, the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) addresses both the global Agenda 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063. The AfCFTA is thus a pan-African initiative positioning Africa's regional integration on a path toward an accelerated collective response to socio-economic and climate imperatives. This significant trajectory is necessary for the establishment of effective urbanization and sustainable development processes (Woolfrey, 2021).

Internationally, energy partnerships such as the EU Clean Trade and Investment Partnership, which addresses SDG7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, are equally paramount for Africa's renewable energy transition. South Africa's Energy Diplomacy has been strategically progressive in securing a groundbreaking EU-SA green transition partnership. For example, the €4.7 billion JET investment to fund critical drivers of economic growth sustainability, such as clean energy,

technological connectivity, and health sectors, has shown the EU's commitment to the Just Energy Transition Partnership, which sets a precedent for continuous EU-Africa trade agreement (ESG News, 2025).

In essence, bilateral and multilateral agreements between countries advance participation in global forums addressing collective environmental challenges, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The latter framework forms the basis for collective negotiations shaping international climate agreements like the Paris Agreement, which does not impose but compels signatories of the convention to strengthen efforts to reduce toxic emissions in the environment (Kuh, 2018). These efforts take the form of global responses to the multifarious threats that climate change poses to nations' sustainable development and initiatives toward poverty eradication (Mbatia, Burton, & Ouma, 2023). To this end, energy diplomacy is critical as it fosters a collaborative approach to combat climate change challenges such as air pollution, droughts, and floods. As nations strive to meet the targets set by international agreements, including the Paris Agreement, cooperative efforts in renewable energy development, technology transfer, and financial investments become essential (Harris, 2022). This collaborative dimension ensures that energy diplomacy is not merely about competition for resources but about promoting shared goals for a sustainable future, especially since African states are far behind in decarbonizing their local and regional economies (Smith & Jones, 2021).

As Mbatia et al. (2023) observed, African states' economies are particularly at a loss, specifically states whose economies rely on natural resource extraction, such as Tanzania and Mozambique. In these nations, the diversification of economic resources is vital to broaden their domestic industrialisation and renewable energy pathways. As such, strengthening multilateral cooperation between asymmetric states, meaning cooperation between states with clear, distinct economic capabilities and distinct responsibilities in the context of climate change contributions, remains critical. The concept of Energy Diplomacy also emphasizes the importance of exercising soft power (Kuh, 2018: 506). In essence, soft power is used to leverage states' energy resources as a

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means to exert global influence and relationship-building (Hoffmann, 2021). For instance, countries rich in renewable energy technologies can export clear energy solutions to developing nations. By so doing, they would be enhancing their geopolitical standing while aiding other nations in expanding energy transitions (Käkönen, 2019).

In the context of South Africa, energy diplomacy takes on a unique form as the country seeks to balance its energy needs with its commitments to renewable energy and sustainability. Over the years, the government has been engaging in various international partnerships to enhance its renewable energy capacity while addressing local socio-economic realities (Gumede, 2020).

This strategic approach highlights the multi-faceted nature of energy diplomacy, which involves understanding its role as a strategic tool necessary to navigate the complexities of global energy markets and the dynamics of collective environmental responsibilities. In most cases, states' domestic considerations intersect with global imperatives due to the interplay between energy security, economic development, and the need for environmental sustainability. For instance, in the case of South Africa, the long years of dependence on coal, which accounts for approximately 80% of its electricity generation, saw the need to form global coalitions to collectively address environmental challenges (Department of Energy, 2019). The challenges that include the reduction

of greenhouse gas emissions affecting the air quality and public health cannot by any means be addressed unilaterally. Hence, South Africa continues to strategically work towards improving its energy security. To this end, conceptualising energy diplomacy is vital for it serves as a crucial framework for countries' enhancement of their energy security while contributing to a sustainable global energy transition. Thus, the diversification of national energy sources, through regional integration and global accessibility to modern energy carriers, is often enhanced through bilateral and multilateral partnerships. For instance, with South-China bilateral partnership, an increase in China's development of green and low-carbon energy projects that include wind and solar in South Africa has contributed to "at least eight hydropower projects financed by the Export-Import Bank of China (CHEXIM), which represent 26% of all hydropower lending, not only in South Africa but across the African continent (Klomegah, 2024).

South Africa's energy diplomacy, therefore, positions South Africa as a strategic catalyst for the expansion of green electricity through its regional and global energy dialogues that shape both climatic changes and climate policies. In essence, the discourse surrounding South Africa's energy diplomacy imperatives maximises opportunities for a strengthened Global North and Global South energy partnership despite the complexities in balancing the path towards a Just Energy Transition.

Energy Diplomacy: Opportunities for Global North and Global South Partnerships

It is undeniable that the trajectory of South African energy diplomacy is highly framed within the context of the Global North-Global South economic interests in decarbonising the environment. Despite being a major emitter of greenhouse gas (GHG) in Africa, South Africa and the entire global community are increasingly embracing green energy transition strategies. Collectively, the signatories of the Paris Agreement have shown commitment to the binding target in limiting the temperature rise below 2 °C as an effort to reduce the environmental challenges caused by the transboundary nature of climate change (Salman, Wang, Qin and He, 2024). For these reasons, some scholars argue that the negotiated climate change actions as prescribed by the Paris Agreement

have become an “irreversible transition to a low carbon world” specifically because the signatories of the Paris Agreement are unanimously phasing out the reliance on coal as the main source of energy (Amusan and Olutola, 2016:396). Partly, this ‘irreversible’ phenomenon is also due to the collective impact that fossil fuels pose to the environment. Carbon-driven energy sources create adverse consequences to human security, ranging from air pollution to health complications such as “cardiovascular, respiratory and neurological disorders” resulting from toxic chemical deposits (Tladi, Kambule & Moodley, 2024: 1).

Hence, to accelerate the just energy transition, South Africa relies on its global partners, both in the North and the South, through its membership in global forums such as the G20 and BRICS. By engaging with countries such as Brazil, China, and other EU member states, such as Germany, which account for the key largest carbon-reduction drivers, South Africa advances the global Agenda 2030 whilst positioning itself strategically to bridge the financial gap between the Global North and the Global South nations (Naidu, 2025). For instance, although in 2022, countries from the Global North pledged about \$100 billion towards the Global South climate finance to reduce the environmental disparities between low and middle-income states, the disparities continue to persist (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Historically, developed nations benefit the most from climate finance provisions. This, in turn, inhibits emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) as well as least developed countries (LDCs) from participating equitably in climate change mitigation efforts. An equitable approach is vital as it is aimed at reducing dependency on fossil fuels, which impacts the health of society across nations and their environmental conditions (Brazilian G20 Presidency and the G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group, 2024). For instance, between the 2021-2022 financial years, the United Nations Trade & Development (UNCTAD, 2024) reported that developed nations acquired a considerably higher percentage of climate finance, about 44%, in comparison to the 14% allocated to emerging markets and 2% to least developed countries. This evident disparity places the Global South nations at a disadvantage, particularly when climate finance is tied to conditionalities required to deliver

certain climatic priorities. For these reasons, global financial structures and economic governing systems require reforms to address the systemic inequalities. It is worth noting that, even though the Paris Agreement adheres to “common but differentiated responsibilities,” where despite the existence of agreed shared climate change actions, states still present distinct actions based on their different regional and national positions (UNCTAD, 2024 & United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2021).

It is, therefore, critical that continued Global North and Global South collaboration remains a priority to balance not only the uneven financial distribution needs for mitigation and adaptation efforts but also to regulate the debt crisis that most African states are entangled in. Odimegwu (2025) advocates for an integrated approach that combines both strategies of mitigation and adaptation, highlighting their effectiveness in addressing to the climate-induced challenges while promoting long-term sustainability and resilience. However, the acceleration in the implementation of clean energy transition across geographies, specifically within the African context, requires a “common framework for dealing with debt relief” because the higher debt rate amongst Sub-Saharan African states (Mbatia et al, 2023:36).

The party, the rising debt impact negatively on African states’ economic sustainability and investor confidence. Moreover, most Global North states, such as Germany and Canada, have been at the forefront of decarbonisation efforts due to their higher private sector financial contribution of about 64% whilst the EMDEs and LCDs nations rely on multilateral climate funds (MCFs) finance, which remains very low, as indicated earlier (Buchner et al. 2023). These financial discrepancies accentuate barriers to the aspired accelerated renewable energy transition. However, it is worth noting that the need for progressive governance amongst state-owned power utilities such as Eskom, in the case of South Africa, is extremely essential to ensure that political interference on international investments is kept at bay whilst increasing participation of the private sector on renewable energy efforts that enhance the flow of domestic capital and boost investor reliability and partnership confidence. South Africa has successfully secured a multilateral financial investment of about \$8.5

billion from European partners such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany in a bid to move away from its 80% dependency on coal for electricity generation into a clean energy transition model (European Union, 2021). Through this Just Energy Transition Investment from the Global North, South Africa is expected to reduce its gas emissions over the next 20 years. This green transition anticipates an acceleration in the commitment to lower emissions to less than 1-1.5 gigatonnes whilst advancing resilience to climatic changes and promoting sustainable development as prescribed in the Paris Agreement.

The impact of multilateralism in the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP)

As a collective practice by states to forge international collaborations through global institutions, international forums, and agreements critical to accomplish shared objectives (Hoffmann, 2021 & Peters, 2024). The African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), as well as the JET IP, are multilateral forums through which South Africa collaborates with other nations in sharing knowledge and resources in an effort to advance a sustainable energy future. Furthermore, multilateralism seen in the JET IP collaboration between South Africa and global EU investors is set to achieve a wider economic diversification. To some extent, this continuous partnership leads to environmental benefits that impact affected communities through the coal transition to greener ecosystems. However, this does not in any form mean that multilateral engagements between developing and developed nations forfeit the national interests. To the most part South Africa often chooses to act collectively with international partners to address environmental vulnerabilities (Najam, 2020).

Regenerating mining-affected land specifically in Mpumalanga province is essential, considering that this province is one of South Africa's toxic gas emissions hotspots (Kamolane-Kgadima and Kathi, 2024). The global energy landscape shifts have compelled South Africa to diversify its energy sources. In addition, it also reduces reliance on fossil fuels, which have largely impacted mining communities directly. In some communities, water pollution affects their health and human security. In the same vein, the prevalent injustices in accessibility to green energy in some peri-urban

settlements, such as in Qandu-Qandu, in Cape Town, accelerate the necessity for just energy transition (Mirzania et al, 2023). By establishing relationships with developed countries that possess advanced renewable energy technologies, South Africa is set to multilaterally bolster and diversify its energy resilience. This approach is set to redress the historical environmental challenges, such as deforestation, forced displacements, and hazardous residues found in mining areas (Gumede, 2020 & Kamolane-Kgadima and Kathi, 2024). Multilateralism in this regard is significant in a context where climate change poses substantial risks to energy systems. Thus, international collaboration is essential for collective environmental solutions that yield a reliable supply of green energy in spite of the complex climate change vulnerabilities plaguing the 21st century (Harris, 2022).

Navigating socio-economic challenges impacting the international energy landscape

The geopolitical dynamics of South Africa's energy diplomacy present both opportunities and challenges required to navigate the complex elements surrounding the nation's socio-economic challenges and the continuous commitment to global climate change imperatives. Historically, South Africa's socio-economic challenges date back to the tumultuous legacies of the Apartheid regime that have presented existential challenges

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Mpumalanga – this
North-eastern province of
South Africa is notoriously
known for its highest
greenhouse gas emitter
in Africa.

”

to governance systems and eroded social cohesion (DIRCO, 2025). Although the Apartheid regime has officially ended with South Africa's government democratic transition, in 1994, the racial and cultural cleavages of Apartheid have left visible environmental cleavages, particularly amongst black communities.

Kamolane-Kgadima & Kathi (2024) reveal some of the socio-economic challenges plaguing the post-Apartheid South Africa, specifically, in the context of climate change vulnerabilities posed by the environmental injustices in the Highveld and Secunda towns in Mpumalanga province. This North-eastern province of South Africa is notoriously known for its highest greenhouse gas emitter in Africa. This province hosts 12 fossil fuel-reliant stations, which weigh heavily on the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of the community whilst empowering Sasol's chemical and coal-based energy refinery (Kamolane-Kgadima & Kathi, 2024: 2).

Given the considerable direct environmental harm caused by the coal-driven power stations in the Mpumalanga surrounding areas, the democratic South African government has collaborated with both national and international corporations to find workable solutions to the environmental challenges at hand. Since South Africa's foreign policy has Africa's regional integration, political security, and economic development at the core of its interest. As such, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) serves as a regional forum through which South Africa accelerates its regional integration and advances multilateral trade and energy security interests (Zubane, Mlambo, and Shoba, 2021).

By so doing, South Africa continues to demonstrate its persisting commitment to equity in diversification of energy resources by engaging with both its neighbouring states, the AU, and other continents through South-South relations as well as North-South engagements. This strategic approach is critical in leveraging energy transition support domestically and internationally within the framework of the Paris Agreement. As such, whilst the country navigates its geopolitical dimensions that drive its shift from the longstanding coal dependency towards a more efficient and green energy, certain global targets, governance policies,

and climate change initiatives drive South Africa's global influence in the just energy transition on the continent (Ukoba, *et al.* 2025). To attain these targets, active engagement in global dialogues that address just energy transition enables South Africa to not only secure technical support, investment funding, and global market access to resources related to advancing renewable energy technologies but also to sustain its influential role on global environmental issues.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, it is evident that South Africa's energy diplomacy has ushered in its prominence in acting decisively on both domestic energy transition needs and leadership roles in regional and global climate commitments. In light of realists' theoretical framework used to examine South Africa's energy diplomacy in the context of its competitive power to advance economic interests multilateral agreements such as the five-year Just Energy Transition Investment Plan form the basis for South Africa's stable pattern of global interactions. For instance, despite having secured large investment sums to support its JET IP from EU members, South Africa continues to collaborate with other emerging economies. This strategic approach to realise its interests is made possible through forums such as BRICS, G20, the AU, and the SADC regions. Conversely, this multilateral strategic approach continues to provide meaningful renewable energy interventions that create opportunities for expanded influence within the African continent and beyond.

Despite having successfully secured financial investments, which are critical for the implementation of the JET plans, it is equally vital that sustainable renewable energy practices are adopted within the contextual framework of the South African society. Although a blend with international practices also ensures economic sustainability. This approach fosters reliability and inclusiveness in decarbonisation and innovation-driven renewable energy development. Given the dynamics of the South African society; the impact of the just energy transition has a greater impact not only on the broader global environmental agenda that demands structural and policy reforms backed by the international community but must take into cognisance the socio-economic aspects.

Hence, an expansion of mechanisms advancing inclusive energy accessibility must remain pivotal, particularly in a highly divisive socio-economic context where rural communities remain marginalized. In most cases, such communities have limited clean sources of energy and, to some extent, are subjected to limited access to any form of electricity in comparison to the urban areas, which, despite periodic interruptions in power supply, tend to have stable access to electricity.

Therefore, to promote equitable and inclusive energy access to all members of society, this chapter recommends prioritisation of infrastructural development. This approach must not only be accelerated as a means to meet global standards but must also be implemented to address energy inequalities. Thus, extending just energy transition projects to rural areas where traditional biomass remains the primary source of energy. Continued reliance on such traditional energy sources not only heightens health and safety concerns but also hinders JET progress. The mitigation of coal-dependency and the adaptation of energy justice strategies is necessary to achieve the lower greenhouse gas emissions targets (1-1.5°C) – a critical renewables step for attainment of climate sustainability.

Conclusively, energy diplomacy goes beyond merely accelerating the green energy transition to reduce air pollution and other environmental threats posed by toxic gas emissions. It is more about advancing innovative solutions. Scaled up solutions that integrate technological advancements, financial diversification, and multilateral partnerships. In addition, these interventions should be carried out while also redressing the historical legacies that continue to underpin inequitable conditions affecting and perpetuating slow-paced socio-economic development in our society.

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Change and Contradiction: Hungary's Foreign Policy Across its 2011 and 2024 European Council Presidencies

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Abstract

This study traces the significant alterations in Hungary's national identity and strategic culture between its 2011 and 2024 presidencies of the Council of the European Union, highlighting how these shifts have reshaped the country's foreign policy orientation and behaviour in the international system. Situated against the backdrop of Hungary's unique historical experiences—including the long shadow of Trianon, decades of communist rule, and the post-1991 imperative of Europeanization—the paper seeks to clarify how Hungary moved from a firmly Westward-leaning, Euro-Atlantic trajectory toward a more sovereignty-centred and identity-driven approach to diplomacy. The objective is to examine how these internal reconfigurations have informed Hungary's contemporary foreign policy choices and the tensions they have produced within the EU. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative content analysis of core documents such as the Fundamental Law (2011) and Hungary's post-presidency foreign policy programme, complemented by discourse analysis of speeches made by key decision makers, most notably Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This mixed qualitative approach enables the systemic identification of recurring narratives and identity markers visibly shaping Hungarian foreign policy. The findings suggest that Hungary's recent foreign policy conduct reflects not episodic populist opportunism but rather a coherent recalibration of strategic culture shaped by longstanding grievances, post-communist identity

reconstruction, and a recognition of shifting global power realities. This recalibration is evident through policies such as the Eastern Opening, strategic neutrality in the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the securitization of migration and Hungary’s selective veto usage within EU and NATO frameworks. The study concludes that Hungary’s evolving foreign policy posture provides valuable insight into how identity, populism, and geopolitics intersect to redefine the external behaviour of small states within a transforming European and global order

Keywords: Strategic Culture, Security Policy, Hungary, National Policy

In the second half of 2024 Hungary, a small landlocked country located in Central Eastern Europe (CEE), took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union as the third part of the “Presidency Trio”, after Spain and Belgium, allowing it the opportunity to become the centre of European Union politics and policy-making (Harb et al., 2024). Even before 2024 Hungary had become an increasingly infamous actor in Central European and European politics at large, often tied to its hawkish foreign policy stances towards the European Union (EU), aversion to liberal democracy, and friendly interactions with states seen as threats to European cohesion and security. This was not always the case, as at one point Hungary stood as a beacon of European liberalism, with a national identity and strategic culture rooted in being European.

This paper looks to be a somewhat longitudinal study that follows the conversion in Hungary’s foreign policy between its first term in the EU council presidency that took place in 2011 and its recent term that concluded in December of 2024 through the outlining of alterations in Hungary’s national identity and connected strategic culture. In doing so the paper utilizes a methodology mix of (i) qualitative content analysis, serving to identify major themes from text and materials relevant to Hungarian foreign policy like the 2011 Hungarian Constitution (a.k.a. the Fundamental Law) and foreign policy documents, as well as (ii) discourse/sentiment analysis for speeches made by key foreign policy personnel, mainly Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban.

The study’s novelty and significance are found in its approach to the modifications of Hungarian foreign policy, not in relation to its implications on Hungarian-EU relations but as a structured, integrated mesh of policy cognisant of a distinct internal and regional history, the sustained salience of the foreign policy imperatives of previous

governments and recalibrations in the global economic and political pecking order. The paper not only contributes to a richer understanding of Hungary’s contemporary position within the EU but also offers theoretical and empirical insight into how small states renegotiate their identities and strategic roles amid geopolitical uncertainty.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Culture and National Identity

Before handling the central argument, the paper is concerned it is prudent to establish a conceptual benchmark for the two terms pivotal to the study. The first to be unpacked here is strategic culture, which in this study refers to a method of foreign analysis in understanding the behaviour of states and international bodies, typically in security and defence affairs, but can be applied to general foreign policy actions (Meyer, 2004). It is broadly understood as referring to the social values, ideology, narratives, shared beliefs, experiences, attitudes, norms and patterned behaviour that shape a nation’s collective identity, evaluate its interests and influence its understanding of the methods available to best achieve its “destiny” in the international system (Tellis, 2016:5; Kuznar et al., 2023; Zandee & Kruijver, 2019). It also assists in the framing of issues, policy and policy expectations, giving contextual meaning, decision making and justification for decisions made (Kuznar et al., 2023; Mi, 2022; Hadfield, 2005). Inside the European Union some strategic cultures are easily discernible; France’s, for instance, is on it being a nuclear power with the integrated potential of force. Germany, on the other hand, prefers an approach that is shy on the use of violence, due to its troubled history (Kuznar et al, 2023).

National identity, the second pivotal term, is in need of slightly more expansive elucidation, considering the gravity the concept has accrued overtime based on its nature and impact. On the latter, national identity has been cited as ‘pivotal’ to

the potential futures of modern states, with a weak national identity holding the possibility to introduce state disintegration and societal fragmentation, which either stands to be a major obstacle to development or, at worst, internal instability leading to state failure (Fukuyama, 2021; Kowert, 2000). In contrast, strong national identities are attributed to a factor in the successful modernisation of China, Japan and South Korea, which were able to springboard off the already present sense of common national purpose and singular sense of internal identity to rapidly develop in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Fukuyama, 2021:21). With regards to its nature, Parekh (1995) articulated that in the earlier literature the term 'national identity' elicited the following four most common understandings; (i) to refer to what makes a nation distinct and distinguishable from others, (ii) pointing to what the organized community understands itself to be, (iii) enquiring into the organising principles, fundamental tendencies, dispositions and characteristic ways of thought it has and (iv) equating it with deeply cherished values, goals and commitments used to ascertain what the community stands for and what political projects define it – which, when pursued on an international level, can be considered the state's national interests (Weldes, 1996). For this paper national identity is conceptualised as the distinct identity of a territorially organized community or polity defined by a history that is passively inherited while simultaneously being redefined via project(s) carried out by each generation in response to the prevalent needs and circumstances, allowing it to be altered within limits, as informed by Parekh (1994; 1995).

Critical about this malleability is that it *can* be founded around liberal-democratic political values and shared experiences that act as connective tendons facilitating the thriving of diverse communities; however, it does not necessarily have to be, as long as there is the shared belief in the legitimacy of that country's political system (Fukuyama, 2021; Fukuyama, 2022). An additional comment on the national identity is that feelings of belonging hold relative value that only make 'real sense only when contrasted with the feelings that nation members collectively hold towards other nations' (Triandafyllidou, 1998) as it is 'connected to a specific country's national image and its world

view, helping to distinguish a state's friends from its enemies' (Kowert, 2000; Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009).

2. Hungary in Historical Perspective: An Abridged Political Trajectory

It would be troublesome and admittedly reductionist to attempt to identify Hungary's strategic culture outside of its arguably unique historical experiences. If one unfamiliar with Magyarország (the Hungarian name for Hungary) were to come across a Hungarian and spark a conversation about the country's past, outside comments on the homeyness of gulyás or distinctive 'beaches' would almost immediately be made aware of the country's eventful and in no way dull history that by no small margin has made up a significant amount of the Hungarian identity and, by extension, impacted the formation of its strategic culture. The following section spotlights three key moments in Hungary's history central to its contemporary politics and attached foreign policy, these being the Treaty of Trianon, its post-communist pivot away towards a Europeanized democracy and the 2010 electoral victory of *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség*, more commonly known as FIDESZ.

2.1 Historical Hungary and The Treaty of Trianon

From 1526, when the mediaeval Kingdom of Hungary fell under the Ottoman occupation after losing the Battle of Mohacs, it was then governed by the Habsburgs after the Ottomans were expelled by an International Christian Army. In 1867 the Austro-Hungarian Empire came into existence and remained a regional power, only gaining independence at the end of the First World War, following persistent failed attempts by Hungarians at restoring independence, which came at a heavy cost (Jeszenszky, 2007:44). This cost was the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, during which Hungary, not a subject of international law at the start of the war, had been identified as the losing party of World War I and consequently suffered. This suffering came from the significant loss of territories to what was then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (more commonly called Yugoslavia), Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Romania as well as the populations within them (Sadecki, 2020; Pop, 2019). In fact, following the treaty, the dismembered Hungary retained only one-third

of its original territory and had seen over three million Hungarians transferred to neighbouring states as the result of redrawn borders, putting Hungary in the unique position of being one of the few European countries ‘surrounded by its own ethnic group’ (Sadecki, 2020; White, 1992; Rapcsák, 1994:74). Then World War II saw Hungary become an “unwilling and unreliable ally” to Hitler’s Germany, which led to German occupation in 1944 to prevent Hungary’s defection to the Allies, a year later it came under Soviet occupation and later a “captive nation” under communist control following its deliverance from the Nazis by the Red Army that lasted into 1991, when communist rule was contested by mass uprisings and people’s revolutions (Jeszenszky, 2007:44-45; Kocsis & Karácsonyi, 2022).

This legacy of territorial disintegration and externally imposed borders fundamentally shaped Hungary’s current strategic culture, especially its emphasis on sovereignty, minority protection, and opposition to external restraint. Hungarian foreign policy has stressed national autonomy and bilateral leverage over multilateral conformity since 2010, which can be explained by the continued use of Trianon as a political and cultural reference point. Since a significant amount of Hungary’s current policy changes are closely related to a past characterised by limited sovereignty and externally imposed national and foreign policy identities, it is crucial to comprehend this historical foundation of Hungarian identity and its early foreign policy orientations. These experiences serve as the foundation for the goal of forging a stronger sense of national identity and exercising more control over the direction of Hungary’s current foreign policy.

2.2 Democratization, Europeanization, and the Post-1991 Transformation

As part of a spate of elections that installed liberal democracies across Central Eastern Europe between 1989-1991, Hungary’s 1990 general election saw the emergence of a new democratic government with great popular legitimacy. This legitimacy was required for the successful implementation of socio-economic and political changes to break the ‘long-suffering nation’ free of the Soviet imprint left on it by the decades of communist rule (Batt, 1990:7; Tökés, 1996; Gebethner, 1977).

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The foreign policy objectives of the first freely elected government of Jozsef Antall were simple. To initiate a geopolitical reorientation guided by the need to restore Hungary’s sovereignty, replace Eastern connections with Western relations and develop trust with Western democracies, all of which basically meant the Europeanization of Hungarian foreign policy (Jeszenszky, 2007; Kiss & Zahoran, 2007; Tarrosy & Voros, 2014). Europeanization is defined as being concerned with “a transformation in the way in which national foreign policies are constructed, in the ways in which professional roles are defined and pursued and in the consequent internalisation of norms and expectations arising from a complex system of collective European policymaking” (Tonra, 2000:299). This is coupled with transforming and harmonizing national and foreign policy to match the requirements for EU membership and developing policies that affect or contribute to the development of a European foreign policy that is common (Hettyey, 2020:3). Becoming European remained the core domestic and foreign policy priority of government from 1991 and, albeit at alternating intensities, meant

conforming to the European political community and its comprising values to prove Hungary's ability to be a viable member of the EU and not a weak point in a 'rather unstable region' (Kiss & Zahorán, 2007).

Emphasis placed on European integration was facilitated through the supporting of pan-European collective security and joining the European Community to reinforce the cordial ties formed with the capitalist West in the 1980s when Hungary joined the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Rapcsák, 1994; Jeszenszky, 2007). It is generally agreed that the 'Holy Trinity' of first post-soviet Hungarian government strategic foreign policy objectives were the (i) joining of Euro-Atlantic Organizations, namely the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (joined in 1999) which at the time was the pressing policy point considering the immediate security threat the still Soviet Union posed as well as the European Commission and European Union (joined in 2004), (ii) a constructive relationship with its neighbours (five of them being new states, three of which were formerly communist) through promoting economic and political cooperation of the region and lastly (iii) defence of the interests of Hungarian minorities abroad (Boros & Bondor, 2002; Balogh, 1998; Kiss & Zahoran, 2007). The "damaging long-term side effect of Trianon on the national psyche of Hungary meant that the post-1920 generations becoming obsessed with schemes for the creation of international conditions that could make possible the reversal of Trianon would go on to dictate the primary focus of foreign policies for years to come" (Dreisziger, 2003: 33). As part of demonstrating its willingness to 'move back to Europe', the development of relations with Russia and the broader 'East' was set aside, but not stopped, as cordial relations slowly grew after the dissolution of Soviet Russia (Tarrosy and Voros, 2014). The establishment of the Visegrad Group in 1991 stood as an example of Hungary's neighbourhood policy and an ideal balance between 'exclusive Eastern reliance', with Eastern European states relying on each other, and the disillusionment with the notion of the West protecting Central Eastern Europe from Soviet aggression, two traditional orientations that history had proven ineffective' (Jeszenszky, 2007:49).

In addition to establishing expectations of reciprocity and protection that later influenced Hungary's disenchantment with EU governance, this phase of Euro-Atlantic integration solidified a strategic culture focused on institutional conformance and multilateralism. A crucial point of reference for comprehending the post-2010 recalibration of Hungarian strategic culture is the perceived limits of Europeanization.

2.3 FIDESZ and the Consolidation of a New Political Order

It is crucial to include the 2010 pivotal landslide victory of the coalition of moderate right-wing conservative, nationalist Hungarian Civic Union (FIDESZ) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) and the far-right or even 'neo-fascist' Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and the geopolitical realities that enabled it. Two years before FIDESZ's victory was the crisis of the liberal world order, comprised of the 2008 global financial crisis that struck a Hungary already struggling through slowed economic growth, the result of major austerity measures introduced by the previous Socialist government between 2006-08 (Hajdú, 2016). For many internationalists, Hungary's 'U-turn' away from Europeanization and liberal democratization towards illiberalism and Euroscepticism was also caused by asymmetric EU development in its structural cohesion. This is in reference to efforts by the EU to reduce economic, social and territorial development disparities between all member states and across the region, between 2007 and 2014 (Vegh, 2015:72). As a member of Europe's right, FIDESZ is an ethno-nationalist party with 'Christianity and Christian values, protecting/supporting Hungarian minorities outside the country and the placing of Hungarian interests over European ones' (Ilokova & Andrey, 2020: 328) as the themes that sit central to its narrative and policies. In line with the foreign policy approach of other (CEE) right-wing parties, FIDESZ places importance on "national sovereignty that directly influences their foreign policy position", being highly critical of membership in international organizations especially if this membership entails ceding sovereignty (Vegh, 2021:5).

The consolidation of power by FIDESZ did not introduce new historical narratives, but rather it re-activated and rearranged preexisting ones,

embedding them into a coherent strategic culture centred on sovereignty, cultural survival, and pragmatic autonomy. This signalled a change in foreign policy from one that sought integration to one that prioritised strategic adaptability both inside and outside of the EU.

3. The Evolution of Hungarian Strategic Culture in Foreign Policy

This section sees the application of the discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis previously outlined in the methodology section. Explicitly, discourse analysis reviews the recurring themes and identities in Hungary's core legal and strategic texts while discourse analysis unpacks how political leaders narratively define the interests, limitations and overall role of Hungary within its specific European context. The aim is not a descriptive summary but the systematic identification of dominant frames that structure Hungarian foreign policy behaviour.

In identifying the role of Hungary's strategic culture in foreign policy between EU presidencies a good place to start is April of 2011. In symbolizing a 'new political cycle' FIDESZ looked to signal the end of its post-communist transformation and, in turn, redefine national interest, by moving away from its 1989 constitution that was based on the 1949 'communist constitution that was the basis of tyrannical rule' (Fundamental Law, 2011:3) through adopting a new constitution in 2011 called the 'Fundamental Law' (Benedek, 2015). In addition to curtailing the review power of the Constitutional Court, and the majority needed to pass laws, this new constitution redefined "the totality of people living under Hungarian laws" as members of the ethnic Hungarian nation, defining it as a cultural community bound together by a fabric that is "intellectual and spiritual" (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011:2; Hajdú, 2016:151-152). This redefined national identity is one of the constitution's major themes, revealed through the content analysis. Other key themes include increased independence and sovereignty, Hungary as a pillar of Christianity in Europe, the state's role in preserving historical accuracy, accountability and progress, and Hungary's place in the international order.

The centrality of 'Hungary as a pillar of Christianity' is visible as the constitution goes a step further than

the standard 'God bless nationality' commonplace in constitutions internationally. The Fundamental Law includes a National Avowal, or the "National Profession of Faith" (Könczöl & Kevevári, 2020: 167), which reaffirms it as a Christian country proud of its Christian heritage founded in "being made a part of Christian Europe one thousand years ago" (second verse of the National Avowal) but also recognizing "the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood" (sixth verse of the National Avowal, Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011:2). Scholars (Scott, 2023) confirm the 2011 constitution as constituting a clean separation from pre-Fidesz (as the ruling party) Hungary. Terming it as 'temporal othering' and articulating it as speaking to the sense of national narcissism, a desire for recognition of exceptionalism and a new European agenda made possible by FIDESZ 2010 victory that has enabled Hungary to follow its own political destiny and realize its role as a great culture-building and state-organization nation within the context of European cooperation (Scott, 2023).

In view of the paper's subject matter, one may ask if the constitution, if at all, makes any explicit mention of policies or frameworks that have some sway on its foreign policy. It does, a commendation of its comprehensiveness. According to the document, these are Euro-Atlantic orientation, the protection of Hungarian ethnic minorities and devotion to regional politics (Benedek, 2015; Fundamental Law, 2011).

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The second material required in charting out Hungary's strategic culture comes after Hungary's first European Union Presidency Term that ran until June of that year. The context of Hungary's presidential assumption was the Eurozone crisis, enlargement fatigue of the EU neighbourhood and the uncertainty of the future. Hungary came in with the conviction that following the crisis, only deepened cooperation between member states focusing on the needs of European citizens can make the EU successful, reflected in its slogan for that term, "Strong Europe with a Human Touch" (Vida, 2011; Vizi, 2011). At the top of the Hungarian presidency was the adoption of legislative proposals aimed at reinforcing EU economic governance, the introduction of the European Semester and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), expanding the EU neighbourhood by concluding on Croatian accession negotiations as well as 'paving the way' for Bulgarian and Romanian Schengen membership and the adoption of a new European Strategy that deals with the integration of Roma minorities, and launching the Danube Strategy (Vida, 2011). The Danube Strategy was a macro regional project and a Roma-centered strategy that, based on the recognition of the growing population of Roma in the EU, especially in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, suggested coordinated action between member states to solve the pressing issues faced by the Roma people (Balázs, 2011).

Immediately after completion of its term in June 2011, the Hungarian government launched what Jenne (2021) classified as a type of ethno-populist foreign policy revisionism aimed at 'fundamentally reconfiguring' its position in the international system typical of populist governments. In a summary document creatively titled "Hungarian Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union", the world was introduced to a Hungary that "intends to conduct a value-based foreign policy" with foreign policy goals derived from "the most important sources of Hungary's values", namely the United Nations Charter, the North Atlantic Treaty, the Treaty on the European Union and the (new) Hungarian Constitution (which is the Fundamental Law)", (Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011:4). A value-based foreign policy, pointed out by the document, means that "Hungary should not inherently limit her relations with countries that do

not fully respect, or interpret differently, the values [it] adheres to. It does, however, mean that even in pursuing those relations Hungary's interests are determined on the basis of its values, and it will choose the most effective means – including the forms of interactions – to realise its value-based interests" (Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011:3. Brackets added). Given that "the harmonisation of Hungarian interest and values is always being based on the rational analyses of the relevant circumstances and on the conclusions drawn from them" (Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011), the question is how best to advance the country's "value-based" interests. Values here *can* be understood to mean Hungarian values, but based on the trends of Hungarian foreign policy and diplomatic action, in addition to the explicit mentioning of them in the document, values should be understood as European/Trans-Atlantic values. It is also in this text that Hungary commits to the continuation of priorities pursued during its first Council of the EU presidency as well as its foundational foreign policy priorities, like its regional policy and Euro-Atlantic orientation. This, in retrospect, is unsurprising when taking into account that when it comes to the issue of neighbourhood integration into EU structures, Hungarian governments have generally been keen, as this improves bilateral relations with surrounding states that aid in dealing with 'serious issues that are likely to remain burdensome', most notably the situation of Hungarian minorities in surrounding countries (Vita, 2011:130). Pivotaly, it is with this document that Hungary's 'Global Opening' is introduced. This is a foreign policy position determined by the "global realignment of international power relations as a result of changes in the economic performance of individual countries or a group of countries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011) that stresses the importance of the post-Soviet space, Asia, the Sahel and Sub-Saharan African regions, North Africa, and Latin America as key regions (Greilinger, 2023). Before this Prime Minister Gyurcsyán (2004-2009) argued for the rethinking of Hungarian relations with global power and to construct, reconstruct and reinforce relations with the US, Russia, Asia and South-East Asia (Poti, 2006:73).

In discussing the evolution in Hungarian strategic culture and national identity between pre and

post 2010 Hungary, it should be noted that both share the same sources, these being the history of occupation, particularly as a Soviet satellite, and the dual traumas of Trianon (territorial dismemberment and population separation), but have differences in terms of their immediate geopolitical and security realities.

From 1991-2010 Hungarian strategic culture had been shaped by the need for Europeanization, democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration (Benedek, 2015) as a means of detaching themselves from the Soviet sphere of influence. Connected to this was the accessing of the political, economic and military mechanisms of security entrenched needed to deter Soviet expansion that Hungary lacked due to it being relatively limited by being small and landlocked with “no real economic or military power” (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021: 693; Szalai 2017). After 2010, or more accurately 2011, profound changes in international and regional socio-economic stability called for the revisitation of Hungary’s national and foreign strategic aims and policy. Hungarian strategic culture, inferred from the adoption of the Fundamental Law and its post-EU presidency foreign policy document, migrated towards a position that sees Hungary as a distinct Christian European nation (a theme that is salient in its stance on migration) attempting to overcome its (Soviet/Trianon) past and ensure its ethnic and socio-economic survival as part of a weakening geopolitical arrangement (the liberal EU). Key to this is pursuing and adopting values that centre Hungarian interests first, even if these values clash with the values of the states around it. It is critical to highlight that while its foreign policy goals often contradict its existence within the EU, Hungary is aware that its interests are better pursued when advanced within the (stable and predictable) framework of liberal democratic multinational organizations (Talas & Csiki, 2013, parenthesis added). As such, Hungary’s ‘breaking away’ from EU norms and values combined with its ‘actively attempting to relieve itself of possible or perceived restraints imposed by European foreign policy’, more easily understood as ‘de-Europeanization’ (Hettyey, 2020:3), has been explained as the result of it being a small state with an enlarged identity. All of which is exhibited by reaffirming it being in control of its own affairs with it as the sole ‘master of its fate’, holding unlimited autonomy, free to

select its international positions and partners, and the need for psychological self-determination to compensate for the long period of domination in its history (Hettyey, 2022; Szalai, 2017). Schmidt & Glied (2024:249-250) highlight that, based on the government narrative, Hungary’s national strategic interest foreign policy looks to “establish mutually beneficial relationships with all great powers, respecting each other’s sovereignty”.

The analysis that follows draws on qualitative content analysis of constitutional and strategic documents, alongside discourse analysis of key political speeches. The emphasis is on identifying recurrent narratives, identity markers, and justificatory frames that shape Hungary’s foreign policy behaviour rather than treating these texts descriptively.

4. The Eastern Opening: Strategic Pragmatism or Geopolitical Trojan Horse?

In seeing the impact of Hungary’s strategic culture and altered national interest, we can look at “one of the most important foreign policy strategies since the political regime change” (Tarrosy & Voros, 2014:141), Keleti Nyitás (Easter Opening). The policy was introduced in 2011 and justified by Prime Minister Orbán as a mainly economic international strategy that aims to reduce Hungarian economic dependence on the declining West and does so by “pointing towards broader geoeconomic trends and global reorientation to the East” (Greilinger, 2023:1). International relations experts (Tarrosy & Voros, 2014:145) argue the Eastern opening to be “not as much a coherent policy rather than a collection of gestures and activities towards Eastern states able to either invest in Hungary or finance its debt”. It must be remembered that within the realm of international issues and public policy, defining something is the key to persuasion, or as explained by David Zarefsky in Bostdorff & Goldzweig “to choose a definition is to plead a cause” (1994:518). By this, however, Hungary’s self-articulated aim of increased trade with Eastern partners is relatively disingenuous, as trade had not been the only focus of the policy.

The real relevance of Hungary’s foreign policy change was best explained by Prime Minister Orbán, who in his articulation of the need to

step away from ideology-driven foreign policy traditionally carried out, maintained that while Hungary would remain a steadfast member of the Western system of alliance, rejected the notion that Hungary needed to be putting Western values at the core of every foreign policy decision. Instead, Orbán argued that Hungary should relate to non-Western states on the basis of either culture, political institutions or democracy and not which states were the most liberal democracies, as Hungary now followed a foreign policy phase concerned with realizing its own economic interests (Vegh, 2015:51-52). Discursively, it can be noted that these speeches present foreign policy choice as a matter of civilizational survival and strategic autonomy instead of ideological alignments normative for the EU, thus positioning Hungary as historically constrained but strategically adaptive.

For advocates of the liberal international order, it may remain peculiar that Hungary has actively selected to engage non-democratic or illiberal regimes under its Eastern opening framework, despite its being in the stronghold of economic liberalism. It has reached out to various non-liberal states, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China, Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, even going as far as to call Azerbaijan a model state and brotherly nation during an official visit by President İlham Aliyev to Budapest for strategic partnership in 2014 and at a United Nations Special Programme for the Economic of Central Asia summit held in Baku in 2023, respectively.¹ Here is a good time to note that Azerbaijan currently sits in the bottom 25% across all Global State of Democracy categories (representation, rights, rule of law and participation) and routinely classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime by Freedom

House. However, it may be argued that much of this peculiarity is misplaced due to the policy encouraging diversification of Hungarian trade and investment relations in acknowledgement of the current situation in the global economy, where a bulk of global investments flow out from the East (Moldicz, 2024).

A second reasoning for the change in its strategic culture is in relation to Hungary's difficult past. This is visible in a statement by Prime Minister Orbán, who, following talks with President Xi on the anniversary of diplomatic relations between Hungary and China, said, "The 20th century was a shameful one...in which Hungarians suffered extremely heavy losses of historic proportions. The concept driving Hungarians is that we want to win the 21st century, not lose it. And to win we need (strong) partners" (Orban, May 2024, brackets added). Evident here is the view that the Eastern opening in some form furnishes the state with the chance to secure a victory able to erase from its slate the heavy records of defeat. For some academics, values-based foreign policy gained an air of pragmatism, expressed by the need for a foreign policy where both transatlantic and eastern relations are important and where geopolitical interests, including peace, energy, security and trade objectives, are as important as Hungarian national interest (Shmidt, 2024:115).

The belief in the need to prevent the reemergence of Cold War policies and culture in modern international relations (Orbán, 2021) is an additional explanation for the shifts in Hungary's strategic culture. Visibly articulated in the reviewed documents is the prioritization of the interests, security and stability of Hungary, reflected in the country's trend of anti-Euro Atlantic behaviour seen in its vetoing joint EU resolutions deemed harmful to its new, and much needed, Eastern allies (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021). For instance, it vetoed high-level NATO-Ukraine joint military exercises and meetings as well as blocking EU statements on human rights violations or criticisms of China, like the security law in Hong Kong (Chalmers & Emmott, 2021), and explicitly recognizing Beijing's One China policy (Szunomar & Peragovics, 2024) which is an ideological justification for Beijing's claims to Taiwan as a Chinese territory.

1 Azerbaijan, Global State of Democracy Initiative. Ideational Idea. <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/azerbaijan>. Date Accessed: 03/07/2025

Azerbaijan, Freedom House Democracy Index. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/azerbaijan> Date Accessed: 03/07/2025

Speech by Viktor Orbán at a summit of the United Nations Special Programme for the economies of Central Asia (SPECA). <https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/speech-by-viktor-orban-at-a-summit-of-the-united-nations-special-programme-for-the-economies-of-central-asia-speca>: Date Accessed: 28/11/2025

5. Strategic Culture and the Recalibration toward Strategic Neutrality

Having reviewed Hungary's strategic culture, it is of some use to attempt to point out how this strategic culture guides Hungary's long-standing neutrality in some of the conflicts taking place around the CEE region. Hungarian neutrality should not be confused with a lack of interest in international affairs and the happenings of its neighbourhood. As a refresher, the strategic culture spoken of here is one of a nation attempting to survive, thrive and navigate shifting geopolitical realities that necessitate strategic neutrality, preventing it from taking sides based solely on geopolitical ideologies, especially if doing so holds the potential to harm Hungary's socio-economic stability and security in any way or limits the interests of Hungarians from being catapulted forward.

Ukraine stands as an extremely relevant case study of Hungary's strategic culture manifested through foreign policy sovereignty, prioritization of interests, security and defence of Hungarian minorities abroad. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it would be seen that Prime Minister Orbán's Hungary would agree not to block any EU sanctions "as long as they do not cross the red line... endangering Hungary's energy security and thus its economy" (Orbán, 2022). This is, partially, the result of Hungary being heavily reliant on Russia for its energy security, with energy dependence ranging between 56.2 % and 53.7% from 2020 and 2021 respectively, a number that spikes to 90% if including the import of nuclear fuel required for the Paks nuclear plant (Csernus, 2023). The protection of Hungarian energy stability has been a constant thread in its foreign policy decisions, not only leveraging its veto ability to attain exemptions from the ban of Russian oil products, thus making it one of the few EU member states still consumers of Russian gas but also deepening energy cooperation with another 'unfriendly' state, like Azerbaijan that have enabled it to become an energy producing country "even without oil and gas fields", as said by Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (Csernus, 2023; Morvai, 2025; Weiner, 2024; Daily Hungary News, 2025) all of which is in line with the pursuit of an energy policy Prime Minister Orbán stressed was mandatory for the 'strengthening and safeguard the country's sovereignty' (Feledy,

2015).² From an analysed discourse perspective, Hungary's neutrality is articulated as responsible proactive statecraft guided by economic survival and historical experience and not as passivity.

Beyond this, as a continued neutrality, Budapest barred the use of Hungary as a transit country for weapons headed to Ukraine, promising to keep Hungary out of 'NATO's War Effort' (Scheppele, 2022) and would "repeatedly insist on watering down both joint sanctions against Russia and a common approach towards Ukraine" (Muller & Slominski, 2024:122).

Even as early as Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, in breaking away from the common EU position, Hungary adopted a 'Russia-friendly policy', not only continuing economic relations with Russia but also voicing concerns over the rationale of EU-imposed sanctions on Russia (Gyarmati, 2015). When questioned over the stance of the Hungarian government towards Russia in Ukraine, Orbán affirmed the EU narrative of the primary interest being Ukraine's Sovereignty (Orbán, 2014) while simultaneously cementing the centrality of Hungarians in foreign policy choices around the matter, reportedly having said "the important issue for us in this whole conflict is the safety of Hungarians... living in Hungary and... living in Transcarpathia" (Feledy, 2015:75).³ Home to a sizable Hungarian population, Ukraine additionally offers a glimpse into how Hungary's use of its diaspora as a foreign policy tool is tied to its strategic culture. Prime Minister Orbán is also reported to have said "Ukraine can be neither stable nor democratic if it does not give its minorities, including Hungarians, their due. That is, dual citizenship, collective

2 Speech given by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán after swearing his prime ministerial oath (2022). Date Accessed: 02/07/25. <https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/speech-given-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-after-swearing-his-prime-ministerial-oath>

Engagement between the Hungarian and Azeri governments joint economic commission in Budapest. Date Accessed: 30/11/2025/ <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-azerbaijan-deal-energy>.

3 Website of the Hungarian Government. (2014) 'Hungary committed to Ukraine's Sovereignty' <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/hungary-committed-to-ukraine-s-sovereignty> Date Accessed: 01/07/25

rights and autonomy” (Gyarmati, 2015:22). Hungary’s foreign policy decision-makers place priority on bilateral relations even in cases where these relations undermine EU unity, such as the instance where Hungary chose to obstruct the EU’s joint statement on the International Court of Arbitration’s South China Sea ruling and a common EU statement on China’s Hong Kong security law (Hettyey, 2020:9; Greilinger, 2023).

6. Christianity as Foreign Policy: Constructing the Narrative of “Bastion Hungary”

Although not often considered foreign policy, immigration policy serves as one of the better policies to engage with concerning Hungary’s strategic culture as it concerns the intersection between its domestic issues (of ethnic population sizes) and foreign policy (tied to migration agreements).

As one of the EU’s frontline states, Hungary was at the ‘heart’ of the 2015 refugee crisis due to its special position as the southernmost Schengen and EU Dublin State within the Western Balkan route, that makes it a corridor between Austria and Serbia in Southeast Europe.⁴ This location, merged with its expansive interstate transportation system, made Hungary attractive as a transit country, with many migrants hoping to reach preferred Northern European destinations (Semerádová, 2023). Be that as it may, it is no exaggeration to say Hungary was among the hardest hit by earlier waves of asylum seekers. Hungarian authorities had recorded 174,135 asylum applications, roughly 1770 applicants per 100,000 people at the end of 2015 (Foldes, 2022; Connor, 2016), the highest of any EU member state according to a 2016 report by the Pew Research Centre with Syria (37%), Afghanistan (26%), Pakistan (8%) and Kosovo (14%) making the majority of applicants (Kiss, 2016). Startlingly high numbers aside, it needs to be emphasized that Hungary and other frontline countries (Greece, Italy, and Spain) mainly for entry and transit. Although in Hungary’s case a low number of migrants, 1.87% of

all types of migrants choosing to settle within its borders according to 2017 study by the European Parliament on the ingestion of refugees in Greece, Italy and Hungary (Borbély 2017). Attributed to this are the joint reasons of Hungary’s relatively low economic and industrial development, high mono-ethnicism and strong anti-migration policies that have created stringent limitations for any real integration support (Hartocollis, 2015; Semerádová, 2023; Borbély 2017).

In response to the refugee crisis, Hungary adopted a hardline stance on its immigration policies, actively preventing migrants from entry by erecting walls along the border zones between Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia and deploying security forces to guard them, drawing wide criticism, and placing it in direct violation of its international and European human rights obligations (Carrera et al, 2015; Amnesty International, 2015). Prior to the refugee crisis, Hungary did not have a stance on migration that contradicted the European Union. In light its recent changes Hungary’s strategic culture is featured here as a tactful blend of two narratives, these being a strict responsibility under the Schengen Agreement, arguing that doing so is carrying out its obligation in securing a “section of Europe’s common external borders”, in addition to protecting Hungarian citizens (and the Hungarian cultural identity) from the security threat created by mass migration (Orban, December, 2015; Orban, September, 2015, brackets added). When challenging the European Commission on mandatory migration and refugee quotas, Hungary argued that the acceptance of migrants required by the quota system “would change the Hungarian and European national, cultural and religious identity” (Bozóki&Ádám, 2016 in Ilikova & Tushev, 2020: 326; Daher, 2020), and that Hungary wanted to avoid the gradual change of Hungarian population and culture (Orban, September, 2015).

The narrative of ‘being a cultural and religious group under threat’ underpinning Hungarian strategic culture and foreign policy has been deployed in novel and interesting ways. As alluded to above, the harsh anti-migration policy choices are justified under Hungary’s moral obligation to act as guardian of both Hungarian and European historical (Christian) legacies, (Christian) values, (Christian) culture and defender against the dangers of ‘unnatural migration and possible

4 The Dublin system commits the EU state of first entry responsible for the examination of asylum applications, disproportionately placing more pressure on ‘entry countries’, typically the frontline, for asylum-seeker applications (Carrera, 2015), in high volume presents humanitarian and security emergencies.

emergence of parallel (Islamic) societies that may threaten 'Europe's identity, security, welfare and way of life' (Daher, 2020: 41; Rizova, 2019; Scott, 2018). This was further illustrated by Hungary's vetoing of the majority EU position on the against the indiscriminate use of Israeli missiles in the Israel's ongoing genocide in Palestine with Prime Minister Orbán stating that while, "most Western European countries have entered an era of a post-national and post-Christian concept of life... it cannot be ignored that (Hungarians) still live our lives according to Judeo-Christian values, a Judeo-Christian culture and concept of life" and thus it is "not possible to equate Israel with an organization on the EU sanctions list" (Orban, 2021. Parenthesis added). This incompatible equation stems from Israel being perceived as the protector of Judeo-Christianity in the Islamic Middle East and, by extension, an ally of Christian Hungary.⁵ In validating the 'strategy' behind 'strategic culture', the use of Christianity as an identity marker and foreign policy tool is malleable, as seen in dealings with Turkic states where Hungary's Christian image is mixed with Turanism to alter its image from a Christian wall to a Christian bridge linking East to West. This malleability is evident in Orbán's proclaiming Hungary as Christian Turkish lands and describing said Hungarians as people from the westernmost East (who) will never forget their Eastern relatives (Haas, 2023; Balogh, 2022).⁶

7. Revisions in National Security Doctrine: Hungary's Contemporary Strategic Vision

Until now the paper has elucidated the alterations in Hungary's national identity to better explain the linked evolution of its strategic culture and display how these changes have been articulated as necessary for the country's socio-economic security. However, it has not yet shown or evaluated

⁵ Hungary acted in accordance with the Treaties when it vetoed. (2021). Date Accessed: 02/07/2025. URL <https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/hungary-acted-in-accordance-with-the-treaties-when-it-vetoed/>

⁶ The European Centre for Populism Studies defines Turanism or Eurasianist as a malleable geopolitical ideology that argues for the need for cooperation between ethnically, culturally or linguistically related people of Central Asian or Eurasian origins including the Finns, Japanese, Koreans, Sami, Samoeyes, Mongols, Manchus, Turks and Hungarians

how Hungary has applied the changes in national identity and strategic culture to its armed national security strategy to better match the various threats perceived as proliferating the world from 2011, the undertaking of its Fundamental Law.

In 2021 the Hungarian government published the country's new National Security Strategy (NSS) titled "A Secure Hungary in a Volatile World" in the April release of Magyar Közlöny, its government gazette, where the government redefined a national security reflecting the "profound changes in the global security environment since 2012" (the last publication of the NSS)" (Hungary National Security Strategy, 2021:1), mainly in Hungary's neighbourhood. The document reiterates the centrality of Hungary's sovereignty in its foreign policy, and importance of its history, traditions and "systems of values grounded in ...Christian heritages" to the "the survival of the Hungarian people" and their contribution to European diversity, going on to say "(Hungarians) respect different cultures but insist on (their) own Hungarian identity at all times" (Hungary National Security Strategy, 2021:1, brackets added). The document additionally highlights the presence of new security 'risks' for Hungary, the most interesting for this paper are mass illegal migration and/or the settlement of foreign populations in Hungary, unwanted armed attacks, restrictions to Hungary's national sovereignty, supply crises caused by the interruption of energy imports and a reemergence of the international economic crisis and the purpose of national interests towards the top of National Security Strategy (Varga, 2021; Csicsmann, 2020; National Security Strategy, 2021).

8. Hungary's 2024 Council of Europe Presidency: Stated Priorities and Strategic Intent

In the second half of 2024 Hungary once more sat the helm of the Council of the European Union, this time under the slogan "Make Europe Great Again (MEGA)", not openly reflecting inspiration from a fellow renowned right-wing populist in North America, but reflecting the perception of a Europe that is a shadow of its former self, no longer a cultural pioneer, economic pillar and geopolitical powerhouse.

There is a sense of continuation from the priority areas seen in its first term of the presidency programme, with glimpses of what matters to Hungary and what it believes threatens the EU in line with the strategic culture developed and expanded between its previous term and this one. The core foci of its second term were the New European Competitions Deal, the reinforcement of European Defence Policy, neighbourhood enlargement that is consistent and merit-based, the stemming of illegal migration, addressing demographic challenges (which impacts competitiveness) and a farmer-oriented EU agricultural policy shaping the future of cohesion policy all of which fly relatively close to the priorities of the first. The only new addition is with regard to the Green New Deal farmer-oriented EU agricultural policy and addressing demographic challenges.

Conclusion

Between its 2011 and 2024 presidencies of the Council of the European Union Hungary, national identity and strategic culture have undergone extensive transformations that, while in many ways have thrust it forwards in terms of its agency and diplomatic capacities outside of Europe, have had contradictory bearing on its standing within the European Union. The above study has showcased development of the small, Central Eastern European Country that are central to understanding its recent behaviour on the international stage and the ways in which the state has constructed itself from its earlier position of having endured immense territorial loss instrumented by the Treaty of Trianon with a foundational post-Soviet foreign policy priority being to one desperately trying to break away from its Eastern ties through Europeanization and assimilation into the Euro-Atlantic alliance and its various organizations.

2011 was an eventful year for Hungarian domestic and foreign policy. Although 2010 is the year FIDESZ came into power, 2011 is the year Hungary's domestic and foreign policy priorities and strategic culture departed from those set out by the Antall government of 1991, all of which came into sight during its first term in the Presidency of

the Council of the European Union. Through the reviewal of Hungary's post-Fidesz constitution, also called the Fundamental Law, and its foreign policy programme after its EU presidency. These saw the adoption of a strategic culture that narrates Hungary to be an Eastern Christian country in Europe, violently persecuted by its past but doing what it can to ensure the survival of its ethnic people while weathering a rapidly changing geopolitical climate influenced by changes in the centres of economic and geostrategic power. By reviewing aspects of Hungarian foreign policy between 2011 and 2024, this paper has explained how this new strategic culture has informed a foreign policy that puts Hungary's national security first by relying on its sovereignty first as a diplomatic actor and a new post-Soviet identity of a Hungary refusing to be left behind or limited by its size or hampered by geographic location.

Across the documents analysed, content and discourse analysis reveal a consistent narrative structure that places sovereignty, historical grievances and cultural survivals as organizing priorities in Hungary's contemporary strategic culture.

The outcomes of this paper hold relevance for broader studies examining the relationship between populism, national identity, and foreign policy. By contextualizing Hungary's identity restructuring as more than a set of opportunistic moves by a populist government seeking legitimacy, the analysis demonstrates that these shifts represent a coherent transformation in strategic culture. This transformation is anchored in longstanding historical grievances, a necessary post-communist reconstruction of national identity, and an increasingly pragmatic worldview that recognises the declining centrality of the West in the global economic order. At the same time, the study illustrates the persistent influence of ethno-nationalism, anti-Islamic sentiment, and exclusive notions of Christianity in shaping state behaviour—particularly in the realm of migration policy—highlighting how identity-driven narratives continue to inform foreign policy choices in certain states

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Economic Diplomacy, Foreign Direct Investment, and the Path to Sustainable Development: Evidence, Barriers, and Strategic Opportunities for Guinea

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Abstract

Guinea occupies a paradoxical position in global investment discourse: a nation endowed with extraordinary mineral wealth, including the world's largest bauxite reserves, substantial gold deposits, diamonds, and one of the richest iron ore deposits on earth, yet one that has historically failed to translate these endowments into broad-based economic development through foreign direct investment (FDI). Despite sustained government efforts to deploy economic diplomacy as a strategic lever for attracting capital, FDI inflows declined sharply over the past decade, undermining state revenues, employment, and development trajectories.

This study critically examines the effectiveness of Guinea's economic diplomacy in attracting FDI, identifies the principal structural and institutional barriers impeding investment, and proposes evidence-based strategies for improvement. Employing a descriptive mixed-methods design, the research draws on structured interviews with 25 key stakeholders, including diplomats at the Guinean Embassy in Pretoria, government officials, and business representatives, supplemented by questionnaire surveys and documentary analysis. Thematic analysis revealed six critical impediments: corruption (identified by 75% of participants), inadequate infrastructure (80%), political violence and insecurity (70%), bureaucratic bottlenecks (60%), language barriers (40%), and limited institutional capacity.

The study situates its findings within evolving strategic contexts that create new opportunities for Guinea's investment landscape, including the Simandou iron ore mega-project, the growth of United

States commercial engagement, and the launch of Guinea's first sovereign wealth fund. The research concludes that Guinea must pursue comprehensive institutional reforms, strengthen anti-corruption architecture, invest in infrastructure, and proactively leverage its emerging strategic partnerships to improve FDI attraction across all sectors.

Keywords: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Economic Diplomacy, Guinea, Investment Attraction, Foreign Investment Promotion (FIP), West Africa, Simandou 2040, United States-Guinea Relations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Conceptual Framework

Economic diplomacy refers to the strategic use of diplomatic channels, international negotiations, and bilateral or multilateral agreements to advance a nation's economic interests in the global marketplace (Naray, 2011). Unlike traditional statecraft focused on political and military cooperation, economic diplomacy prioritises trade promotion, investment attraction, and commercial partnerships. As Rashid (2005) explains, a distinctive feature of economic diplomacy is the involvement of private sector actors alongside government institutions, maintaining competitiveness in regional and global markets through coherent public-private coordination.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) encompasses capital flows from foreign entities into domestic enterprises through equity investments, reinvested earnings, or intra-company loans, typically involving substantial ownership stakes and long-term interest in the host economy (UNCTAD, 2021). FDI differs from portfolio investment in that it confers management control and represents a durable interest in the enterprise. The significance of FDI lies in its potential to facilitate technology transfer, create employment, enhance productive capacity, and integrate developing economies into global value chains (Li & Tanna, 2019).

1.2 Background and Problem Statement

Globalisation has prompted nations worldwide to restructure their foreign policies, elevating economic interests above traditional political and military concerns. This shift reflects a growing recognition that economic prosperity forms the foundation for citizen welfare, providing access to healthcare, education, housing, and essential services. As political leaders acknowledge that economic well-being constitutes the principal objective for societal growth and prosperity (Rashid, 2005), countries increasingly compete to

attract foreign investment capital necessary for development.

Africa has emerged as an increasingly significant destination in the global FDI landscape, with foreign investment recognised as crucial for economic growth, poverty reduction, and technological advancement (Boreinsztein et al., 1995). The early 2000s witnessed marked increases in African FDI inflows, particularly to resource-rich countries (Chen et al., 2020). However, FDI distribution across the continent remains highly uneven, with certain regions and countries substantially outperforming others.

Guinea presents a paradoxical case within this African investment landscape. Endowed with abundant natural resources, including the world's largest bauxite reserves, significant gold deposits, diamonds, and iron ore, the country should theoretically attract substantial foreign investment in mining and extractive industries. The Guinean government has actively pursued economic diplomacy strategies to promote these advantages, forge strategic partnerships, and establish a favourable business environment for foreign investors (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2020). Yet Guinea's FDI performance tells a troubling story: after experiencing significant inflows during the mid-2000s primarily in the mining sector, FDI has declined substantially over the past five years to negligible levels (World Bank, 2021). This decline raises critical questions about the effectiveness of Guinea's economic diplomacy approach.

Several structural challenges appear to undermine Guinea's investment attraction efforts. Political instability and governance deficiencies create uncertainty for potential investors (Makuwira, 2021). Weak institutional capacity limits the government's ability to effectively promote and facilitate investment. Infrastructure deficiencies, particularly in transportation and energy sectors, constrain operational efficiency. Moreover, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and security

concerns compound these challenges, creating a complex web of impediments to FDI attraction.

Despite Guinea's strategic position and resource wealth, scholarly research specifically examining the effectiveness of its economic diplomacy in attracting FDI remains limited. Most existing literature focuses on regional African FDI trends or countries with more established investment portfolios, leaving Guinea's particular experience insufficiently understood. This gap in knowledge hampers evidence-based policymaking and prevents learning from the country's challenges and potential opportunities.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to critically examine the effectiveness of Guinea's economic diplomacy in attracting FDI, identify the principal barriers undermining these efforts, and propose context-specific strategies for improvement. The research addresses the following questions: How effective is Guinea's economic diplomacy approach in attracting foreign direct investment? What are the key factors hindering Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness in attracting foreign investors? What feasible strategies can enhance Guinea's economic diplomacy efforts to attract foreign investment?

Understanding these dynamics holds significance beyond Guinea, contributing to broader debates about resource-rich developing countries' capacity to leverage natural endowments for sustainable development through strategic economic diplomacy. The findings inform policy reforms and provide comparative insights for other African nations facing similar challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Foreign Investment Promotion Theory

This study employs Foreign Investment Promotion (FIP) theory as its theoretical foundation. Developed by Schoeneman in the 1970s, FIP theory emphasises the host nation's active role in attracting FDI, arguing that investment flows extend beyond pure market forces and are significantly influenced by host country policies, incentives, and promotional efforts (Schoeneman et al., 2022). The theory posits that government policies, regulatory frameworks, and investment climate conditions serve as critical determinants of FDI attraction.

FIP theory provides an analytical lens for examining Guinea's investment climate, regulatory environment, and policy effectiveness. By applying this framework, the study can assess whether Guinea's promotional efforts align with established best practices for attracting foreign investors and identify policy reforms that might enhance FDI attraction. The theory's emphasis on institutional factors, bureaucratic efficiency, infrastructure quality, and governance transparency directly addresses the challenges reportedly facing Guinea's investment promotion efforts.

2.2 Economic Diplomacy and FDI: Debates and Divergences

Global research demonstrates that countries actively engaged in economic diplomacy, promoting international trade agreements and maintaining investment-friendly policies, tend to attract higher FDI levels (UNCTAD, 2019). However, scholars debate the relative importance of different FDI determinants. The Investment Development Path (IDP) theory, frequently employed to understand relationships between developmental stage and investment attractiveness, suggests that early-stage countries typically attract resource-seeking FDI, whilst more advanced economies draw technology- and market-oriented investment (Dunning, 1980). Critics argue this framework oversimplifies complex FDI dynamics and fails to account for institutional quality variations within developmental stages (Djokoto, 2021).

A fundamental tension exists in the literature regarding whether resource endowments or institutional quality matters more for FDI attraction in African contexts. Some scholars emphasise natural resources as the primary FDI driver, citing substantial investment flows to Angola and Nigeria's oil sectors (OECD, 2002). This perspective suggests Guinea's bauxite reserves should automatically attract investment. However, competing research challenges this resource-centric view, demonstrating that institutional quality, governance standards, and policy frameworks often outweigh natural resource advantages (Asiedu, 2021). This debate has critical implications for Guinea: if resources alone determined FDI, the country's abundant mineral wealth would guarantee investment success. The reality of declining FDI despite resource wealth suggests institutional and governance factors predominate.

The literature also reveals disagreement about optimal strategies for FDI attraction. Some scholars advocate aggressive incentive packages, including tax holidays, subsidies, and special economic zones (UNCTAD, 2020). Others argue that such incentives prove costly and ineffective without fundamental improvements in business environments, infrastructure, and governance (Vukšić, 2013). A third perspective emphasises the primacy of political stability and security, suggesting that no economic incentives can overcome investor concerns about political risk and instability (Makuwira, 2021).

2.3 The United States as an Emerging FDI Partner for Guinea

The United States maintains one of the world's most open investment climates, and American FDI in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown in strategic importance in recent years. The U.S. State Department's 2025 Investment Climate Statement for Guinea recognises that American companies have conducted significant transactions across Guinea's energy, mining, and information technology sectors, and that Guinea's government maintains diversified economic partnerships with a broadly pro-Western orientation. These conditions, combined with Guinea's extraordinary mineral endowments, position the US-Guinea commercial relationship for meaningful expansion.

American engagement in Guinea has gained particular strategic significance through the Simandou iron ore project. The co-development agreement governing the TransGuinée Railway explicitly requires that all locomotives on the 650-kilometre corridor be sourced from the United States. Pittsburgh-based Wabtec Corporation subsequently secured locomotive orders worth US\$525 million across both Simandou consortia, a US\$277 million order from Rio Tinto SimFer, and a US\$248 million order from Winning Consortium Simandou. This contractual arrangement reflects Guinea's deliberate strategy to balance Chinese capital investment with American technology and Western governance standards, embedding US commercial interests as a structural feature of Guinea's most significant infrastructure project. US development finance institutions, including the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and Prosper Africa, provide additional frameworks through which American private capital could

be mobilised for Guinea's broader development priorities.

The US-Guinea relationship is not merely transactional. As Guinea navigates the management of large-scale Chinese capital and infrastructure investment, American industrial partnerships and governance support offer a counterbalancing mechanism that can strengthen accountability, improve contract transparency, and diversify Guinea's strategic exposure. This dynamic has direct implications for Guinea's broader FDI attraction strategy: demonstrating the ability to manage a credible, enforceable partnership with a major Western power signals institutional reliability to prospective investors from all countries.

2.4 Barriers to FDI in African Contexts

International studies identify political stability, ease of doing business, governance transparency, and legal protections as key FDI determinants (Asiedu, 2021). Countries with stable political environments, strong institutions, and clear investment legislation attract more foreign capital. Conversely, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and opacity discourage investors (Wei & Liu, 2019). For Guinea specifically, existing research identifies political violence, security concerns, and corruption as significant obstacles (Heritage Foundation, 2021). The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index ranks Guinea poorly, citing bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory complexity as key investor challenges (World Bank, 2021).

The African Development Bank identifies inadequate infrastructure and limited financial access as critical challenges facing African FDI attraction generally (AfDB, 2021). For Guinea, infrastructure deficiencies in the transport and energy sectors particularly hinder investment (African Development Bank, 2019). Scholars debate whether infrastructure improvements must precede FDI or whether FDI itself can catalyse infrastructure development through public-private partnerships. This chicken-and-egg problem reflects broader disagreements about sequencing development interventions in resource-rich but institutionally weak states.

2.5 Successful FDI Attraction: Contested Lessons

Analyses of successful FDI attraction reveal contested interpretations. China's experience

demonstrates the significance of affordable labour in attracting substantial foreign investment and catalysing rapid economic expansion (Tembe & Xu, 2012). However, this raises questions about Africa's competitive position: if cheap labour drives FDI, why have African countries like Nigeria and Angola, despite attracting some FDI, not achieved comparable growth and development outcomes? This paradox suggests that labour costs alone cannot explain FDI effectiveness, and other factors, possibly institutional quality, infrastructure, or political stability, play determining roles.

Morisset's (2001) analysis of 29 African nations identified successful FDI attraction through business environment improvements, concluding that proactive policies and reform-oriented governments can generate investor interest. Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, and Senegal succeeded in the 1990s through political stabilisation, trade liberalisation, privatisation programmes, regulatory modernisation, and positive international image-building. However, critics note that several of these success stories proved temporary, with countries subsequently experiencing FDI declines due to governance deterioration or political instability, suggesting that sustained FDI requires continuous institutional strengthening rather than one-time reforms.

Hungary's success in attracting substantial FDI per capita among East Central European nations offers instructive lessons: early legislative framework development, national treatment for foreign investors, liberal profit repatriation policies, tax incentives, and industrial parks (Antalóczy et al., 2011). However, applying such strategies to Guinea faces challenges. Hungary benefited from proximity to wealthy European markets, relatively advanced institutional capacity, and EU accession prospects, advantages that Guinea lacks. This highlights ongoing debates about whether successful FDI strategies are context-specific or universally applicable.

2.6 Research Gap

While research exists on African FDI patterns generally, studies specifically examining Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness in attracting foreign direct investment remain scarce. Most African investment research focuses on regional

trends or countries with established investment portfolios, leaving Guinea's particular experience and challenges inadequately understood. This gap limits evidence-based policymaking for Guinea and prevents other African nations from learning from its experiences. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness, grounded in stakeholder perspectives and comparative analysis with successful cases, and by incorporating emerging strategic developments, including the Simandou project and the expanding US-Guinea commercial relationship, that have not previously been examined in this literature.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design using mixed methods to examine Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness. The design was selected because it enables systematic description and analysis of phenomena through both quantitative and qualitative data, appropriate for exploring the complexities of economic diplomacy and FDI attraction (Sileyew, 2019).

The target population comprised key stakeholders in Guinean economic diplomacy: diplomats at the Guinean Embassy in Pretoria, government officials in Guinea responsible for investment promotion, and local business representatives with experience in FDI. Purposive sampling identified 25 participants with extensive knowledge and direct involvement in economic diplomacy activities. In Guinea, purposive and snowball sampling recruited diplomats, ministers, directors, local businesses, and investors experienced in economic diplomacy efforts.

Data collection involved structured interviews, self-administered questionnaires, and document review. Structured interviews with the 25 participants explored their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness. Questionnaires gathered additional quantitative data on specific impediments and their prevalence. Document review of policy papers, government reports, and diplomatic correspondence provided contextual information. The researcher's expertise as an investment consultant and political adviser to the Guinean Government facilitated access to participants and relevant documentation.

Thematic analysis using SPSS software identified patterns and trends in the data. Interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were coded to identify recurring themes regarding effectiveness, barriers, and improvement strategies. Quantitative data provided frequencies and percentages for specific challenges, whilst qualitative data offered a deeper contextual understanding of stakeholder experiences and perspectives.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality protection, and voluntary participation. The Head of Diplomacy authorised participation, whilst other participants received detailed information about the study and their rights. Data anonymisation protected participant identities, with access restricted to the researcher and supervisor. The researcher maintained objectivity despite professional involvement in Guinean political and investment consulting.

4. Results

4.1 Research Question 1: Effectiveness of Guinea's Economic Diplomacy

The findings reveal that Guinea's economic diplomacy has been largely ineffective in attracting significant FDI. All 25 participants (100%) assessed the overall effectiveness as poor to moderate.

Quantitative data from the World Bank confirms this assessment: Guinea experienced substantial FDI declines over the past five years, with inflows falling to negligible levels compared to the mid-2000s peak. Participants attributed this ineffectiveness to systemic challenges rather than individual diplomatic failures, suggesting structural rather than personnel issues undermine performance.

Participants identified the absence of comprehensive trade agreements as a fundamental weakness. Without bilateral or multilateral frameworks offering favourable terms to potential investors, Guinea cannot compete effectively with countries providing such guarantees. This finding suggests Guinea's economic diplomacy lacks the institutional foundation necessary for sustained FDI attraction.

4.2 Research Question 2: Key Barriers to Economic Diplomacy Effectiveness

Thematic analysis identified six principal barriers. Figure 1 presents a comprehensive visualisation of FDI barriers and trends in Guinea, illustrating both the prevalence of each impediment as reported by stakeholders and the trajectory of FDI performance over time.

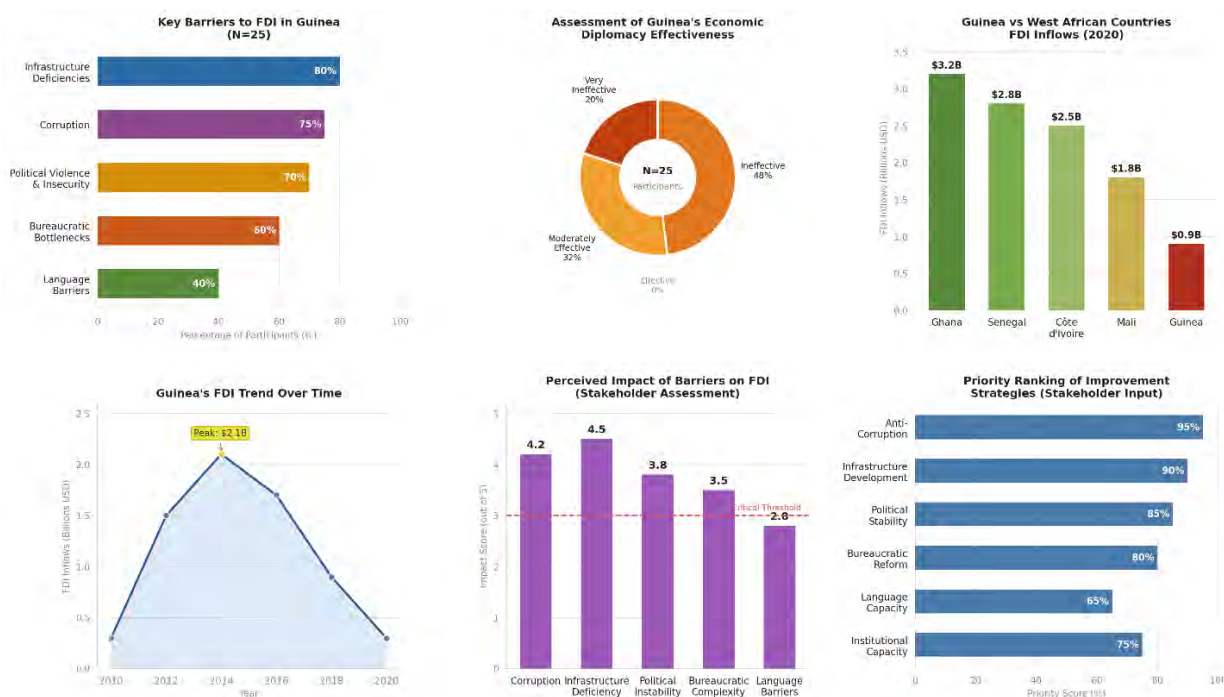


Figure 1. Comprehensive Analysis of FDI Barriers and Trends in Guinea

Corruption (75% of participants). Three-quarters of participants identified corruption as a significant obstacle to effective economic diplomacy. Respondents emphasised that pervasive corruption creates negative perceptions among potential foreign investors, undermining trust and raising concerns about investment protection. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Guinea poorly (ranked 133rd out of 180 countries in 2024), corroborating participant assessments. Participants described how corruption manifests at multiple levels, from high-level procurement to routine administrative processes, creating systemic uncertainty for investors about true costs and regulatory compliance.

Infrastructure deficiencies (80% of participants). Four-fifths of participants expressed concerns about inadequate infrastructure. Limited transportation networks, unreliable power supply, and outdated communication systems pose substantial barriers to foreign investment. The World Bank's Infrastructure Performance Index indicates Guinea's infrastructure quality falls below regional and global averages, increasing operational costs and challenges for potential investors. Participants described concrete examples: mining companies face difficulties transporting extracted resources to ports; manufacturers cannot rely on a consistent electricity supply; telecommunications limitations hamper business operations and international connectivity. These infrastructure gaps translate directly into higher costs and lower profitability for potential investors.

Political violence and insecurity (70% of participants). Seventy percent of participants identified political violence and insecurity as significant deterrents to foreign investment. Participants cited instances of civil unrest, protests, and strikes that damage perceptions of stability. Foreign investors consider political stability and security as critical factors in investment decisions. Guinea's consistently low ranking in the Global Peace Index reflects these concerns. Participants explained how political uncertainty creates investment hesitancy: companies delay decisions during unstable periods; insurance costs increase; and foreign personnel express reluctance to relocate to Guinea.

Bureaucratic bottlenecks (60% of participants). Sixty percent of participants expressed frustration with bureaucratic bottlenecks within Guinea's administrative systems. Cumbersome procedures, delays in obtaining necessary permits and licences, and complex regulatory requirements discourage potential investors from seeking streamlined business environments. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index ranks Guinea unfavourably, noting significant bureaucratic hurdles hindering efficient business operations. Participants described lengthy approval processes, sometimes extending months or years, for routine permits.

Language barriers (40% of participants). Two-fifths of participants raised concerns about language barriers affecting business and foreign investment attraction. Guinea's predominant use of French limits communication with non-French-speaking investors, particularly those from English-speaking countries and emerging economies. Participants noted that diplomatic staff and government officials often lack proficiency in English or other internationally prevalent business languages, constraining investor engagement. This linguistic limitation is particularly relevant for deepening commercial relationships with the United States, Gulf states, and Asian investors who represent major sources of global FDI.

Limited institutional capacity. Participants identified inadequate institutional capacity and technical expertise as limiting the government's ability to effectively promote and facilitate investment. Investment promotion agencies lack resources, staff training, and systematic approaches to investor engagement. This institutional weakness prevents Guinea from implementing sophisticated investment promotion strategies observed in more successful African countries such as Rwanda, Mauritius, and Morocco.

4.3 Research Question 3: Strategies for Enhancement

Participants proposed several improvement strategies, which they emphasised must be implemented comprehensively rather than selectively. The most frequently recommended strategies include strengthening anti-corruption enforcement, investing in infrastructure development, streamlining bureaucratic processes, enhancing language capacity among diplomatic

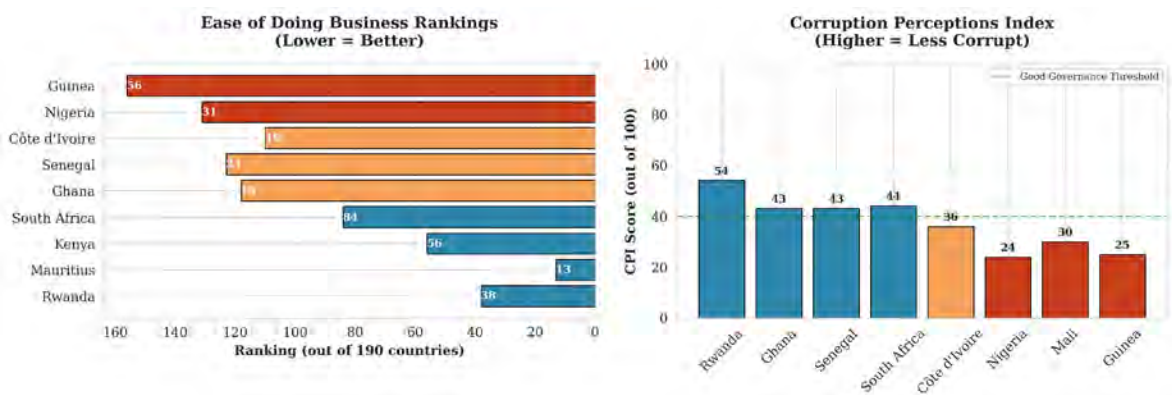


Figure 2. **Guinea’s Performance on Key Investment Climate Indicators Compared to Regional Peers**

personnel, improving political stability through governance reforms, and building institutional capacity within investment promotion agencies. Participants stressed that isolated interventions would prove insufficient; sustainable improvement requires coordinated reforms addressing multiple barriers simultaneously

5. Discussion

The finding that Guinea’s economic diplomacy has proven largely ineffective in attracting FDI aligns with World Bank data showing substantial investment declines (World Bank, 2021) but contradicts the optimistic assumptions underlying government policy. This ineffectiveness challenges resource-deterministic perspectives in the FDI literature, which suggest that abundant natural resources should automatically attract foreign investment (OECD, 2002). Guinea’s experience demonstrates that resource endowments alone prove insufficient without supportive institutional frameworks, supporting scholars who emphasise institutional quality over resource availability as the primary FDI determinant (Asiedu, 2021).

Figure 2 contextualises Guinea’s underperformance by comparing its performance on key investment climate indicators against regional peers, illustrating clearly how institutional deficits, rather than resource scarcity, drive the investment gap.

The prominence of corruption as an impediment (identified by 75% of participants) confirms existing research on African investment climates (Wei & Liu, 2019; Transparency International, 2024). However, this finding extends the literature by quantifying stakeholder perceptions and demonstrating how corruption operates at multiple administrative

levels to create systemic investor uncertainty. Guinea’s experience illustrates the interconnection between corruption and other barriers: corruption exacerbates bureaucratic bottlenecks, undermines infrastructure development through misallocation of public funds, and contributes to political instability by fuelling grievances and delegitimising governance. In this context, the institutional requirements embedded within major investment agreements, including contractual obligations on sourcing and procurement in projects such as Simandou, offer a practical mechanism through which external accountability standards can partially compensate for domestic governance weaknesses.

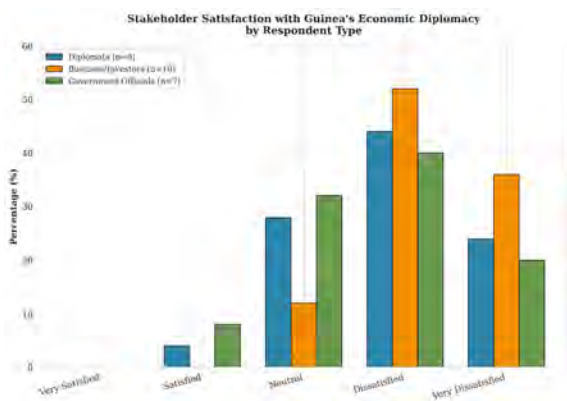


Figure 3. **Stakeholder Satisfaction with Guinea’s Economic Diplomacy by Respondent Type**

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of stakeholder satisfaction across respondent types, revealing that dissatisfaction is broadly shared across diplomats, government officials, and business representatives alike, reinforcing that the identified barriers are systemic and not sector-specific.

Infrastructure deficiencies, identified by 80% of participants as the most prevalent barrier, support African Development Bank findings about infrastructure gaps constraining African FDI generally (AfDB, 2021). Guinea's case contributes nuance to debates about infrastructure-FDI causality. Participants described how infrastructure inadequacy creates a vicious cycle: poor infrastructure deters FDI, whilst insufficient FDI limits resources for infrastructure improvement. This dynamic also underscores the strategic importance of the Simandou project's physical infrastructure components, specifically the 650-kilometre Trans Guinée Railway and deep-water port at Morebaya. While this infrastructure primarily serves the iron ore corridor, its construction opens new possibilities for agricultural export, passenger transport, and light manufacturing along the route. Critically, full ownership of the railway and port will transfer to the Government of Guinea over 35 years, creating a national infrastructure asset of historic scale. Guinea's challenge is to leverage this corridor investment into multi-sector economic diversification rather than allowing it to serve solely as a mining export channel.

The significant concern about political violence and insecurity (70% of participants) reflects broader patterns in conflict-affected African states but challenges assumptions that resource-rich countries can overcome political risk through economic incentives alone. Guinea's experience aligns with Makuwira's (2021) emphasis on political stability as a prerequisite for FDI, suggesting that governance and security reforms must precede or accompany economic diplomacy efforts. Guinea's ongoing democratic transition, including a constitutional referendum and planned elections, represents a critical near-term test of whether political conditions can be stabilised sufficiently to sustain investor confidence.

The language barrier finding (40% of participants) introduces a dimension rarely emphasised in FDI literature but with direct relevance to Guinea's relationship with major non-Francophone investment partners. Guinea's Francophone orientation limits engagement with English-speaking investors from the United States, the United Kingdom, and across Asia. Expanding multilingual capacity within Guinea's investment promotion agencies and diplomatic services

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is therefore not merely a training matter; it is a strategic prerequisite for diversifying the investor base, particularly for deepening the emerging US-Guinea commercial relationship.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings strongly support the Foreign Investment Promotion theory's emphasis on host country policies, institutions, and promotional efforts as critical FDI determinants (Schoeneman et al., 2022). Guinea's abundant resources have not automatically attracted investment, whilst institutional weaknesses, corruption, bureaucracy, and inadequate infrastructure actively deter investors. The study's evidence also points to an underexplored dimension of FIP theory, the role of strategic geopolitical positioning, particularly the deliberate diversification of major investment partners as a governance accountability mechanism. Guinea's approach to the Simandou project, embedding American locomotive sourcing as a contractual obligation and enforcing it rigorously, demonstrates that such arrangements can function as tangible signals of institutional reliability to prospective investors from all countries.

The study's limitations include its focus on a single country case, limiting generalisability. The sample size (25 participants), whilst appropriate

for qualitative exploration, restricts statistical robustness. The researcher's professional involvement in Guinean politics and investment consulting, though providing valuable access, may introduce subjective bias despite efforts to maintain objectivity. Future research should conduct comparative studies with countries at similar development stages, examine sector-specific FDI patterns in Guinea, and survey foreign investors, including American companies, directly about their perceptions and experiences.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness in attracting FDI, identifying critical barriers and proposing improvement strategies. The research found that despite abundant natural resources, Guinea's economic diplomacy has proven largely ineffective in attracting sustained foreign investment. Six principal impediments emerged: corruption, infrastructure deficiencies, political violence and insecurity, bureaucratic bottlenecks, language barriers, and limited institutional capacity. These barriers operate interdependently, creating systemic challenges that isolated interventions cannot overcome.

The findings challenge resource-deterministic assumptions in FDI literature, demonstrating that natural resource endowments alone prove insufficient without supportive institutions, infrastructure, and governance. Guinea's experience validates the Foreign Investment Promotion theory's emphasis on host country policies and institutional quality as critical FDI determinants. The research contributes to limited scholarship on Guinea's investment climate, providing evidence-based insights for policymakers and extending understanding of economic diplomacy challenges in resource-rich but institutionally weak African states.

Simultaneously, the study situates these findings within a landscape of emerging opportunity. The Simandou mega-project, encompassing one of Africa's largest railway and port investments, the launch of Guinea's first sovereign wealth fund, and the growing strategic dimension of the US-Guinea commercial relationship, collectively represent qualitatively new conditions that did not exist during Guinea's previous resource

booms. Whether these translate into sustainable FDI attraction depends entirely on the quality of governance and institutional implementation. The following recommendations address Guinea's specific context, recognising that meaningful reform demands sustained political will and years of consistent effort.

6.1 Anti-Corruption Measures

Guinea must implement comprehensive anti-corruption reforms targeting both high-level and routine corruption. Specific measures should include: strengthening the National Agency Against Corruption with genuine investigative powers and prosecutorial independence; establishing transparent public procurement systems with competitive bidding requirements and public disclosure; implementing digital governance systems that reduce face-to-face interactions where corruption typically occurs; protecting whistleblowers through robust legal frameworks; and conducting regular corruption risk assessments in investment-relevant sectors. These reforms require international technical assistance, potentially through partnerships with Transparency International, the African Development Bank's governance programmes, and USAID, whose engagement capacity in Guinea has grown alongside the deepening US commercial relationship.

6.2 Infrastructure Investment

Infrastructure development must prioritise sectors most critical for FDI: reliable electricity generation and distribution, road networks connecting mining regions to ports, port facility modernisation, and telecommunications infrastructure. Guinea cannot finance these investments solely through domestic revenues. The government should pursue public-private partnerships for energy and transportation projects; development bank financing from institutions like the World Bank, African Development Bank, and Islamic Development Bank; and bilateral infrastructure agreements structured to ensure multi-use functionality. The US Development Finance Corporation (DFC) represents a prospective partner for infrastructure co-investment alongside revenues from the Simandou project, particularly for energy and digital infrastructure that serve broader economic sectors beyond mining.

6.3 Bureaucratic Streamlining

Guinea must radically simplify administrative procedures for foreign investors. Specific reforms include: establishing a one-stop investment centre consolidating all required approvals and permits; implementing strict timeframes for administrative decisions with automatic approval if deadlines elapse; digitalising registration, licensing, and permits systems; publishing clear multilingual guides detailing all requirements for different investment types; and conducting regular regulatory reviews to eliminate redundant requirements. These reforms should benchmark successful African examples like Rwanda's investment promotion agency, adapting approaches to Guinea's institutional capacity and Francophone legal system.

6.4 Governance and Political Stability

Enhancing political stability requires: strengthening democratic institutions and electoral processes to reduce political tensions; establishing inclusive dialogue mechanisms involving government, opposition, civil society, and traditional leaders; professionalising security forces; developing clear constitutional frameworks for political transitions; and implementing reconciliation programmes addressing historical grievances. Guinea's ongoing democratic transition represents a critical near-term opportunity to demonstrate credible governance reform, a signal that investors, including those from the United States and other Western nations, will be watching closely. External support from the African Union, ECOWAS, and Western partners can provide accountability frameworks and technical assistance for this process.

6.5 Deepening the United States Strategic Partnership

The US-Guinea commercial relationship, anchored by the Wabtec locomotive contracts and the contractual sourcing requirements embedded in the Simandou project, represents a foundation on which a broader investment partnership can be built. Guinea should actively seek to expand Prosper Africa programming; engage the US Development Finance Corporation for infrastructure co-investment; pursue a bilateral investment treaty to provide legal protections and dispute resolution frameworks for American investors; and utilise the U.S. Commercial Service at the Embassy in Conakry for systematic investor

matchmaking. English language capacity building within investment promotion agencies and diplomatic services is a prerequisite for deepening this relationship effectively. Guinea's successful enforcement of American locomotive sourcing requirements in 2025 demonstrated that contractual commitments can be upheld, a signal that should be actively communicated to potential US investors as evidence of Guinea's institutional reliability.

6.6 Language and Communication Capacity

To overcome linguistic limitations, Guinea should: provide intensive English language training for diplomatic personnel and investment promotion staff; recruit multilingual staff for investment promotion agencies; develop investment materials in English, French, Arabic, and Mandarin to reach diverse investor audiences; establish professional translation services for investor interactions; and consider seconding diplomats to English-speaking countries for language immersion combined with economic diplomacy training. These measures acknowledge that while Guinea cannot abandon French as its primary language, competing globally for investment from the United States, Gulf states, and Asia requires genuine multilingual institutional capacity.

6.7 Institutional Capacity Building

Guinea must strengthen investment promotion institutions through: comprehensive training programmes in investment promotion, negotiation, and investor relations; establishing systematic investor tracking and relationship management systems; developing sector-specific investment strategies based on rigorous analysis of Guinea's comparative advantages; creating public-private dialogue mechanisms allowing regular consultation between government and business; and potentially partnering with more experienced African investment promotion agencies, such as Rwanda Development Board or Mauritius Board of Investment, for technical assistance and knowledge transfer. Institutional strengthening requires sustained capacity building rather than one-time interventions.

6.8 Trade Agreement Negotiations

Guinea should actively negotiate bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements,

providing legal protections and market access guarantees to foreign investors. Priority should target major investment source countries: China, the United Arab Emirates, India, the United States, and European nations. Guinea should leverage regional frameworks like ECOWAS to strengthen regional market integration, making Guinea more attractive as a platform for accessing West African markets. A bilateral investment treaty with the United States would be particularly strategic, formalising the growing commercial relationship, providing investor protections that reduce perceived risk, and signalling Guinea's commitment to open and rules-based investment governance.

Implementing these recommendations requires coordinated action across multiple government agencies, sustained political commitment despite electoral cycles, and patience, recognising that institutional strengthening demands years rather than months. Guinea's economic diplomacy effectiveness ultimately depends not on diplomatic skill alone but on comprehensively addressing the structural impediments identified in this research. The emergence of transformative projects and strategic partnerships creates conditions that prior generations of Guinean leaders did not have. The test is whether current institutions can translate these conditions into a durable and diversified investment environment that serves Guinea's long-term development.

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The Re-examination of South Africa's National Interests in a Post-International and Heterarchy Era

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Introduction

This study assesses South Africa's national interests and argues that they ought to be revised in light of the current international order, in which myriad non-state actors, ideologies, wars, the emergence of innovative technologies, and environmental threats challenge centralized state power. The study recognizes that postinternational theory departs from state-centric theory. Mathebula (2024) explains postinternationalism as a new world order encompassing a conglomerate of nonstate actors, including multinational corporations, civil society entities, technology behemoths, international normative systems, and global trends and influences. Mathebula (2024)'s definition is derived from the writings of James N. Rosenau, regarded as an architect of postinternationalism. James N Rosenau explains that the global system has become turbulent due to extensive change, making it difficult to understand global life solely from an "international politics" perspective, as much of politics extends beyond national boundaries and state-to-state relations. A central definition of heterarchy is central to the construction of this body of literature, its central tenets and thesis. Belmonte and Cerny (2019) define heterarchy as an organizational system in which elements are not fixed in a single chain of command but can be positioned in multiple ways depending on context.

The authors contrast heterarchy with hierarchy, which relies on a rigid top-down structure; a heterarchy distributes power and authority more horizontally, with different actors holding influence that may

shift or overlap across networks (Belmonte and Cerny, 2019). In the social and information sciences, it is often described as a network in which each element plays an equally significant role, though its relative importance can vary across situations.

Upon defining postinternational and heterarchy, the piece argues that South Africa's national interests ought to be reviewed, considering the postinternational theory and heterarchy. South Africa's national interests are framed around protecting state sovereignty and constitutional order, safeguarding the security and welfare of its people, fostering inclusive economic growth, and contributing to a fair and peaceful global order (Bohler-Muller, 2012). Grounded in the 1996 Constitution, it prioritizes democracy, human rights, social justice, and national unity domestically, while internationally, it emphasizes African unity, regional integration, Pan-Africanism, and reforming global governance through forums such as the AU, BRICS, and the G20 (Kotze, 2024). Guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu diplomacy, South Africa presents a people-centered and progressive vision rooted in interdependence and global cooperation (Kotze 2024).

The Notion of National Interest

In the 1940s, the scholar Hans Morgenthau deepened the concept of *national interest* by situating it at the heart of classical realism. He argued that the overall arrangements of states were rooted not only in power but also in the goal of maintaining, enabling, and advancing their power in the international system (Kotzé, 2024). Within this framework, power is perceived as the ability to pursue one's own ends without being hindered by external constraints. Morgenthau (1948) further stressed that national interest, defined in terms of power, provides a rational guide to foreign policy by anchoring it in objective considerations rather than ideological or moralistic ones. For him, this made *national interest* both a descriptive and prescriptive tool, descriptive in explaining how states behave, and prescriptive in guiding policymakers on how they should act to safeguard state survival and influence (Morgenthau, 1948). However, the realist understanding of national interest, while foundational, later came under criticism for its state-centric assumptions, paving the way for post-international theory as an alternative lens (Rosenau, 1990).

Post-international theory emerged as a response to the limitations and biases of traditional realist and neorealist approaches, particularly their narrow focus on states as the central actors in global politics (Rosenau, 1990). This dynamic resonates with the idea of heterarchy, where authority is organized through fluid, non-hierarchical, networked relationships. Even though authors only now call for a shift from the concept of hierarchy to 'heterarchy', historical evidence suggests that

heterarchy was already a feature of global empires dating back to the 2nd century (Subrahmanyam, 2022). This was downplayed by the introduction of the Eurocentric 'nation-state' narrative.

Understanding South Africa's national interests today requires situating them within both historical and contemporary global dynamics, where networked, multi-actor perspectives increasingly complement traditional state-centric approaches. According to Kotzé (2024), since the transition to democracy in South Africa, there has been a shift from a securocratic system of control over the population during apartheid to a human-centred approach that has ushered in a new dispensation with very different national interests. Three decades later, these interests have been further complicated by the establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU) after the ruling party, the ANC, failed to secure an outright majority in the previous elections (Mafumo, 2024). This further underscores the need to reexamine South Africa's national interests within the context of a newer era of post-international and heterarchical perspectives.

Theoretical Review: Postinternational Theory and Heterarchy

Traditional approaches in International Relations have historically dominated the conceptualisation of national interest, framing the state as the centre of analysis. The realist school defines national interest in terms of survival, security, and power. At the same time, the liberal approach extends this by including key tenets such as interdependence and institutional cooperation (Clark, 1996). Furthermore, both paradigms assume

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(*Mathebula, 2024*).

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that anarchy, hierarchy, and authority are central to understanding global politics. However, recent approaches to international relations, such as postinternationalism and heterarchy, have challenged these classical frameworks, emphasising nuances in actors, authority, and governance (Ferguson and Mansbach, 2007).

The postinternational theory by James Rosenau (1990) offers an alternative paradigm for understanding international politics. The theory posits that global politics are frequently influenced by the roles of non-state actors, international norms, the prevalence of conflict and war worldwide, and the processes of globalisation (Mathebula, 2024). Postinternationalism suggests that no sovereign state is powerful enough to be unaffected by

the “postinternational effect” of world politics (Mathebula, 2024). Instead, national interests are negotiated across multiple actors and complex networks beyond traditional diplomatic channels. It further demonstrates how geopolitical events can shape a state’s agenda and foreign policy.

The theory that often complements the post-international theory is the concept of heterarchy. In contrast to anarchy and hierarchy, heterarchy describes a global political system where power is diffused among a multitude of diverse, interconnected actors who constantly compete and collaborate across multiple levels, rather than being concentrated in formal intergovernmental institutions (Cerny, 2022). These interconnected actors overlap across multiple autonomous regimes within trade, finance, and security in a global system that lacks a central authority (Crumley, 2015). Heterarchy helps explain how various actors influence and are influenced by geopolitics, creating a complex and ever-changing global landscape (Mathebula, 2024).

Taken together, the postinternational and heterarchy theories offer a more contemporary guiding perspective on national interest as a fluid, multilevel construct rather than a static, fixed concept.

South Africa’s National Interest in the past decade

According to the former minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr. Naledi Pandor, South Africa’s national interest is captured as follows: *“In crisp terms we define our national interest as encompassing national sovereignty and constitutional order, safety of our citizens, wellbeing of our citizens, economic prosperity and a better Africa and world”* (Pandor, 2022).

Since the inception of democracy, South Africa’s national interest has undergone transformative, rapid changes. National interests have not remained stagnant; they have aligned with national priorities and conformed to the geopolitical and international environment beyond South Africa’s borders. According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (2023), South Africa’s foreign policy over the past 20 years has been characterized by an amalgamation of political, security, human development, economic,

ideological, and global interests. DIRCO (2023) further asserts that South Africa's national interests are derived from its domestic priorities, establishing a strict nexus between domestic needs and foreign policy. Some key marks of the domestic and foreign nexus include the African Continental Free Trade Area, spearheaded by the country and instrumental in fulfilling the economic interest aspect of our national interest through the promotion of free trade and investment. This is further accentuated through bilateral relations. The human development element of the nexus is expressed through South Africa's democratic and constitutional mandate, which distinguishes it by its ideologies of fairness, ubuntu, and transformation (Masters and Landsberg, 2024). From these two examples, it can be argued that the country has found some balance between its domestic priorities, national interest, foreign policy, and implementation.

Analysis

The key findings presented in this article reveal the complex nature of the international arena, compelling states to respond in a sophisticated and diplomatic manner that safeguards their sovereignty and national interests while positioning them as strategic players in global politics. South Africa has repeatedly found itself in unfavourable global political spaces, such as its non-alignment stance on the Russia-Ukraine war and its alliance with the BRICS+ alliance. While South Africa navigates many of these geopolitical factors, the state needs to maintain balance amid geopolitical shocks and in its foreign policy.

Postinternationalism and heterarchy posit that states ought to position themselves as strategic players. Herein, positionalities matter, as states need to situate themselves diplomatically to navigate geopolitics while fulfilling their national interests. For South Africa, this means, in the era of heterarchy, that the state must position itself in a manner that both fulfils and advances its national interest and strengthens its sovereignty and influence in the global arena. As the country continues to deem itself a moral actor in the heterarchy era, it ought to aggressively align its foreign policy with its national interests, as this multi-nodal system enables it to exert some relative influence in the international arena (Mathebula, 2024). In pragmatic terms, the

nexus between heterarchy and South Africa's national interest can be captured as follows

Political Interests – *National sovereignty and constitutional order: South Africa needs to adopt a realist approach to its influence and sovereignty in the international arena, while maintaining its moral order, by ensuring South African interests are fulfilled through international treaties and agreements, multilateralism, alliances, and international organizations. Reflect on the relevance of their partnerships and multilateral memberships such as BRICS+, the United Nations, and the African Union. Regarding constitutional order, the country must ensure that the ratification of international treaties strengthens South Africa's laws and their role in international law, its international standing, and its position.*

Economic Interests – *Economic prosperity: The state ought to ensure that its bilateral relations and positionality position it as a suitable investment destination, and that relations foster long-term, mutually beneficial trade agreements.*

Ideological and global interest – *A better Africa and world: South Africa should ensure that it continues to play a moral role in the African continent. Automatically, when the above interests are met, the safety and well-being of citizens become easier to attain and maintain.*

Conclusion

While politics extends beyond national borders, the duality of national interests, reflecting the current state of global order, creates a disjuncture in which South Africa's national interests need to be anchored in a heterarchical and post-international vision. This vision should posit the essence of South Africa's post-democratic national interest, foregrounding *Ubuntu* diplomacy, while adopting a multi-actor, multilateral, and global normative approach to the non-static nature of the worldwide order. South Africa's national interests have been organized along moralistic and idealist guidelines, centred on the transition from a securocrat system to one anchored in a human-centred approach. However, the crux of this piece has argued that the emergence of the GNU has exerted pressure on South Africa to consolidate its role within a global paradigm that considers the influence of geopolitics on the deployment of foreign policy and, by extension, national interests.

The role of post-international theory, in conjunction with the theory of heterarchy, is to offer an alternative analytical frame. This is most useful for examining the extensive role that non-state actors play in creating a complex, non-static global landscape (Mathebula, 2024). By using South Africa as a case study, the reinvention of understanding global paradigms of influence

introduces a shift from traditional approaches to state behaviour underpinned by national interests. Instead, it presents a framework of analysis that recognizes the role of global order as a catalyst for a non-state foreign policy, which in turn, creates a case for a re-invention of national interests that reflect current international developments.

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Solidarity to Strategy: Reviewing Commitments to Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration Post-1990s by Lusaka, Harare, and Pretoria Nexus

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Abstract

This study looks at how South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia approached their commitments to regional integration and Pan-Africanism since the 1990s. Using a qualitative, comparative desktop method and theme analysis, it explores how each country's political views, economic standing, diplomatic strategies, and historical heritage have shaped its roles and contributions in the Southern African region. While Zimbabwe has pursued symbolic and assertive activities like land reform and regional peacekeeping with varying results, Zambia has maintained a consistent, quiet diplomacy approach based on its backing from the liberation period, according to the studies interrogated. Although South Africa has pushed for institutional and economic unification through its post-apartheid influence, it still has an inconsistent foreign policy and regional engagement. Findings indicate that the three states have taken a variety of noteworthy but inconsistent actions, underscoring the need for further collaboration, strategic goal alignment, and further research into the long-term effects of their regional roles. This study argues that national priorities must be in line with common African objectives for regional integration to be successful.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Regional Integration, Diplomacy, Africa By Bus

1. INTRODUCTION

Pan-Africanism and regional integration have long been central pillars in Africa's pursuit of freedom, unity, and emancipation. Pan-Africanism is the ideological and political movement that seeks the unity and liberation of African people globally, has long been a target of both external and internal suppression (Adebajo, 2020). Moreover, according to Monyae and Nkala (2023), regional integration is a political and strategic process that aims to address colonial disunity and underdevelopment in Africa through cooperation, solidarity, and group effort. The 1990s are marked by the end of the Cold War, liberation of most African countries, but most importantly, the emergence of regional blocs in Africa and beyond. Although there has been a notable effort to write about Pan-Africanism and integration on a continental level, not much has been done on a regional level. The Lusaka, Harare, and Pretoria Nexus provides an excellent study base to review Pan-Africanism and regional integration post the 1990s. These three countries, although distinct, have interrelated trajectories marked by the quest for unity through liberation movements, radical policy moves, and vocal global standing. Thus, a comparative analysis of their efforts is crucial for understanding Pan-Africanism and regional integration. This paper seeks to understand how much and in what specific ways Zambia, in comparison to Zimbabwe and South Africa, has contributed to Pan-Africanism and regional integration since the 1990s. Through a desktop qualitative analysis, this paper will present its findings centered on the argument that while the Lusaka, Harare, and Pretoria Nexus have made remarkable contributions on these two pillars, the nature and extent of these contributions have been deeply influenced by each country's respective political ideologies, diplomatic strategies, the extent in which colonial legacies exist, and the level of economic development. Overall, highlighting the uneven efforts in advancing the Pan-Africanism and regional integration agenda.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, regional integration and Pan-Africanism have been central to Africa's political vision, while their implementation and expression have varied widely across national contexts. The African Union (AU) and the broader

ideological legacy of Pan-Africanism are often highlighted in continental studies, but regional interactions, particularly in Southern Africa, remain insufficiently studied. The contributions that South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia have made to the advancement of regional integration and Pan-Africanism since the 1990s are examined critically in this literature study. It uses the Lusaka–Harare–Pretoria relationship as a prism to understand how political ideologies, economic prowess, diplomatic strategies, and liberation history interact. The assessment highlights these governments' diverse and sometimes contradictory approaches to Pan-African ideals and regional responsibilities rather than treating them as homogeneous entities.

2.1 Zimbabwe: Radical Symbolism and Strategic Ambiguity

It is common to evaluate Zimbabwe's participation in Pan-Africanism following the 1990s from the standpoint of extreme decolonial symbolism. The most notable of these efforts is perhaps the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), which was started in 2000. Some African leaders and scholars have hailed the program as a brave statement of economic independence and historical correction, even though Western governments and financial institutions have widely criticized it for its haphazard implementation and negative economic effects (Raftopoulos, 2009; African Union, 2003). According to Mamdani (2008), the FTLRP re-engaged citizenship and land in ways that mirrored broader Pan-African calls for fundamental transformation. In contrast to the neoliberal ideas that had become prevalent in African development discourse, Zimbabwe positioned itself as a pioneer in postcolonial resistance in this work.

This iconic Pan-Africanism has, however, been combined with tactical ambiguity. Officially, Zimbabwe's 1998 military engagement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was portrayed as a commitment to regional peace and unity. It is questioned by scholars such as Rupiya (2002) and Hartzenberg and Maasdorp (1999) that the intervention was driven more by elite geopolitical plans and economic incentives than by Pan-African ideals. In addition to exposing the limits of regional consensus on security governance, the intervention put SADC relationships to the test.

Zimbabwe has maintained a consistent level of participation in regional organizations such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and SADC. A willingness to participate in regional economic planning was demonstrated by the holding of the 34th SADC Summit in 2014 and support for the SADC Infrastructure Master Plan. Critics claim that Zimbabwe's standing as a regional leader has been harmed by its domestic unrest and contentious governance past. According to the literature, Zimbabwe's claimed commitment to Pan-Africanism and its patchy implementation clash, raising questions about the country's use of regional frameworks for internal legitimacy (Hartzenberg and Maasdorp, 1999).

2.2 Zambia: Foundational Solidarity and Normative Leadership

Zambia's heritage from the liberation era serves as a foundation for its influence on Pan-Africanism. Lusaka served as a haven for exiled political groups in the 1960s and 1970s, including South Africa's ANC and Zimbabwe's ZANU. This crucial unity, which is usually overlooked in popular narratives, made Zambia a moral leader in Southern Africa's decolonization operations (Chongo, 2024; Chongwe, 2024). Because of its symbolic support as well as the real and diplomatic risks it faced in resisting colonial and apartheid regimes, scholars have referred to Zambia as a "centre of decolonization."

Zambia adopted a quiet diplomacy policy after the 1990s, which was characterized by private mediation, reaching consensus, and purposefully avoiding public conflicts (Dlamini, 2003). During regional crises like Zimbabwe's political upheaval and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's electoral disputes, Zambia has been able to take on calming roles thanks to its diplomatic approach. Though less obvious than South Africa's institutional leadership or Zimbabwe's ideological aggressiveness, Zambia's nuanced diplomacy shows a normative commitment to Pan-African values of solidarity, dialogue, and respect for one another.

Zambia has consistently, but unremarkably, participated in regional integration. Zambia has consistently backed regional industrial expansion, infrastructure connectivity, and trade standardization as a member of SADC, COMESA,

and the East African Community (EAC). Zambia's role in supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and promoting a consistent trade policy is highlighted by Edwards and Lawrence (2012). The North-South Corridor project, which aims to connect Southern and Eastern Africa with a network of highways and railroads, is an example of Zambia's infrastructure Pan-Africanism, which prioritizes connectedness above control (Foster and Dominguez, 2010).

However, Zambia's achievements are often ignored in popular narratives of regional leadership because of its little economic clout. Scholars such as Chongo (2024) argue that Zambia's moral leadership, which is based on historical unity and diplomatic restraint, offers an alternative Pan-African paradigm that deserves more recognition. This paradigm challenges the notion that regional leadership must be equivalent to economic or military might by emphasizing consensus over coercion and facilitation over assertion.

2.3 South Africa: Institutional Ambition and Contradictory Hegemony

The post-apartheid foreign policy of South Africa has been audacious and ambiguous. Incorporating democratic, human rights, and collective accountability principles into the AU's Constitutive Act, South Africa played a crucial role in the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) transformation into the African Union (AU) under President Thabo Mbeki (Mbeki, 2003; Sturman, 2004). Mbeki's "non-indifference" principle signalled a change from the OAU's traditional non-interference policy and the beginning of a new era of continental engagement. Gaining traction in global forums such as the G8, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), also led by South Africa, sought to link development assistance and governance reforms (De Waal, 2002; Sturman, 2004).

Contradictions have, however, plagued South Africa's leadership role in the region. South Africa's attitude was seen as a betrayal of regional solidarity by Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia who were particularly irritated by Mandela's opposition to military intervention in the DRC (Sturman, 2004). The fundamental Pan-African ideals that South Africa claims to uphold have been undermined by Mbeki's tactful diplomacy on Zimbabwe, especially

his alleged support for delaying an AU report on human rights violations.

The economic domination of South Africa is both a benefit and a drawback. South Africa is sometimes described as the “engine of growth” for Africa, accounting for over one-third of the continent’s GDP (Leistner, 1992). In addition to facilitating regional integration, its financial investments in retail, infrastructure, and finance have raised concerns about economic domination. According to Africa by Bus reflections (2024), Zambian academics have expressed concerns that South African investments exacerbate inequality rather than foster shared progress by undermining indigenous companies. Projects like Eskom’s regional power systems and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project demonstrate important contributions while also exposing the systemic inequalities that undermine South Africa’s position as a leader.

Particularly complex has been South Africa’s engagement with SADC. Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe opposed Mandela’s attempts to restructure the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security, underscoring the region’s deep mistrust (Landsberg, 2000; Sturman, 2004). These regional disputes contributed to Mbeki’s later turn toward the AU. South Africa’s dual role as the architect and protector of regional integration, according to researchers, calls for a closer look. Its internal problems (such as xenophobia), presumed hubris, and unequal human rights stance have undermined its Pan-African narrative, despite its obvious institutional objectives (Agaigbe and Akuraga, 2025).

2.4 Comparative Reflections and Thematic Tensions

The literature indicates that although all three nations have played a role in Pan-Africanism and regional integration, their approaches have been distinctly different. Zimbabwe’s strategy is ideologically daring yet institutionally unreliable. Its land reform and military actions illustrate a radical Pan-Africanism based on sovereignty and decolonization, but its internal volatility and disputed governance weaken its credibility in the region. In contrast, Zambia presents a model of ethical leadership rooted in historical unity and subtle diplomacy. Its contributions may be less apparent but arguably more reliable, focusing on facilitation

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rather than assertion. South Africa represents institutional aspirations and economic power, yet its leadership is complicated by inconsistencies between statements and actions, especially concerning human rights and regional fairness.

These differences represent more than just stylistic differences; they also reflect deeper tensions within the Pan-African movement. What does it mean to be a Pan-African participant in a region marked by disparate historical pathways, political conflicts, and economic inequality? Does regional integration require hegemonic leadership, or can it be achieved through consensus? In what ways may countries balance their regional obligations with their domestic agendas? While the literature does not offer definitive solutions, it does show that successful regional integration involves more than institutional frameworks; it also calls for mutual recognition, trust, and a shared vision for Africa’s future.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology, which describes how a certain research approach was

chosen and used. This study adopted a qualitative research approach, suitable for exploring and comparing the political, economic, and socio-cultural contributions of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa to Pan-Africanism and regional integration since the 1990s. The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to interpret complex social and historical phenomena in depth across different national contexts. According to Merriam (2009) and Hennick et al. (2010), qualitative research is a broad term that embraces research methodologies that deal with phenomena by analysing experiences, behaviours, and relations without the use of statistics and mathematics and the processing of numerical data. Similarly, Goertz and Mahoney (2012) highlight that a researcher who follows a qualitative research approach observes, summarizes, describes, analyses, and interprets phenomena in their real dimension. A documentary analysis method will be employed to evaluate secondary data from a variety of sources, including books, scholarly journals, policy documents, government publications, and credible reports from institutions such as the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and United Nations (UN).

3.1 Research Design

The study employed qualitative, comparative desktop design that involved systematically reviewing secondary sources to compare the contributions made by the three countries. This design allowed the identification of thematic similarities and differences across political, economic, and social dimensions.

3.2 Data Collection

“Data collection is a process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion, that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes” (Creswell, 2014). This study used documentary analysis as a data collection method. The method was chosen due to this study relying on existing records, such as government documents, policy reports, journal articles, and publications by regional institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Moreover, this method is appropriate for a comparative and historical study as it allows examination of how

policy documents and scholarly sources reflect evolving commitments to Pan-Africanism and regional integration.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is suitable for identifying and analysing patterns in large textual data sets. This approach was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and contrasts across multiple documents from different countries. By comparing these patterns, the study was able to reveal both convergences and divergences in the three countries' approaches to Pan-Africanism and regional integration.

The analysis was directed by the primary research questions of the study, concentrating on the impact of each state's historical experiences, diplomatic strategies, and national priorities on their contributions to regional unity. In accordance with Braun and Clarke's six-step process, the researcher engaged with the data through thorough reading, developed initial codes, organized these into overarching themes, assessed and refined the themes for consistency, defined and labelled each theme, and created an analytical narrative that links the findings to the research objectives. The six interconnected steps established the basis of the study's analytical process, facilitating a structured and transparent interpretation of documentary evidence across the three national contexts.

In conclusion, this chapter clarified the methodology used in this study. A qualitative research approach was employed to examine political, economic, and sociocultural contributions by Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa to Pan-Africanism and regional integration in a non-numerical, interpretive way. The study employed a descriptive and interpretive design using documentary analysis as the primary method of data collection. Moreover, the study followed a thematic data analysis that provided a structured approach to identifying meaningful patterns in the data, ensuring coherence between the findings and the study's research questions. The following chapter presents key findings from this analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents and analyses the findings of the study, which explored how South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia have contributed to Pan-Africanism and regional integration since the 1990s. The findings of the study were gathered through the use of thematic analysis used to analyse the obtained secondary data. These include policy documents from the African Union and Southern African Development Community, publications from government websites, and work from different scholars. In addition, the use of intriguing insights obtained from the 'Africa by bus's field experience will be included as discussions that occurred in Lusaka and Harare universities were impactful and contributed significantly.

The chosen data collection method made use of the document analysis form of method. The study observed and identified themes that persistently emerged and will further highlight discourses that exhibit how each of the states that were studied operationalise the principles and values of Pan-Africanism. Three major patterns were identified from the thematic coding process, and these include: the leadership from the political and diplomatic domains, the engagement between the economic domain and institutions, and the different and contradicting perspectives from the principles of Pan-Africanism and the interests of states. Therefore, the following section will discuss the themes identified, as it will illustrate these themes that emerged from the collected data and further demonstrate the approaches that were adopted by each state.

4.1 Political and Diplomatic Leadership

The findings illustrate that after apartheid, the position of being a dominant regional actor was taken by South Africa's political and diplomatic leadership. From the data collected, it was observed that continental governance reforms were advanced as the African Union (AU) was transformed from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) due to the role that was played by the SADC and AU. According to Bischoff (2020), democracy and stability within the African region were promoted by the state, South Africa, through the established initiative, which includes the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). However, the credibility of South Africa's Pan-Africanism

principles and values has been undermined, and the events that have occurred within the state further contribute to this notion. This is because it has been identified that the state is practicing "quiet diplomacy" towards the Zimbabwean state and encounters persistent xenophobic attacks (Agaigbe and Akuraga, 2025).

On the other hand, data obtained from speeches and policy records have shown that Pan-Africanism has been consistently perpetuated through active contribution by the diplomatic role of the Zambian state. Since it had gained its independence, the first state in doing so, the Zambian government aimed at advancing regional cooperation and emphasised the practice of peace through adopting "quiet diplomacy". The traits that have been identified, by thematic coding, from the state include conflict mediation, consensus resolution, and brought about neutrality. Thus, stabilisation has been emphasised and imposed by Zambia within SADC and the AU (Dlamini, 2003). Unlike the observed literature, which aims to only highlight the solidarity that was enforced during the liberation struggle period in Zambia, the data that has been analysed illustrates that the state's diplomatic identity remains defined by this legacy. This can be seen through actions that involve active participation in measures of peacebuilding and integration.

Furthermore, Ideological nationalism and assertive Pan-African ideals have been identified as a pattern within Zimbabwe's political approach, though the analysis from the obtained policy documents, speeches, and AU communiqués. Measures of assertion of African sovereignty and the reversion of colonial injustices were pursued, during the presidency of Robert Mugabe, through established policies such as the "Fast Track Land Reform Programme (2000) (Raftopoulos, 2009). In addition, the findings illustrate Zimbabwe's desire to defend the self-determination of African states through the state's involvement and participation in the missions of regional peacekeeping. For instance, this can be observed when Zimbabwe intervened in the crisis that occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998. Despite this, these actions embarked by the state evoked international criticism, further straining the relations within the region, highlighting tensions between regional cooperation and the imposition of ideologies by powerful states.

4.2 Economic and Institutional Engagement

The economic power of the South African state has been positioned as an imperative force that influences regional integration, as observed through the analysis of the documents from SADC and the AU. SADC and other regional institutions have been strengthened by the state's leadership measures within the development of infrastructure, energy, and the facilitation of trade relations and agreements (Nathan, 2016). Additionally, Zambian scholars have illustrated their apprehension of South Africa's dominance through the field discussions and evidence from the documents. Although South Africa has been acknowledged as a contributing force for integration through the state's actions of investments, mainly in infrastructure and retail, these scholars further emphasised that this established the notion of dependency, and local industries were crowded.

The findings on Zambia's involvement and contribution within the economic sector indicated that, despite the state's financial capacity being limited, they have illustrated a strong constitutional commitment. Zambia's participation within organisations such as SADC, COMESA, and African Continental Free Trade (AfCFTA) was highlighted, and further highlighted that the cross-border infrastructure was supported through the North-South Corridor, as the analysed documents obtained (Foster and Dominguez, 2010). The data has portrayed Zambia's approach, emphasising the state's contribution to the projects established within the region, further illustrating its cooperation.

Zimbabwe's economic participation has been inconsistent. Even though the country remains part of SADC and COMESA, policy reports show that its economic decline, sanctions, and governance challenges have weakened its actual contribution. Still, Zimbabwe continues to push for Pan-African economic independence, promoting self-reliance and resistance to Western control. These ideas, though often expressed more in rhetoric than practice, still hold strong symbolic meaning and reflect the country's long-standing commitment to sovereignty and African pride.

4.3 Contradictions and Comparative Insights

The analysis shows that while South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe all speak the language of

Pan-Africanism, how they live it out differs based on their political stability, economic position, and historical background. Three key contradictions stand out:

Rhetoric vs Practice: South Africa's leadership role is often undermined by internal policy inconsistencies. Zimbabwe's nationalist tone does not always match its economic capacity, while Zambia's quiet and diplomatic approach, though effective, often goes unnoticed.

Leadership vs Equality: South Africa's economic strength gives it influence but also creates tension, as its dominance challenges the idea of equal partnership among states.

Sovereignty vs Integration: Zimbabwe's focus on self-determination and Zambia's cautious diplomacy sometimes slows down progress toward deeper regional unity.

Overall, these contradictions show that while Pan-Africanism still holds power as an idea, its implementation remains uneven. The three countries continue to pursue the same dream, but their different realities make unity more of an ongoing effort than a shared achievement. The findings further reveal that Zambia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe each contribute uniquely to Southern Africa's regional project, yet their lack of policy coordination weakens the broader integration agenda. Zambia often provides moral and diplomatic balance, South Africa offers institutional and economic strength, while Zimbabwe represents ideological resilience. However, Zambia's peace-driven diplomacy tends to neutralise Zimbabwe's more confrontational tone, and South Africa's economic policies, depending on how they're implemented, can either strengthen or strain regional relationships.

4.4 Preminent: Zambia's Role

Zambia's influence stands out for its tone and substance. The document analysis points to its consistent push for collective decision-making, evident in SADC and AU communiqués. The idea of "quiet diplomacy," which emerged frequently in the data, captures Zambia's use of soft power as a tool for regional cohesion. Unlike South Africa's assertive leadership or Zimbabwe's ideological militancy, Zambia's approach focuses on mediation, partnership, and solidarity.

Insights from the Africa by Bus engagements reinforced this observation: academics and students in Lusaka often described Zambia not as a “power-broker” but as a “bridge-builder.” Despite its limited resources, Zambia’s continued engagement in continental affairs reflects a deep-rooted commitment to unity that values peace over prominence. This demonstrates that regional influence is not determined by economic power alone but by credibility and consistency in action.

4.5 Synthesis of Findings

The synthesis suggests that post-1990s Pan-Africanism in Southern Africa has evolved from liberation solidarity to strategic cooperation. South Africa leads through its institutional capacity, Zimbabwe through ideology, and Zambia through diplomatic balance. Yet, these efforts remain fragmented. The findings make it clear that uneven political will and resource gaps continue to undermine regional integration.

In essence, while South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia each represent different faces of Pan-Africanism, their collective strength is weakened by inconsistent commitment and a lack of mutual trust. Thematic evidence from reports and dialogues confirms that South Africa remains the institutional and economic leader, though its internal contradictions affect its legitimacy. Zambia continues to show principled, steady leadership rooted in diplomacy and advocacy for integration. Zimbabwe maintains ideological influence despite its declining economic standing. Together, they paint a picture of a region striving for unity yet still bound by competing national interests. The Lusaka, Harare, Pretoria nexus, therefore, captures both the promise and paradox of Pan-Africanism in the post-1990s era, where unity is celebrated in principle but inconsistently applied in practice.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Pan-Africanism to shift from aspiration to tangible progress, this paper recommends that these three states must move beyond rhetorical speeches to renewed political will towards Pan-Africanism and regional integration. Firstly, in order to maintain regional influence and leadership, South Africa must address its policy inconsistencies by aligning national priorities with regional and continental resolutions. Secondly,

while commendable, Zimbabwe needs to move beyond a nationalist standpoint by adopting Pan-African and regional integration to strengthen its economy and contribute to the broader regional agenda. Moreover, the quiet diplomacy attitude by Zambia seems to be working partially; this state needs to be more vocal and visible in the diplomatic arena. Furthermore, the paper recommends that the three states should respectively promote civic education on Pan-Africanism and regional integration by engaging grassroots communities on the importance of this subject. To harness this, the ability of technology to connect communities should be leveraged by creating online spaces where regional integration can take place and where Pan-Africanism becomes an identity that citizens proudly wear on digital platforms. Overall, the Lusaka, Harare, and Pretoria nexus needs to leverage each other’s abilities to amplify and contribute to regional integration and Pan-Africanism.

6. CONCLUSION

Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa have each contributed uniquely to Pan-Africanism and regional integration since the 1990s. Zambia’s historical role as a refugee camp created a culture of peace and neutrality, making it a quiet but effective stabilizer in regional affairs. Its support for infrastructure and trade demonstrates commitment, although limited resources necessitate a more strategic approach. Zimbabwe has played a symbolic

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and active role through land reform, regional peacekeeping, and participation in SADC and COMESA. Despite criticism, it remains a strong voice for sovereignty and African unity, acting as a counterweight to South Africa's influence. South Africa has led in institutional development and infrastructure, but inconsistencies in its foreign policy, particularly "quiet diplomacy"

towards Zimbabwe, have drawn mixed regional responses. While influential, it must better balance national interests with its Pan-African vision. Their combined efforts demonstrate both possibilities and difficulties. Regional integration may be strengthened by these nations' greater alignment and collaboration, but this will take political will and a shared strategic vision.

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Reimagining Pan-Africanism in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Youth Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper examines how youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are redefining Pan-Africanism in the twenty-first century. Moving beyond traditional state-led approaches, youth are advancing new forms of solidarity through activism, digital expression, entrepreneurship, and cultural production. Comparative analysis reveals that while political and economic conditions vary across the three countries, shared struggles against inequality, unemployment, and exclusion unite youth in their pursuit of justice, dignity, and African self-determination. South African youth channel Pan-African ideals through social movements and cultural activism; Zambian youth through digital innovation and entrepreneurship; and Zimbabwean youth through art and informal networks that resist repression. Together, these experiences signal a shift from Pan-Africanism as an elite political project to a grassroots movement driven by youth agency and creativity. The study concludes that for Pan-Africanism to remain relevant, governments and regional institutions must recognise and support youth as central actors in shaping Africa's collective future.

Keywords: Contemporary Pan-Africanism, youth activism, regional integration, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, cultural politics, informal economy, African Union

INTRODUCTION

A new generation is reimagining Pan-Africanism. Having deep roots in the history of liberation and independence movements, Pan-Africanism faces the challenge of remaining relevant in the modern era and must be rethought for contemporary realities. With most of Africa's population under the age of thirty, youth represent a powerful force for transformation. Yet, in many countries, they remain excluded from decision-making, regional planning, and formal politics. Institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) discuss youth inclusion, but these efforts often fail to translate into genuine influence or opportunity.

This paper examines youth engagement in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – three countries with shared liberation histories but distinct post-colonial trajectories. It explores how youth are shaping new forms of participation in the twenty-first century through activism, social media, entrepreneurship, and cultural production. The central research question guiding this study is: *How are youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe contributing to Pan-Africanism and regional integration, and what structural conditions enable or constrain their engagement?*

The findings reveal that youth in the three countries are actively redefining Pan-Africanism according to their social and political realities. In South Africa, youth continue a legacy of liberation-era activism through organised movements, cultural initiatives, and regional forums. Zambian youth use technology and business to connect across borders, while in Zimbabwe, participation often occurs informally through art and cultural exchange, despite political repression. Across all three, most engagement happens outside formal government structures – particularly online and through creative or protest-based spaces. Despite facing unemployment, limited political access, and generational exclusion, youth are developing flexible, creative, and grounded interpretations of Pan-Africanism.

This paper proceeds with a review of existing literature on Pan-Africanism and youth participation in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, followed by an explanation of the methodological approach. The findings section explores country-

specific patterns of youth engagement, while the analysis compares political, economic, and cultural participation across the three contexts. The paper concludes with key insights, policy recommendations, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding how youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe engage with Pan-Africanism and regional integration requires a consideration of multiple interrelated factors. This literature review traces the historical foundations of Pan-Africanism and examines the evolving role of youth in political, social, and cultural transformation across Southern Africa. It analyses contemporary expressions of Pan-Africanism through digital technologies, creative industries, and entrepreneurial activity while identifying the structural constraints, such as inadequate institutional support, limited educational opportunities, and exclusion from policy processes that impede meaningful participation. Finally, it highlights existing research gaps and outlines areas that require further scholarly attention.

Foundations and Trajectories of Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism emerged as a response to the historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racial subjugation, particularly among Africans in the diaspora who associated the continent with liberation and self-determination (Malisa and Nhengeze, 2018, p. 2). Foundational thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Kwame Nkrumah advocated for African unity and self-governance, framing political independence as incomplete without continental solidarity (Logan, 1965, pp. 91-92; Afari-Gyan, 1991, p. 6). However, the pursuit of national interests and regional rivalries frequently constrained these aspirations (Logan, 1965, p. 104).

The concept of the African Renaissance, championed by Thabo Mbeki, reinvigorated Pan-African discourse by emphasising African epistemologies, languages, and values as foundations for sustainable development. This vision recognised the limitations of both capitalist and Marxist frameworks in fostering continental transformation (Malisa and Nhengeze, 2018, p. 11). Similarly, the African Union's *Agenda 2063* positions youth as pivotal agents of change in advancing

regional integration and social renewal (African Union, 2020, p. 10). These ideological continuities form the historical and intellectual backdrop for understanding contemporary youth activism.

Youth and Pan-African Engagement in Southern Africa

Historically, youth have been at the forefront of political transformation across Southern Africa. In South Africa, their activism has shaped national discourse, from the 1976 Soweto Uprising to the more recent #FeesMustFall movement (Lekalake, 2016, p. 1; African Union, 2020, pp. 99-100). In Zambia and Zimbabwe, youth were instrumental in nationalist struggles and post-independence democratic movements (Musonda, 2022, pp. 1-2). Yet, participation has often been episodic, intensifying during political crises but rarely institutionalised in governance structures (Musonda, 2022, p. 19).

Despite their historic contributions, youth today remain marginalised in decision-making processes. Older political elites often view them as inexperienced or disruptive rather than as legitimate partners in governance (Dzimiri, 2014, p. 443; African Union, 2020, p. xiv). In more repressive contexts such as Zimbabwe, political leaders have at times instrumentalised youth to perpetrate violence, distorting their role as agents of progress (Dzimiri, 2014, pp. 441-442). These dynamics underscore the need to distinguish genuine participation from tokenism and political manipulation.

Southern African Youth's View on Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration

The South African National Youth Commission Act (1996) defines youth as individuals aged 14 to 35. This demographic faces significant socioeconomic challenges, with unemployment reaching 45.5% in 2024 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Economic precarity has contributed to tensions between local and migrant youth, particularly toward peers from Zimbabwe and Zambia, perceived as competitors in a constrained job market. This has, at times, generated ambivalence toward regional integration and Pan-African solidarity (Kornegay, 2006, pp. 26-29; Crush, 2022, pp. 14-16; Uwah, Dlamini and Cheteni, 2025, pp. 1-5).

Nevertheless, studies indicate that intercultural exposure and educational exchange can reshape

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these attitudes. School and university-based programmes, both short-term and long-term, have been shown to foster intercultural understanding and reinforce Pan-African values (Ammah, Walls and Walls, 2022, pp. 1-8; Dziki and Leonard, 2016, pp. 1-10). Such initiatives enhance youth awareness of continental issues and encourage regional cooperation, though their sustainability is often hindered by financial constraints (Dziki and Leonard, 2016, pp. 1-10).

Youth Involvement and Participation in Decision-making

The imperative of youth participation is particularly evident in post-apartheid South Africa. Under the former system of parliamentary sovereignty, decision-making authority was concentrated in parliament, excluding public, and particularly youth voices. The transition to democracy introduced new participatory frameworks that recognise youth as stakeholders in governance.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms the right of youth to express their views on matters affecting them and

calls for institutional mechanisms to facilitate such participation (United Nations, 1990). Mampame (2019) argues that meaningful youth inclusion enhances policy relevance and democratic accountability, fostering a generation of active and responsible citizens.

Digital, Cultural, and Entrepreneurial Pan-Africanism

Today's youth are pioneering new forms of Pan-Africanism through digital technologies, cultural production, and entrepreneurial initiatives. The internet and social media have enabled youth to circumvent traditional barriers to expression and create networks of solidarity, allowing them to challenge governments and mobilise for reform (African Union, 2020, pp. 12, 30). Cultural fields, especially music, fashion, and art, are also key spaces of continental identity-building, as youth blend local styles with global trends to craft a distinctly African cultural narrative (African Union, 2020, p. 9).

Entrepreneurship, particularly in Zambia, is increasingly viewed as a viable path to economic participation, even though access to capital and infrastructure remains limited (Bhorat et al., 2015, p. 2). Incubators like *BongoHive* exemplify emerging models that integrate digital skills with business training (Bhorat et al., 2015, p. 30). Yet, despite these innovations, youth-led initiatives often lack state support and operate in unstable conditions, surviving on personal resources and informal networks (African Union, 2020, p. 30).

Youth using business and digital tools to connect across borders are doing more than just making money. They are also building networks that challenge national borders and push for unity, fairness, and shared African identity. Their businesses and creative work are part of a larger political effort to imagine a future led by African youth.

Institutions, Education and Policy Frameworks

Institutional and educational systems are both enablers and barriers to youth empowerment. The African Youth Charter (AYC) and Agenda 2063 offer frameworks for integrating youth into policy and governance, but these commitments often remain unfulfilled or unimplemented (African Union, 2020, pp. ii, xxv). National youth policies, though widespread, are sometimes drafted without

meaningful youth consultation and frequently lack the resources to be effective (African Union, 2020, p. 14).

Education systems in the region are often misaligned with labour market needs. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, curricula are criticised for being overly theoretical and failing to equip students with practical or entrepreneurial skills (Ahmimed, 2019, p. 38; Maulani and Agwanda, 2020, p. 240). Disparities in access to quality education, especially for rural youth and marginalised groups, further entrench inequality (Ahmimed, 2019, pp. 30, 39). The result is widespread youth unemployment and a growing skills mismatch, which undermines both national development and regional integration.

Many plans to include youth in government and policy do not work well. One reason is that there are not enough spaces where youth and older leaders can talk and learn from each other. On top of that, different institutions often do not work together, and there is not enough money to support youth-focused programmes (Amupanda, 2018, p. 81; African Union, 2020, pp. 65-66).

Comparative National and Regional Dynamics

South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe illustrate distinct yet interconnected challenges to youth engagement in Pan-Africanism. In Zimbabwe, youth participation is undermined by political repression and the instrumentalisation of youth by ruling elites (Dzimiri, 2014, pp. 447-448). Zambian youth face systemic exclusion from formal institutions despite high political engagement during elections (Musonda, 2022, p. 27). In South Africa, tensions persist between the dynamism of student activism and broader apathy toward formal politics (Lekalake, 2016, p. 1).

At the regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has established youth employment strategies, yet implementation remains limited and symbolic (Mkombe et al., 2021, p. 864). Many youths remain unaware of or disengaged from continental institutions such as the African Union, reflecting a disconnection between rhetoric and lived experience (African Union, 2020, p. 82).

Gaps in the Literature

Much research highlights the importance of youth to Africa's future but often focuses on their

historical activism or symbolic inclusion in policy frameworks. There is limited exploration of how youth themselves understand and reimagine Pan-Africanism today – through everyday practices, digital cultures, or economic innovation. Most studies also overlook how national contexts, such as political culture, education systems, or civil society, shape different opportunities for youth engagement in regional integration.

There is a lack of research that divides youth by country, class, and identity. Rural youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and working-class youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are often underrepresented, and their unique perspectives on Pan-Africanism and integration remain poorly documented. Comparative studies that address these intersections could offer more nuanced insights into how diverse youth populations relate to continental agendas.

There is also little empirical work that centres youth voices in defining what regional integration should look like. Although institutions like the AU mention youth in official strategies, these rarely reflect the lived experiences or priorities of young Africans. This highlights the need for youth-centred research and more participatory policy processes.

Existing studies often overlook the perspectives of marginalized youth, such as LGBTQ+, rural, and working-class groups whose experiences reveal important variations in how Pan-African ideals are understood and lived.

Key Insights

The literature shows that youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have played – and continue to play – important roles in shaping political change, cultural identity, and regional cooperation. Their activism builds on a long history of Pan-African thinking, from the early visions of leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Kwame Nkrumah to modern calls for unity through Agenda 2063 (Malisa and Nhengeze, 2018, p. 2; African Union, 2020, p. 10).

Across all three countries, youth are engaging with Pan-Africanism in new ways. Through digital platforms, music, art, and entrepreneurship, they are building networks, expressing African identities, and creating alternatives to mainstream politics and economics (African Union, 2020, pp. 9, 30). In Zambia; for example, innovation hubs

like *BongoHive* support digital start-ups, while in South Africa, student movements have challenged inequality and exclusion in higher education (Bhorat et al., 2015, p. 30; Lekalake, 2016, p. 1).

Despite this energy and creativity, major structural barriers persist. Youth are often left out of meaningful decision-making and consulted only symbolically. Education systems are outdated and fail to prepare youth for real-world opportunities, especially in Zimbabwe and Zambia (Ahmimed, 2019, p. 38; Maulani and Agwanda, 2020, p. 240). Rural youth, working-class youth, and LGBTQ+ youth are especially underrepresented in research and policymaking.

There is also a tension between regional ideals and local realities. While Pan-Africanism promotes unity, some youth view regional migration as a threat to jobs, which weakens their support for integration (Crush, 2022, pp. 14-16). This points to a gap between what institutions say and what youth truly experience.

Taken together, the literature makes clear that youth are not passive – they are finding new ways to be heard. However, without serious institutional support, inclusive education, and spaces for youth voices, their contributions to Pan-Africanism and regional integration remain limited. Future research should centre on youth perspectives, compare how national contexts shape engagement, and explore what genuine participation could look like.

METHODS AND DATA

Research Paradigm

This study follows a pragmatic paradigm, choosing methods and data that are most useful for answering the central research question. Rather than being tied to a single method or theory, the study draws from a range of sources, including academic literature, policy documents, reports, and examples of youth-led initiatives. Pragmatism supports both objective data and subjective interpretation, allowing for a balanced and context-aware analysis that is grounded in real-world relevance (Maarouf, 2019; Turin et al., 2024).

Why Focus on South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe?

South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are the focus of this study for several important reasons. There is

a shared history, as all three countries were deeply involved in Africa's liberation movements and have strong Pan-African connections. Although South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are all part of the same regional group (SADC), they are vastly different in terms of economy, politics, and youth opportunities, this regional variety provides room for meaningful comparisons. All three countries have a large youth population and high youth unemployment, with youth migrating across borders in search of work, making them key players in regional integration. There is also a substantial amount of existing research and documentation relating to these countries, strengthening our study.

Research Design and Approach

This research is best described as a comparative desk study. It does not involve primary fieldwork, interviews, or ethnographic engagement, but instead synthesises secondary sources to understand youth-led Pan-Africanism in the region. The approach is qualitative and exploratory, using interpretive methods to examine how Pan-Africanism is understood, enacted, and challenged by youth in different national contexts.

This design supports the research goal of identifying patterns, contrasts, and shared experiences among youth in the three countries. It also allows for rich thematic insights without requiring direct access to participants (Creswell, 2013; Bhangu, 2023).

Data Collection and Analysis

Background theories and existing debates are collected from academic literature found on online databases that hold studies and articles relevant to our topic. Policy documents from the AU, SADC, and government websites are used to discover what policies say about youth and Pan-Africanism. Publications and reports from relevant organisations provide real-world data on youth education, employment, etc. Each country will be individually studied before completing a comparative analysis to find patterns in differences and alignments on key issues. The data will then be analysed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies and examines patterns and themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). This analysis method is well-suited to studies that seek to draw meaning from complex, qualitative material. While this study does not include direct

fieldwork, it centres youth perspectives by focusing on youth-led movements, public statements, social media campaigns, youth policy submissions, and existing youth-focused research in each country.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

By focusing on only three countries, we cannot speak for the entire continent. As a desk study, this research is limited by its reliance on existing documents and data. It cannot fully represent all youth experiences, especially those in rural or undocumented settings. The study also does not involve direct youth participation, which is a limitation in capturing real-life experiences. However, efforts have been made to centre youth perspectives wherever available.

Ethically, the study is minimal risk, but care is taken to ensure that interpretations remain culturally respectful and contextually grounded in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

FINDINGS

Youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe engage in Pan-Africanism and regional integration in diverse ways. Their level of involvement depends on the political, economic, and social situation in each country. While South African youth tend to be more active and visible, Zambian and Zimbabwean youth often face bigger barriers. This section explains what youth are doing in each country, gives examples of youth-led projects, and compares their strengths and challenges.

South Africa

South African youth have played a strong role in Pan-African and anti-colonial movements, both in the past and today. In the 1950s, 34-year-old Robert Sobukwe helped start the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and in 1976, students led the Soweto Uprising, which brought international attention to the fight against apartheid (Rodwell, 2024). These moments helped build a strong political awareness among youth, linked to African unity and liberation.

In recent years, student protests such as *#FeesMustFall* and *#RhodesMustFall* have focused on making education fairer and more African. These movements were not only about local issues - they also connected to broader Pan-African goals like decolonisation and social justice (Karadag, 2025). The ideas spread across borders and inspired

similar protests in other African countries (African Union, 2020).

South African youth also use art, music, and digital platforms to share Pan-African messages. For example, the 2015 People's March Against Xenophobia brought together youth groups like the SAIYA Youth Policy Committee and Students for Law and Justice to stand up for African unity (Section27, 2015). Online spaces give youth a way to connect with others across the continent and share their views (African Union, 2020).

Still, there are challenges. Most youth activism is based in cities and universities. Many youth are unemployed or disconnected from politics. Sometimes, tensions over immigration lead to xenophobia, which goes against Pan-African values (Kornegay, 2006; Crush, 2022).

Zambia

In Zambia, youth took part in early nationalist struggles and have been active in elections, but today their involvement in Pan-African efforts is more scattered (Musonda, 2022). Many face barriers like limited political access and few platforms to share their views. However, youth are finding new ways to contribute, especially through technology and business.

For example, tech hubs like *BongoHive* help young entrepreneurs build businesses that connect across the region. This shows a kind of "economic Pan-Africanism" where youth use digital tools to build regional networks (Bhorat et al., 2015). But not all youth can access these opportunities - those outside cities or without funding are often left out (African Union, 2020).

Zambian youth also take part in protests. One example is the 2021 Chingola mineworker protest, where many youth demanded fair payments from a foreign company. These actions show frustration with economic injustice and foreign control ideas often linked to Pan-African thinking (IndustriALL, 2021). Still, high youth unemployment and weak civic education limit long-term participation in regional projects (Mazimba et al., 2024).

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, youth involvement in Pan-Africanism is affected by the country's troubled political past and current economic crisis. While youth helped during the liberation struggle, today

many feel excluded or disillusioned (Musonda, 2022; Dzimiri, 2014).

Government programmes like the National Youth Service (NYS) were meant to teach Pan-African values but became linked with political violence and election manipulation (Duri, 2018). Zimbabwean youth have become hesitant about Pan-Africanism as the ruling party and therefore the government strongly identify themselves with Pan-Africanism, yet are associated with oppression, human rights violations, corruption, and nepotism (Oosterom and Gukurume, 2023, pp. 3).

Still, youth find other ways to connect with Pan-African ideas. They use art, music, and informal trade to express their identity and connect across borders. However, problems like poor access to education, unemployment, and migration make it hard for many to participate in more formal ways (Wangotse, 2025; Ndlovu, 2023).

Comparison Across Countries

Looking at all three countries, South African youth are the most visible and organised when it comes to Pan-Africanism. Their history of activism, better access to education, and urban networks give them more platforms to express themselves (Lekalake, 2016, p. 1). In Zambia, youth face more barriers but are beginning to build new pathways, especially through tech and business (Bhorat et al., 2015, p. 30). In Zimbabwe, youth are often shut out of formal politics and distrust Pan-African messages from the state, but still express solidarity through culture and informal work (Dzimiri, 2014).

Across all three, youth are limited by a lack of resources, few platforms to engage with older leaders, and economic struggles (African Union, 2020). Still, they are finding new ways, especially online, in culture, and through business to promote African unity. These informal and creative forms of Pan-Africanism are important and deserve more attention and support from governments and regional bodies.

Youth-led Definitions of Pan-Africanism Today

In recent years, African youth have redefined Pan-Africanism beyond its traditional political roots. Rather than focusing only on state-led unity or historical liberation struggles, youth are shaping a lived, everyday Pan-Africanism that includes digital activism, creative collaboration, and cross-border solidarity.

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For many youth,
Pan-Africanism means
recognising shared struggles
and using those connections
to build something new —
whether that is a business,
a cultural movement, or a
protest network.

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This youth-led Pan-Africanism is often informal, practical, and issue-driven. It emerges through online campaigns that promote shared African identity, cross-border cultural movements in music, fashion, and art, afro-entrepreneurship that links youth in different countries through digital platforms and Pan-African solidarity in protests and movements around democracy, education, and justice.

For many youth, Pan-Africanism means recognising shared struggles and using those connections to build something new — whether that is a business, a cultural movement, or a protest network. This version of Pan-Africanism is flexible and generationally distinct, placing more emphasis on real-life experiences than on institutional declarations.

ANALYSIS

Youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe contribute to Pan-Africanism and regional integration in diverse ways. Their involvement depends on opportunities available in politics, the economy, and culture. This section explores how youth engage across these three areas, what stops them from doing more, and what can be learned by comparing the countries.

The study reveals that the interest and involvement of youth in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia is shaped by factors such as institutional trust and credibility, the political environment, as well as economic and social development.

Political Participation

In South Africa, youth have more space to get involved in political activism, especially through protests and student-led campaigns. Movements like *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* show how youth use political organising to push for social justice and African unity (Karadag, 2025). Although these protests focused on universities, they sparked wider debates across Africa. Youth are also part of civil society organisations and sometimes influence policy, although few are part of formal political decision-making (African Union, 2020, p. 99).

In Zambia, youth vote and take part in elections, but are often under-represented in political spaces. Many do not trust political leaders or feel that they have little influence over decisions. Some youth engage through protest or informal activism, like the 2021 mineworker demonstration (IndustriALL, 2021). However, a lack of civic education and few youth-led political platforms mean their involvement is limited (Mazimba et al., 2024).

Zimbabwean youth face even more serious barriers. Though the state promotes Pan-Africanism in speeches and youth programmes like the National Youth Service, these efforts are often tied to political manipulation (Duri, 2018). As a result, youth may feel alienated from politics and distrust messages about African unity. Political repression and fear also discourage open activism (Musonda, 2022, p. 19).

South African youth are politically active and visible, while Zambian youth are present but disconnected from leadership. In Zimbabwe, political engagement is stifled by fear and lack of trust, as well as being controlled by political forces.

Economic Participation

Youth in all three countries face high unemployment and limited economic opportunity, which affects how they engage with Pan-African goals. In Zambia, digital entrepreneurship is growing, supported by spaces like *BongoHive* which gives youth the tools to build businesses with regional connections (Bhorat et al., 2015, p. 30). This kind of

economic participation allows youth to contribute to regional integration in practical ways, especially in tech and trade.

In South Africa, some youths are also involved in Pan-African trade and creative industries, though the overall youth unemployment rate is extremely high, standing at 45.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Economic inequality and limited access to resources reduce the ability of many to take part in regional projects.

In Zimbabwe, the economic crisis has pushed youth into the informal sector. Although this allows for cross-border trade and cultural exchange, it is mostly done out of necessity, not by choice. The collapse of the formal economy has reduced long-term opportunities for regional cooperation (Wangotse, 2025).

Zambia shows some promise in youth entrepreneurship with a regional focus, while South African and Zimbabwean youth face more economic exclusion. In all three, lack of funding, support, and job security holds youth back from deeper Pan-African economic engagement.

Economic disparities between South Africa and its neighbours continue to shape opportunities for regional collaboration. While South African youth often access better infrastructure and funding, their Zambian and Zimbabwean counterparts rely on informal and cross-border economies. These imbalances may hinder equal participation in regional integration unless addressed through coordinated youth economic policies.

Cultural Participation

Cultural expression is one of the most dynamic ways youths connect with Pan-Africanism. In South Africa, protests like *#RhodesMustFall* had a strong cultural message, calling for decolonisation of education and an African-centred identity. Youth use music, art, social media, and protests to promote African unity and challenge colonial legacies (African Union, 2020, p. 12).

In Zimbabwe, youth use art, music, and informal platforms to express regional solidarity, even if they avoid formal political spaces. Culture becomes a safer outlet for Pan-African ideas when politics is repressive (Dzimiri, 2014, p. 443).

Zambian youth are less visible in Pan-African cultural activism but are participating in digital

spaces and entrepreneurship that reflect Pan-African values. However, cultural platforms for youth are not well developed, and there is limited state or institutional support for Pan-African creative expression.

South African youth are most active in Pan-African cultural activism, followed by Zimbabwean youth in informal spaces. Zambian youth are less culturally engaged due to fewer platforms and visibility. Social media remains a crucial site for youth-led Pan-Africanism, allowing rapid mobilisation, cross-border solidarity, and the spread of cultural movements. As digital spaces evolve, they will likely determine how youth define and sustain Pan-African networks beyond traditional political channels.

Barriers Across All Countries

Across all three countries, youth face major challenges that limit their ability to shape Pan-Africanism:

- **Lack of institutional support:** Youth-led initiatives often go unsupported by government or regional bodies (African Union, 2020, pp. 65-66).
- **High unemployment:** Economic hardship distracts youth from long-term activism or regional engagement.
- **Poor political representation:** Youth are often excluded from formal leadership and decision-making.
- **Distrust and repression:** In countries like Zimbabwe, political mistrust and state violence discourage youth participation.

Despite these issues, youth are redefining Pan-Africanism through new forms - digital activism, entrepreneurship, protest art, and cross-border exchange. These actions may not always fit formal definitions of regional integration, but they represent a grassroots and modern version of African unity.

Table 1 shows a side-by-side thematic country comparison of the themes discussed in this section.

CONCLUSION

Youth in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are reimagining Pan-Africanism through everyday practices that extend beyond state institutions. Despite facing unemployment, exclusion, and limited support, they continue to express

Table 1: **Summarised Thematic Analysis by Country**

THEME	South Africa	Zambia	Zimbabwe
Political	Highly visible but often co-opted by parties	Significant youth turnout; frustration post-election	Energetic activism under repression
Economic	Precarity despite political expression	NGO-based opportunities; limited systemic change	Informal economy; deep structural poverty
Cultural	Rich digital and creative culture	Strong community-based identity	Diaspora-driven cultural activism
Digital Platforms	Social media is central to activism	Used for issue awareness	Used for mobilisation, despite restrictions
Pan-African Vision	Aspirational, connected to the past and the future	Practical and community-grounded	Resilient, often framed through diaspora lenses

Pan-African ideals through activism, art, entrepreneurship, and digital connection. South African youth remain prominent in political and cultural spaces, though still constrained by inequality and xenophobia. Zambian youth are leveraging digital tools and entrepreneurship to connect regionally, while Zimbabwean youth, despite repression, channel Pan-African values through informal and creative avenues.

Together, these experiences reveal that Pan-Africanism today is not confined to official declarations or policy documents, it is being lived and redefined by young Africans themselves. To realise the full potential of this transformation, governments, regional institutions, and civil society must create supportive environments that value youth perspectives and leadership.

The African Union and SADC should institutionalise youth participation by creating youth policy co-design units and allocating budgetary quotas for youth-led initiatives. This would transform youth from policy subjects into policy co-authors, ensuring regional decisions reflect their priorities. To strengthen youth contributions to Pan-Africanism and regional integration, the following steps should be taken:

Include youth in policymaking: Governments and regional organisations such as the AU and SADC should establish genuine participatory mechanisms for youth, ensuring that their involvement moves beyond symbolic consultation. — **South Africa:** Strengthen local and national

youth councils by mandating youth representation in municipal forums and national advisory boards. Build on existing structures like the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) by linking them to African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) youth networks.

- **Zambia:** Establish youth consultative platforms at the district and provincial levels to inform national development plans. Partner with universities and innovation hubs to channel youth policy proposals into formal decision-making.
- **Zimbabwe:** Rebuild trust in youth structures by reforming the National Youth Service and creating non-partisan youth forums that include independent youth leaders, cultural workers, and entrepreneurs.

Support youth entrepreneurship and innovation: Provide funding, mentorship, and infrastructure, especially in rural and marginalised areas to enable youth to develop regional businesses and digital projects.

- **South Africa:** Expand access to microgrants and digital incubators for township and rural youth, linking them to SADC regional markets through trade fairs and online platforms.
- **Zambia:** Scale up successful models like BongoHive by integrating them into national industrialisation and innovation strategies. Provide targeted funding for youth-led enterprises that engage in cross-border trade or technology collaboration.

— **Zimbabwe:** Facilitate regional trade training and simplify border regulations for informal youth traders. Partner with NGOs to create mobile entrepreneurship training units that reach rural youth.

Invest in education that promotes African unity:

Incorporate Pan-African principles, African history, and regional languages into curricula to foster cross-border understanding and solidarity.

— **South Africa:** Embed Pan-African studies, African languages, and regional cooperation modules within secondary and tertiary curricula. Encourage student exchange programs with other SADC states.

— **Zambia:** Update technical and vocational education to include entrepreneurship and digital literacy, enabling youth to participate in regional value chains.

— **Zimbabwe:** Revise civic education curricula to separate Pan-African ideals from partisan propaganda and restore its credibility among youth.

Promote cultural exchange programmes:

Support youth-led cultural initiatives in music, art, and media that strengthen regional relationships and challenge xenophobia.

— **South Africa:** Fund youth-led arts, film, and music projects that promote African solidarity, supported by national arts councils and SADC cultural grants.

— **Zambia:** Create a national digital platform to highlight youth innovation, connecting creatives and entrepreneurs across borders.

— **Zimbabwe:** Support regional arts residencies and community radio initiatives that promote youth dialogue on migration, identity, and unity.

Address political mistrust and repression: Youth programmes must prioritise empowerment over political control, ensuring freedom of expression and participation.

— **South Africa:** Implement civic education programs focused on non-violence and social cohesion to reduce xenophobia and strengthen Pan-African values.

— **Zambia:** Introduce legal protections for youth activists and ensure that public consultations include rural and marginalised voices.

— **Zimbabwe:** Guarantee political freedoms for youth organisations and create independent

oversight mechanisms to prevent their co-optation.

Tackle xenophobia and promote regional solidarity:

Launch public awareness campaigns and youth dialogues to address anti-African sentiment and build mutual respect within regional migration zones.

Across all three countries, governments should support youth-led regional collaborations. SADC could establish a Youth Integration Fund to finance cross-border initiatives in entrepreneurship, creative industries, and civic education. Universities and civil society organisations should facilitate joint youth summits to exchange knowledge, document experiences, and co-design policies from the bottom up.

This research raises several important questions for the future:

— How can digital platforms be better used to connect youth across Africa in practical, not just symbolic, ways?

— What role can regional bodies like the African Union play in holding governments accountable to youth inclusion?

— How can informal youth-led movements – like artists, traders, and online activists – be supported without being co-opted or repressed?

— What does a truly youth-driven version of Pan-Africanism look like, and how can it shape the next generation of regional cooperation?

Future research should prioritise participatory and field-based methods to deepen understanding of youth-led Pan-Africanism. Interviews, focus groups, and workshops with youth organisations, policymakers, and creatives could reveal how young Africans interpret and enact Pan-African ideals in practice. Comparative studies that include marginalised groups, such as rural, LGBTQ+, or working-class youth would provide a more inclusive understanding of regional integration. Finally, exploring the evolving role of digital technology and diaspora youth networks could illuminate how Pan-Africanism will continue to adapt in the next decade.

Future research should also explore the growing influence of diaspora youth, who play a vital role in linking African and global Pan-African networks. Through digital media, remittances, and activism

abroad, diaspora youth are extending the reach of Pan-Africanism and reshaping its transnational dimensions. As digital access expands, online platforms are likely to become even more central to Pan-African youth engagement. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, mobile finance, and virtual collaboration spaces could

further democratize participation, enabling youth across borders to co-create policy ideas, cultural projects, and economic networks in real time. Future work should adopt an intersectional lens to capture how gender, sexuality, and geography shape youth engagement in Pan-Africanism, ensuring more inclusive understandings of regional identity.

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Integration of Pan-Africanism and Regionalism in African Higher Education: A Cross-Disciplinary Study at the University of Johannesburg

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Abstract

This paper critically examines pedagogical ways to integrate Pan-Africanism across different disciplines at the University of Johannesburg such as Economics, Politics, Law, Medicine, Science, and Engineering. This is to foster African identity, unity, and development of Pan-Africanism through the University Curricula. This aligns with the call for a decolonized South African higher education and across the continent. This research aims to explore the opportunities and challenges faced within various disciplines in fostering Pan-Africanism. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. A literature review and a structured survey of n=44 respondents, which consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The participants included students (undergraduates and postgraduates), alumni, and academics. Findings suggested a common lack of exposure to Pan-Africanism, as 52.3% of survey participants indicated that they were “somewhat familiar,” while 25% reported “not familiar at all.” The findings further indicated that Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration are transformative and feasible; however, practical application lacks and varies by disciplines as in economics, politics, and law. They are very theoretical as compared to Medicine and Science as is evident in these disciplines. Pan-Africanist pedagogies would play a pivotal role in critically examining colonial history, different cultural narratives, collaborations of African countries, and curriculum integration.

This study concludes that integration into university teaching remains fragmented, underdeveloped, and lacking in systematic implementation across disciplines.

Keywords: African identity, African Unity, Curriculum, Decolonization, Diaspora, Epistemological frameworks, Pan-Africanism, Regional Integration, Interdisciplinary Studies

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks across multiple academic disciplines represents a critical frontier in the ongoing decolonization of South African higher education. Pan-Africanism, as both an intellectual movement and a political philosophy, encompasses the unity of African peoples, the celebration of African identity, and the promotion of African solutions to continental challenges. The University of Johannesburg, as a leading South African institution, finds itself at the intersection of historical colonial legacies and contemporary calls for educational transformation intensified by movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. This transformation requires a fundamental reimagining of how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and applied across various academic disciplines, including History, Science, Economics, Law, Medicine, Politics, Culture, and Engineering. The implementation of Pan-Africanist pedagogies across these diverse fields presents both opportunities and challenges, from centring African narratives in History to recognizing indigenous knowledge systems in Science and Engineering, incorporating African economic philosophies like Ubuntu in Economics, exploring African customary law in Legal education, acknowledging traditional healing practices in Medicine, examining African governance models in Political Science, and celebrating African intellectual traditions in Cultural studies.

This research seeks to address the question: How can Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks be effectively integrated across different academic disciplines at the University of Johannesburg to enhance critical thinking about African identity, unity, and development among undergraduate students? With that in mind, this paper critically examines the integration of Pan-Africanism and regionalism within higher education at the University of Johannesburg, employing the mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings reveal a significant gap in the

understanding of Pan-Africanism, this underscores the need for intentional curricular reform that will embed Pan-African ideals into the academic programmes. The study anticipates several key findings based on preliminary observations and existing literature. Different academic disciplines are expected to demonstrate varying degrees of receptiveness to Pan-Africanist pedagogical integration, with Humanities and Social Sciences potentially showing greater flexibility compared to traditionally structured fields like Engineering or Medicine. Undergraduate students are likely to demonstrate increased engagement and critical thinking when exposed to Pan-Africanist pedagogies that connect their academic learning to African contexts, manifesting through improved participation, enhanced research interest in African topics, and stronger identification with African intellectual traditions. However, significant institutional barriers are expected, including resistance from faculty trained in traditional Western pedagogical approaches, limitations in appropriate teaching materials and resources, and structural constraints within existing curriculum frameworks.

Despite these challenges, the integration of Pan-Africanist pedagogies is anticipated to demonstrate significant potential for transforming educational outcomes, fostering African consciousness, and preparing students to address contemporary African challenges through interdisciplinary approaches. This research will proceed through a comprehensive literature review examining existing scholarship on Pan-Africanism in education and decolonization of curricula, followed by a qualitative approach combining surveys of undergraduate and postgraduate students with qualitative interviews of faculty members and document analysis of current curricula. The findings will be analysed through the lens of decolonial theory and African-centred epistemological frameworks to provide recommendations for effective integration of Pan-Africanist pedagogies across disciplines. The conclusion will address both analytical implications for understanding decolonized education and policy implications for institutional transformation

while identifying emerging questions for future research, including the long-term impacts of Pan-Africanist pedagogies on graduate outcomes and the potential for scaling such approaches across the South African higher education system.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines a contextual historical and institutional background of Pan-Africanism and regional integration through the African lens. Pan-Africanism and regional integration are not recent concepts or trending themes, their ideological roots can be traced back to early resistance movements across the African continent, even if the terms themselves were not explicitly used. This literature review seeks to improve and understand the evolution of concepts within educational contexts. While Pan-Africanism and regional integration initially emerged as political and cultural responses to colonial domination dating back decades, their relevance extends beyond political space and into the academic sphere. However, a great number of African higher institutions have resisted to meaningfully decolonize their curricula and rethink the knowledge systems. This could not necessarily be due to a lack of vision or confidence, but often due to the fact that institutional uncertainties and internalized doubts about the legitimacy of African knowledge systems have been deeply rooted. To ground this inquiry, it is important to first fully conceptualize Pan-Africanism and regional integration in their broader historical and ideological aspects before questioning their potential integration into education.

1.1 Conceptualizing Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration

Pan-Africanism is a complex idea that serves both as a philosophical lens and a concrete goal for Africans. It is grounded in centuries of common history, cultural traditions, beliefs, and values, and is seen as an essential means of overcoming imperialist oppression and dismantling the worldwide system of white supremacy. Foundations of Pan-Africanism are rooted in movements and global initiatives led by influential figures such as Wilberforce, Blyden, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere. Their efforts were to promote unity, collective political action among Africans, and cultural revival; it also traces back to the early anti-colonial movements and the Organization of

African Unity to the African Union. The struggle for economic and political liberation remains in Africa (Asiedu, 2020). As Adi (2018) defines, it is “an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide” and is grounded in the belief that unity is important for social, economic, and political progress. Emphasizing the importance of interconnectedness for all of African descent, on both the continent and in the diaspora. Despite its significance, Pan-Africanism is marginal in higher education curricula. Ayodele (2025) argues that although it plays a significant role in shaping discussions of self-governance of African countries, its meaning and purpose have been poorly integrated into the academic content. This limits the opportunities for students to critically engage with African-centred ideas and perspectives that challenge the dominant Western policies and ideas. On the other side of the spectrum is regional integration, a concept by which geographically contiguous countries can collaborate to enhance economic cooperation, security, and shared values, complementing Pan-Africanism as a policy and development tool.

1.2 South African epistemological frameworks in Higher Institutions

South Africa is known as a post-colonial country, having gained true independence in the year 1994 and the ruling of the first Black president, Nelson Mandela. Reforms have been previously introduced

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to decolonize the education system in a way that welcomes the major Black communities of the country, promoting transformation, inclusivity, and justice. This also includes the recalling of Afrikaans in most schools and the incorporation of the South African local languages, today recognized as the official languages, emphasizing linguistic diversity and curriculum decolonization that have been historically heavily molded by Eurocentric models. The shift has tried to respond to the challenges presented by a heterogeneous student body in South Africa's historically unequal education system. Epistemological frameworks such as Inclusive Pedagogy (Kemende, 2023), Ubuntu Pedagogy (Ngubane and Makua, 2021), and Humanizing Pedagogy (Ayman and Elsadiq, 2021) seek to reflect these principles. The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2025) recognized curriculum transformation by introducing a national Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) to force South African higher institutions to embed Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks within academic programs. This presents a great way for institutions to align with the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) standards launched in 2023 and promoting the integration of Pan-Africanist pedagogies through Communities of Practice (CoPs).

1.3 Integration in the University of Johannesburg

The University of Johannesburg (UJ), officially established in 2005, is a landmark merger between the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), and the Soweto and East Rand campuses of Vista University. As one of the institutions in post-apartheid SA, it continues to embody transformation, academic excellence, and accessibility to quality decolonized education while also being a multicultural, inclusive, and dynamic institution with students and academic staff from all walks of life. This review tries to investigate the existing integration of Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks, their institutional reception, and the degree to which various academic disciplines have heeded the call for change in their curricula. It aims to understand whether the concept frameworks are critically implemented at UJ, assessing the barriers and successes across its eight faculties: Law, Health Sciences, Science, Humanities, Engineering &

Built Environment, Education, Business, and Art, Design & Architecture, which offer a rich range of disciplines that interdisciplinary students can enrol in. The Specialized Institutes and centres have been developed at the University of Johannesburg, such as the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC). This has been dedicated to the promotion of research, events, teaching, and production of knowledge related to Pan-Africanism (Garvey, 2018). It is aimed at educating and informing public opinion on economics, African politics, and building bridges with Africa's diaspora. Postgraduate courses that focus on Pan-Africanism, the African Union, and philosophy (Garvey, 2018).

1.4 Pan-Africanism Integration Across Academic Disciplines

This section summarizes, analyses, and synthesizes the ideas of scholars on the idea of Pan-Africanism integration in academia, successes, and challenges in light of implemented efforts. Different disciplines and subdisciplines are chosen and reviewed.

1.4.1 Politics & Law

Studies show that while law faculties curricula include indigenous law and international modules to explicitly integrate the Pan-African philosophy remains absent. In contrast, at the University of Cape Town, there has been an integration into African Studies curricula and political science studies by dedicating modules focusing on African thoughts, politics, or Pan-Africanism. The courses explore the historical developments of African thoughts through the thinkers like Nkrumah, Du Bois, Sobukwe, and Nyerere. Academia and researchers in South Africa have been engaging actively in research on Pan-Africanism, and this has been contributing to the knowledge on how Pan-Africanism can be integrated in books, journals, and policies to decolonize the education system (Haffajee, 2023). Furthermore, there has been progress, evidenced by law curricula that include modules on international law, which educate students on international legislation, including that of the African Union, alongside Indigenous law that provides context to the origins and transformations of African legal systems throughout the colonial period; however, they do not include the literal studies of Pan-Africanism. The African American Academy (AAA) and the African Union International

School (AUIS) demonstrate a unique contribution to black globalization through the principles of Pan-Africanism.

Lumumba-Kasongo criticize African higher education as he states that it is still deeply shaped by the Western curricula and suggests that models such as “Pax Africana” be embedded across concepts of modules in political studies, as this urges coherent links between the diaspora communities and African states through Pan-Africanism. He also states that lines must be blurred between the African knowledge systems and Western thought.

However, there are pedagogical challenges, as discussed by Karadag (2025), that reveal the persistency of Eurocentric bias, that Western narratives are prioritized in the textbooks, and this limits the ability for African students to see themselves as people who can drive change and unite Africa. Asiedu (2020) also points out the challenges such as governance issues, underfunding, the colonial mindsets that are still lingering in African minds, lack of youth empowerment in our education systems, and limited Afrocentric curricula. Asiedu (2020) states that there is a need for comparative research on Pan-Africanism’s impact and that we must also use digital platforms to encourage African solidarity. While politics show progress towards Pan-African inclusion, law is still bound by Western epistemic frameworks, this imbalance therefore highlights a critical need to integrate Pan-Africanism to legal studies to align with governance systems, decolonial aspirations, and Africa’s own history.

1.4.2 Economics

In Economics, the integration seems to be stronger than in law as scholars emphasize Pan-Africanist economic models such as AfCFA as a teaching tool for decolonisation. The Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks highlight collective self-reliance and economic integration as responses to colonial legacies of exploitation and structural dependence (Sylvester and Anthony, 2014; Fosu, 1999). The integration of Pan-Africanism into the economics curricula would mean students would be able to critically analyse the historical fragmentation of Africa’s economic systems previously under global capitalism and to evaluate progressive frameworks such as the

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) that seeks to foster industrial development, advance regional integration, and infra-African trade (Nkala and Monyae, 2023; Nshimbi, 2019). Scholars such as Okumu (2011) argued that epistemological frameworks in economics ought to critically dissect the approaches in which cross-border integration, harmonization of immigration regulations, and trade complementarity relate to African development and sovereignty (Nshimbi, 2019). Additionally, African students would be encouraged to carefully think about alternative, community-based economic systems grounded on resource sovereignty, solidarity resources, and Afrocentric values through Pan-African economic thought that encourages re-evaluation of capitalist development standards (Biney, 2008). In pedagogical perspectives, this implies mirroring student minds to great minds like those of Kwame Nkurumah and Julius Nyerere, whose philosophies challenged neoliberal norms and advocated for united continental planning. Notably, scholars such as Nkala and Monyae (2023) emphasize the value of teaching Pan-African principles in early education to shape future leaders who will view economic liberation as a continental rather than national mission. The classrooms, lecture halls, and libraries can be media that allow students to design economic strategies that prioritize decolonial economics, critical trade, and integration based on justice in order to align education with the broader Pan-African goal of shared prosperity and unity. As Fosu (1999) rightly emphasized, economic liberation ought to be perceived not only as a national or regional vision but as a Pan-African imperative. Collectively, the literature highlights that while the economics discipline has made great strides to incorporate Pan-African thought, there is a gap in sustaining the efforts to ensure that economics education fully reflects the African values of equity, unity, and shared prosperity.

1.4.3 Science

Inscienceeducation, Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks aim to dissent from the dominant Eurocentric paradigms by accentuating African ideologies and philosophies such as Ubuntu ecology and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which foreground sustainability, interconnection, and community (Branch, 2018; Chilisa, 2017). This approach challenges the notion that science is

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In the medical discipline, Pan-Africanist pedagogy has been explored through the inclusion of African Traditional Medicine (ATM) alongside Western biomedical paradigms, this has proven to align medical education with cultural relevance and accessibility.

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value-neutral by acknowledging the political and historical foundations of scientific knowledge, and supports inclusive curricula that dismantle the biases and stereotypes that have marginalized African student's engagement and perspectives (Obeng-Odoom, 2018; Ijekeye, 2024). In environmental sciences or the broad sustainability science, Pan-African pedagogy situates ecological challenges within African contexts, challenges that do not respect borders, thus validating local knowledge and strengthens identity and unity by reinforcing detachment from Eurocentric norms and methodologies (Chilisa, 2017), and calls for inquiry-based, place-based learning grounded in local realities and intergenerational knowledge (Fon et al., 2024). Practical efforts, such as the National Research Foundation's (NRF) program on Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK), exemplifies the practicality of this integration in fields like climate change, food security, and traditional medicine (NRF, 2012). While resistance persists due to perceptions of African Indigenous Knowledge as unscientific and universally inapplicable, studies such as one conducted to review the

University of Zimbabwe's integration of AIK in their curriculum, confirmed the persisting challenges in the transformative potential of Pan-Africanist science education (Chabaya and Chabaya, 2023). Overall, the literature reflects growth in awareness in science education that promotes inquiry based learning, acknowledging local contexts, and positions African knowledge as central rather than a supplementary.

1.4.4 Medicine

In the medical discipline, Pan-Africanist pedagogy has been explored through the inclusion of African Traditional Medicine (ATM) alongside Western biomedical paradigms, this has proven to align medical education with cultural relevance and accessibility. The World Health Organization defines ATM as culturally-rooted knowledge, skills, and practices that are based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences of different cultures, whether explicable or not, and that are used to maintain or improve health or to prevent, diagnose, or treat physical and mental illnesses; remaining central to the lives of many South Africans, especially in rural areas where traditional healers dominate (Mthethwa et al., 2025; Ikhoyameh et al., 2024). Some scholars believe incorporation of the ATM in higher institution curricula promotes the Pan-Africanist objective of epistemic decolonization by asserting true African identity and knowledge systems. The University of KwaZulu-Natal provides a strong example, having established a department within its Health Sciences Faculty that focuses on ATM research and education, demonstrating the feasibility and impact of such integration (Mthethwa et al., 2025). As effective and practical as the integration has been, challenges have emanated from a lack of scientific validation, colonial-era stigma casting ATM inferior to Western medicine, and spiritual tensions with dominant religious beliefs (Ikhoyameh et al., 2024). Despite these obstacles, scholars advocate for collaborative training programs that will incorporate both traditional and biomedical practitioners to legitimize ATM, effectively reducing stigma against ATM, and ultimately include Pan-Africanism in ATM as an approach that is not only philosophically aligned with African identity but also practically oriented towards fair healthcare, knowledge justice, and successful integration in curricula without hurdles.

It is with apparent evidence that Pan-Africanism can somewhat be integrated into epistemological frameworks according to the reviewed literature; however, some scholars have highlighted major resistance aligned with this integration. These have been highlighted as substantial resistance, structural barriers, and lingering colonial paradigms that limit full realization. As Pan-Africanism continues to be one of the calls for Africans, central to these calls is the desire to foreground African philosophies, histories, and pedagogies as part of an educational transformation project. Pan-Africanist pedagogy is rooted in African liberation struggles and emphasizes unity, self-determination, and the use of indigenous knowledge systems in both teaching and learning. Hence, this study critically asks, how can Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks be meaningfully woven into all academic disciplines at the University of Johannesburg, and what could hinder this integration? Overall, the literature suggests that while the integration efforts in medicine show promise, for full realization, systematic support and continued decolonial commitment is required.

1.4.5 Engineering

The integration of Pan-Africanism and regional integration concepts into engineering education requires transformative pedagogical approaches that connect technical learning with Africa's socio-political development imperatives. Kanyarusoke (2018) argues that engineering education in sub-Saharan Africa must embrace transformative teaching methodologies that enable students to address authentic regional problems through collaborative, context-specific solutions that transcend national boundaries. This approach aligns with Bekele, Amponsah, and Karkouti (2023) in their advocacy for incorporating African philosophical frameworks into higher education technology integration, emphasizing Ubuntu principles of interconnectedness and collective problem-solving that mirror Pan-African ideals. Practical implementation can draw from successful models such as the African Engineering Education Association's regional networks, which facilitate cross-border student exchanges and collaborative research projects addressing infrastructure challenges spanning multiple African nations, while case-based learning modules can examine landmark Pan-African engineering initiatives like

the East African Power Pool or the West African Gas Pipeline project (Vhumbunu, Rudigi and Mawire, 2023). Furthermore, Nhemachena, Hlabangane, and Matowanyika, (2020) demonstrate how engineering curricula can incorporate African indigenous knowledge systems alongside Western technical frameworks, creating pedagogical spaces where students explore how traditional African engineering solutions, such as the ancient irrigation systems of the Nile Valley or the architectural innovations of Great Zimbabwe, inform contemporary regional integration projects. This multidisciplinary approach not only strengthens technical competencies but also cultivates an African engineering identity that values continental unity and collaborative innovation as essential professional values. Collectively, these perspectives highlight that engineering education can serve innovation and as a catalyst for regional integration when rooted in indigenous frameworks and Pan-Africanism.

Across these disciplines, literature shows that epistemological Pan-Africanist frameworks have grown, but their adoption remains uneven due to colonial legacies, structural barriers, and limited institutional commitment, which continues to hinder curricular transformation. While politics, economics, and engineering display emerging examples, law, science, and medicine continue facing ideological and structural resistance. Politics and law grapple with theoretical inclusion while economics and engineering show tangible efforts of integration, this indicates disciplinary disparities in the application of Pan-Africanist frameworks. Overall, the reviewed study affirms that the meaningful integration of Pan-Africanism into the higher education curricula does not only demand curriculum reform but shifts in pedagogy, institutional culture, and economic values. This gap frames the central question of this paper: How can Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks be effectively integrated across different academic disciplines at the University of Johannesburg to enhance critical thinking about African identity, unity, and development among undergraduate students?

METHODS

This study employed a survey data collection method, collecting both quantitative and quali-

tative data through closed-ended and open-ended questions. The survey was designed to capture perceptions, experiences, and opinions on Pan-Africanism education among students and academic staff at the University of Johannesburg. The online survey was distributed via WhatsApp using a convenience sampling strategy, and yielded a sample of 44 participants, comprising undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as academic staff.

The survey included Likert scale questions to collect quantitative data, which will be analysed using descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and percentages. This analysis aims to identify trends and patterns in participants' perceptions and experiences of Pan-Africanism education. Additionally, the survey included open-ended questions, providing rich qualitative data that will be analysed using thematic analysis. This approach will help identify recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative data, offering insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding Pan-Africanism education.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative data, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pan-Africanism education, highlighting its key characteristics, trends, and patterns, as well as areas for improvement.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study unveil a wealth of insights and perspectives from respondents on integrating Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines. Through their responses, our participants shared their thoughts, experiences, and ideas on how to effectively incorporate Pan-African principles into teaching and learning. For instance, in response to the question, "How would you, as a lecturer or professor, foster discussions and learn about Pan-Africanism in the classroom?" One respondent provided the following answer: "I would encourage my students to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives and explore Pan-African solutions to global challenges. Additionally, I would incorporate readings, videos, and guest speakers from various African regions. Lastly, I would create safe spaces for open dialogue, promoting respectful debate where my students can share their insights, knowledge, and experiences". Several participants suggested

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innovative approaches to teaching Pan-Africanism, such as using interactive methods like debates, case studies, and storytelling to highlight African histories, leaders, and liberation movements. These approaches aim to foster a deeper understanding of Pan-African principles and their relevance to students' lives.

Survey data from this research further reveals a general lack of exposure to Pan-Africanist thought among students. Specifically, 52,3% of respondents indicated they were only somewhat familiar with the concept of Pan-Africanism, while 25% reported no familiarity at all. These figures suggest that Pan-Africanism is not being adequately introduced to young adults who represent the future leadership and development of the continent.

In response to a question about how Pan-Africanist teaching methods might enhance critical thinking regarding African identity, unity, and development, students suggested that such approaches would enable them to "critically examine colonial histories and cultural narratives." Proposed methods for increasing exposure to Pan-Africanism included integrating it into existing curricula through dedicated topics, offering short courses, promoting cross-border research collaborations, and organizing events and discussions centred on Pan-African themes.

The following visual representations provide further insight into the study's findings, highlighting key trends and patterns in the data.

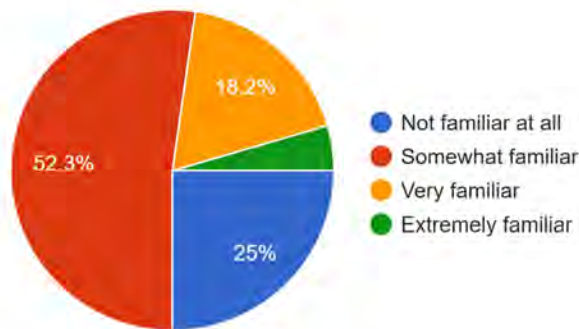


Figure 1: **A pie chart displaying different levels of familiarity with Pan-Africanist theories among 44 respondents from the University of Johannesburg.**

A total of 52.3% reported being “Somewhat familiar” (indicating some knowledge), 25% of the respondents were “Not familiar at all with the Pan-Africanism theme”, 18.2% were “Very familiar”, and 4.5% indicated they were “Extremely familiar with the theme”.

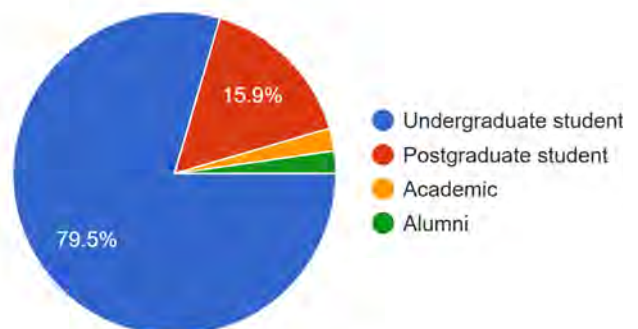


Figure 2: **A pie chart depicting survey respondents' academic levels across the University of Johannesburg.**

Out of the total 44 survey participants, 79.5% were undergraduate students (encompassing students studying diploma and bachelor qualifications), while 15.9% were post-graduate students (a variety of post-graduate diploma, honours, master's, and PhD students) and only 4.6% identified as either academics or alumni. These respondents have highlighted different familiarities with Pan-Africanist theories.

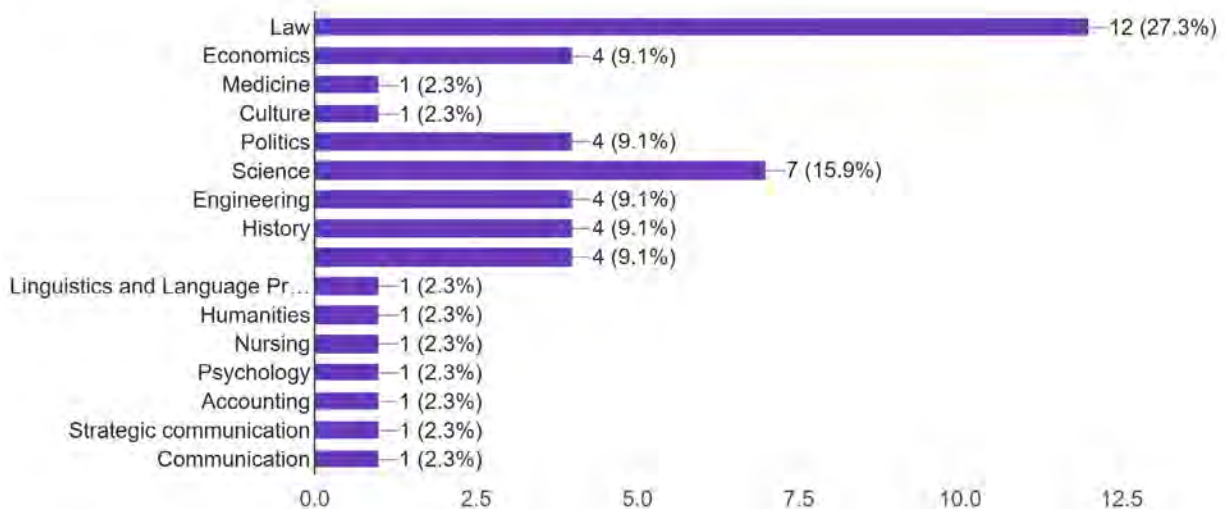


Figure 3: **A horizontal bar chart reflecting the academic disciplines of the different survey respondents at the University of Johannesburg.**

Respondents had the opportunity to select disciplines they study and/or teach in. Respondents were allowed to select multiple fields provided they have been exposed to such disciplines before in the same institution. The Law discipline was the most represented (27.3%), followed by Science (15.9%), and multiple fields such as Economics, Engineering, and History. Disciplines such as those in the major

Humanities faculty and Medicine were each represented at 2.3% each.

A high confidence in the incorporation of Pan-Africanist pedagogies was observed in the Law (75%), Culture (70.5%), Politics (70.5%), and History (68.2%) fields. Moderate confidence for successful integration of the themes was seen in the Economics (59.1%) and Science (38.6%) fields.

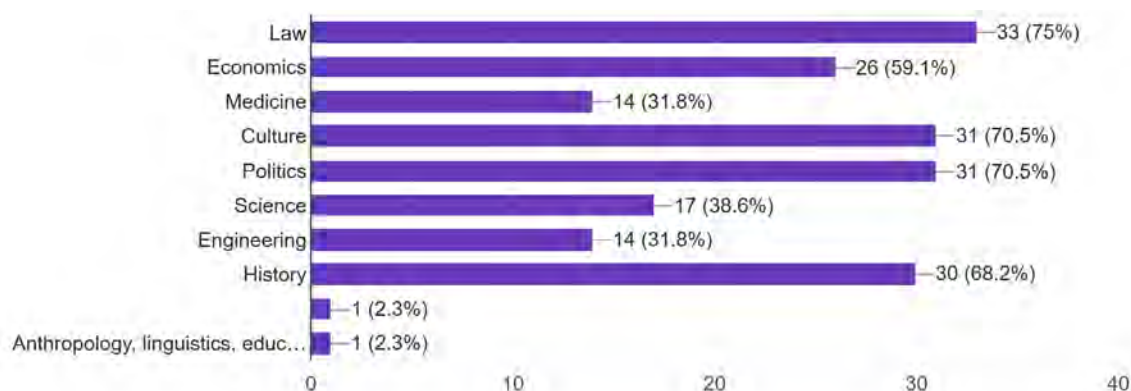


Figure 4: **A horizontal bar chart showing survey participants' perspectives on which academic disciplines would benefit most from incorporating Pan-Africanist pedagogies.**

A low confidence was observed in the fields of Medicine and Engineering by only 31.8% of the total respondents. Anthropology, Education, and Linguistics appeared at 2.3%.

Respondents (n=44) identified challenges hindering integration and practice of Pan-Africanist ideas, with the most common challenge cited as discipline resistance (34.1%) and ideological conflicts

(20.5%) that reflects the friction existing between Pan-Africanist perspectives and existing ideologies. Leadership issues stand at (11.4%), most respondents highlight less knowledge (13.6%) on themes such as Pan-Africanism and Regional integration, Western influence and Disunity (6.8%) were recognized as minor challenges while unspecified (2.3%) represent individual(s) with no opinion.

Table 1: **Frequency table of challenges highlighted by respondents on the integration of Pan-Africanism across different academic disciplines.**

Challenges	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Discipline resistance	15	34.1%	34.1%
Ideological conflict	9	20.5%	54.5%
Disunity	3	6.8%	61.4%
Less knowledge	6	13.6%	75.0%
Western influence	3	6.8%	81.8%
No innovation	2	4.5%	86.4%
Unspecified	1	2.3%	88.6%
Leadership issues	5	11.4%	100.-%

Respondents highlighted dominant strategies such as revision of curriculum (43.2%) to better reflect Pan-African perspectives, and Open discussions (15.9%) such as seminars, workshops, public lectures, debates, and the highlight of the Africa-by Bus initiative as an example to normalize Pan-African discourse. The unspecified (15.9%) reflects respondents who had no clue and/or opinion in

integration strategies. The introduction of new Pan-Africanist modules was highlighted at 13.6% while the incorporation of the theme in existing modules strategy was consistent across 6.8% of respondents. Cross border projects (2.3%) refer to collaborations such as research, and development projects across African nations while language inclusion (2.3%) highlights linguistic diversity.

Table 2: **Frequency table of Integration strategies recognized and highlighted by the 44 survey respondents.**

Integration Strategy	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Cross-border projects	1	2.3%	2.3%
Existing module integration	3	6.8%	9.1%
Language inclusion	1	2.3%	11.4%
New module	6	13.6%	25.0%
Open discussions	7	15.9%	40.9%
Revise curriculum	19	43.2%	84.1%
Unspecified	7	15.9%	100.0%

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The integration of Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines presents a complex landscape, marked by both potential benefits and significant challenges. A critical examination of the findings reveals a stark contrast between the potential of Pan-Africanism to promote African unity, identity, and development, and the limited exposure to Pan-Africanist thought among students. The survey data highlights a concerning gap in education, with 77.3% of respondents demonstrating limited familiarity with Pan-Africanism. This lack of exposure not only limits students' understanding of African identity and development but also perpetuates a lack of awareness about the importance of African unity. Furthermore, this educational gap may perpetuate a lack of awareness about the importance of African unity, identity, and development, ultimately limiting the potential for positive change. Therefore, it is essential to address this gap and provide students with opportunities to learn about and engage with Pan-Africanist ideas and perspectives.

The respondents' answers to open-ended questions revealed a strong emphasis on promoting critical thinking, cultural awareness, and inclusivity in the classroom when teaching Pan-Africanism, with one approach being the use of interactive methods like "case studies, and storytelling that highlight African histories, and liberation sentiments." This approach suggests a focus on experiential learning where students can connect theoretical concepts to real-world

issues and historical contexts. By encouraging students to critically engage with contemporary issues through group projects and reflections that connect Pan-African ideals to their "local and continental realities", the respondents demonstrated a commitment to creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that promotes deeper understanding and relevance. These approaches can help provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of Pan-Africanism and its relevance to various fields of study, ultimately fostering critical thinking and a deeper appreciation for African perspectives and experiences.

The respondent's answer to the question, "How would you, as a lecturer or professor, foster discussions and learning about Pan-Africanism in the classroom?" provides a comprehensive approach to integrating Pan-African principles into teaching and learning. Other respondents echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the importance of promoting critical thinking, cultural awareness, and inclusivity in the classroom. By encouraging students to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives and explore Pan-African solutions to global challenges, the respondent promotes critical thinking and challenges dominant perspectives. The incorporation of diverse resources, such as readings, videos, and guest speakers from various African regions, adds depth and nuance to the learning experience. Furthermore, creating safe spaces for open dialogue and respectful debate enables students to share their insights, knowledge, and

experiences, fostering a collaborative and inclusive learning environment. They also proposed encouraging students to critically engage with contemporary issues through group projects and reflections that connect Pan-African ideals to their local and continental realities. This multifaceted approach highlights the importance of diversity, representation, and critical thinking in promoting a deeper understanding of Pan-Africanism and its relevance to various fields, including medicine, culture, and science. Overall, the respondents' strategies demonstrate a commitment to creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that values diverse perspectives and promotes meaningful discussions.

Despite the potential benefits, several challenges to full-scale integration were identified. These include structural barriers within educational institutions, intellectual issues related to dominant Western paradigms, implementation difficulties, and cultural resistance both within and outside academic settings. Table 1 provides valuable insights into the obstacles faced when integrating Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines. The data reveals that "Discipline resistance" is the most significant challenge, accounting for 32.7% of the total challenges identified, followed closely by "Ideological conflict" at 18.4%. These findings suggest that resistance from within academic disciplines and differences in ideological perspectives are major barriers to integration. Furthermore, the presence of "Less knowledge" and "No innovation" as notable challenges highlights the need for education and innovative approaches. The repeated mention of "Leadership issues" also points to potential problems with leadership in addressing the integration of Pan-Africanism.

The table "Frequencies of Integration strategy" presents a comprehensive overview of the various strategies employed for integration, along with their respective frequencies and percentages. The data reveals that "Revise curriculum" is the most popular integration strategy, accounting for 40% of the total, followed by "Open discussions" and "Unspecified" strategies, both at 18%. The prevalence of "Revise curriculum" suggests that modifying existing curricula is a widely accepted approach to integration. The significant presence of "Open discussions" and "Unspecified" strategies indicates a need for further exploration and

clarification of integration methods. Ultimately, these strategies can help to decolonize the curriculum and promote a more inclusive and diverse learning environment, which is essential for critically teaching and learning Pan-Africanism across multiple disciplines.

The integration of Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of various challenges and strategies. This study highlights the potential benefits of critically teaching and learning Pan-Africanism across multiple disciplines, promoting African unity, identity, and development, while also revealing significant gaps in education and awareness. The findings underscore the need for discipline-specific strategies, innovative approaches, and leadership commitment to address the challenges of integration. By revising curricula, promoting open discussions, and exploring diverse integration strategies, educators can create a more inclusive and nuanced learning environment that values African perspectives and fosters critical thinking across various fields of study. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities and opportunities involved in integrating Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines, emphasizing the importance of ongoing research, dialogue, and critical pedagogy in this area.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges

The study encountered several limitations that impacted on its comprehensiveness and representativeness. Despite efforts to conduct a thorough investigation, the survey participants (only n=44) numbered less than 1% of the University of Johannesburg's population, which comprises over 50,000 students, academic staff, and support staff. This small sample size may have resulted in a biased or narrow reflection and representation of ideas and perspectives on Pan-Africanism and Regional integration into academic disciplines. Furthermore, the majority of survey participants were part of the Africa by Bus trip to Zambia, a Pan-African initiative organized by the faculty of Humanities at UJ. This limited the participant pool to individuals already exposed to Pan-Africanist ideas, excluding a significant portion of the

university community of students, academics, and support staff who did not participate in the trip. Additionally, the short time period for data collection limited the scope of the study to only a single round of qualitative data gathered through the survey responses. These factors collectively reduced the study's depth and breadth. Due to these limitations, the generalizability of the findings to the larger population is limited, and the results may not accurately reflect the views and experiences of the broader university community or other institutions. As a result, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings and attempting to extend the study to broader academic populations or institutions.

Future Recommendations

Future studies should prioritize addressing the limitations of this research by incorporating larger and more diverse sample sizes, representative of various stakeholders and institutions. This could involve surveying a broader range of participants across different disciplines, faculties, and institutions, and utilizing multiple methods of data collection, such as quantitative surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Comparative studies between institutions, disciplines or fields (for e.g., STEM vs. humanities), or countries could also provide valuable insights into the complexities and opportunities involved in integrating Pan-Africanism into academic disciplines. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could help identify the best practices and areas for improvement, while collaboration and knowledge-sharing between researchers, educators, and policymakers could facilitate the development of effective strategies for promoting inclusive education. By adopting these approaches, future research can build upon the findings of this study and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of Pan-Africanism in shaping academic disciplines.

CONCLUSION

This research has critically analysed how Pan-Africanist epistemological frameworks have been included into the University of Johannesburg's (UJ) multiple disciplinary curriculum, highlighting both the implementation's obstacles and its transformational potential. Drawing from both qualitative and quantitative data, the results show how incorporating Pan-Africanist pedagogies

may increase students' African identity, promote cultural affirmation, and improve critical engagement with African realities. This strategy fits with larger demands for educational reform throughout the continent and offers a feasible route for decolonising South African higher education curricula. With 77.3% of respondents claiming little knowledge with Pan-Africanist ideas, the survey also reveals notable gaps in exposure, which are frequently only filled by programs like UJ's Africa by Bus project. While subjects such as medicine and engineering encounter more opposition because of structural and ideological constraints originating from colonial legacies, disciplines including law, culture, politics, and history demonstrate excellent compatibility with Pan-Africanist integration.

These findings have significant ramifications for higher education policy and practice. The study emphasises the necessity for university administrators to create precise, implementable policy frameworks that give curricular change first priority. This includes requiring all faculties to incorporate Pan-Africanist courses or topics, which are backed by the Higher Education Practice Standards and Quality Assurance Framework of the Council on Higher Education. To promote research, training, and curriculum development, administrators should set aside funds to create specialised centres such as UJ's Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation. In fields where Eurocentric paradigms predominate, such as medicine and engineering, faculty members must be prepared with professional development programs to overcome opposition to African-centred pedagogies. To close the gap between Western and African epistemologies, these programs can include seminars on integrating indigenous African knowledge systems, such as Ubuntu ecology in science or traditional engineering solutions in engineering.

To add on, national policymakers should tie financing to quantifiable curriculum transformation progress in order to encourage institutions to support decolonisation objectives. This would entail changing the requirements for accreditation to include proof of Pan-Africanist integration, such as courses on African traditional medicine in the health sciences or African government models in political science. In order to facilitate the exchange of information and best

practices for the implementation of Pan-Africanist pedagogy, policymakers should also encourage cross-institutional cooperation, such as regional networks based on the African Engineering Education Association.

By offering empirical proof of the viability and difficulties of incorporating Pan-Africanist epistemologies, this study makes a substantial contribution to the larger conversation on decolonising education in South Africa and beyond. By providing a path for real-world application that prioritises African identity, unity, and development, it elevates the discussion above symbolic gestures. The study emphasises the necessity of specialised approaches that honour the particular requirements of every discipline while promoting a common goal of decolonised education by pointing out discipline-specific synergies and obstacles. The results are relevant to decolonisation efforts across the world and provide guidance for other post-colonial

settings where indigenous knowledge systems are marginalised by Eurocentric curriculum.

The long-term effects of Pan-Africanist pedagogies on graduate outcomes, namely their employability and contributions to African development and unity, should be the subject of future studies. While longitudinal research may evaluate the durability of curricular modifications, comparative studies across institutions and nations may shed further light on optimal practices. Scalability might also be improved by research into workable solutions for consistent yet genuine Pan-Africanist epistemological integration, such as standardised modules that maintain knowledge systems unique to a community. The question of whether Pan-Africanist epistemologies are appropriate for higher education has been replaced with how institutions may strategically use them to empower graduates and improve the intellectual and developmental landscape of Africa.

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The Future of Pan-Africanism: The Transformative Role of Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract

Pan-Africanism remains a vital framework for addressing Africa's historical fragmentation and advancing unity, self-determination, and economic sovereignty. Yet despite renewed efforts through initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), many of its ideals remain aspirational rather than institutionalised. This study argues that higher learning institutions (HLIs) hold transformative potential in bridging this gap between ideology and implementation. Using a qualitative, document-based approach, the paper analyses policy frameworks, institutional strategies, and academic literature to assess how universities advance Pan-Africanism through curriculum reform, research collaboration, and leadership development. Findings indicate gradual progress in embedding Pan-African ideals, but persistent challenges such as Eurocentric curricula, limited academic mobility, and resource constraints hinder deeper impact. The study concludes that aligning higher education with continental priorities can convert Pan-Africanism from political rhetoric into a practical development agenda, positioning universities as key agents in shaping a unified and self-reliant African future.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism; Higher Education; Curriculum Reform; Decolonisation; Agenda 2063

INTRODUCTION

Pan-Africanism is more than a historical ideal; it is a dynamic, evolving response to the economic and political fragmentation imposed on Africa through colonialism. It arose as a form of resistance to centuries of subjugation and externally imposed identities that continue to influence the continent's trajectory. Emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through thinkers such as Henry Sylvester Williams and W.E.B. Du Bois and later advanced by leaders like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Lumumba, the movement became both an intellectual and political project for African self-determination.

Over time, Pan-Africanism has taken many forms; a call for political unity, a cultural and intellectual revival, a decolonisation of knowledge, and a framework for free movement of people, goods, and ideas (Adi, 2018). Its adaptability has kept it relevant, yet this very diversity has sometimes fragmented its practical application. The early Pan-African Congresses sought racial justice and liberation, while post-independence leaders envisioned a federated Africa with shared resources and pooled sovereignty (Murithi, 2017). The creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 marked progress, but also compromise—upholding state sovereignty at the expense of deeper integration. Its successor, the African Union, renewed this ambition through frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Despite these institutional efforts, Pan-Africanism today faces a crucial test. Intra-African trade remains low, about 14 percent, regional value chains are weak, and many economies remain resource-dependent (UNECA, 2023). These realities reveal a persistent gap between Pan-African aspiration and implementation. The question is no longer whether the ideal matters, but how it can be realised through sustainable, home-grown systems that cultivate unity and shared progress.

Recent leadership developments, such as the renewed calls for sovereignty by Captain Ibrahim Traoré in Burkina Faso or assertive diplomatic reforms by President Samia Suluhu Hassan and President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, signal a resurgence of African agency. Yet political

institutions alone cannot sustain this revival. This paper argues that higher learning institutions are equally vital, though often overlooked, engines of Pan-African transformation.

Historically, universities have been central to Africa's liberation struggles and the formation of new national identities (Mamdani, 1993). In the present context, they remain key spaces for shaping knowledge, leadership, and innovation. Aligning higher education with Pan-African values through curriculum reform, research collaboration, and cross-border academic mobility offers a pathway to turn ideology into practice.

However, limited scholarship examines how universities actually embed Pan-African ideals in their teaching, governance, or research priorities. Existing debates tend to focus on political cooperation, leaving the institutionalisation of Pan-Africanism through education under-explored. This study addresses that gap by investigating the role of higher learning institutions (HLIs) as catalysts for integration, cultural renewal, and development.

The paper adopts a qualitative, document-based approach drawing on policy frameworks, institutional case studies, and archival materials to interpret how Pan-Africanism is being reimagined within universities. By positioning higher education at the heart of Africa's transformation, the study demonstrates how HLIs can bridge the divide between aspiration and implementation.

In essence, the paper contends that higher education institutions are central to translating Pan-Africanism from an enduring political philosophy into a practical institutional agenda, one that cultivates leadership, fosters knowledge sovereignty, and drives Africa's collective progress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Foundations of Pan-Africanism

There has never been a universally accepted definition of what Pan-Africanism truly is. Legum (1965) describes it as “a movement of ideas and emotions which reflect the awakening of a consciousness of African identity and solidarity.” Esedebe (1994) adds that Pan-Africanism did not begin at a single point, but rather emerged gradually, becoming “articulate around the time of the American Declaration of Independence in

1776.” It arose as a collective response to slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression among freed Africans and Black intellectuals in America and Europe.

One of the earliest expressions of Pan-Africanism was the Back-to-Africa movement of the early 1800s, led by figures such as Paul Cuffe, who campaigned for the rights of Black Americans and financed voyages to resettle African-descended people in Sierra Leone (Adi, 2018). These efforts reflected a shared desire to restore dignity, independence, and control to Africans and the African diaspora.

Over time, Pan-Africanism evolved from a moral and political movement into a broader framework for economic, cultural, and intellectual unity. It has continually adapted to changing historical conditions while retaining its central vision of African self-determination and solidarity.

2.2 Education and the Intellectual Roots of Pan-Africanism

Eze (2013) observes that colonial education systems were structured to “civilise” Africans into Western modes of thought, producing a select elite to sustain colonial administration. Pan-Africanism thus emerged as an intellectual and political response to reclaim African subjectivity and challenge Eurocentric historical narratives that portrayed Africa as without civilisation or culture (Eze, 2013).

Thiam and Rochon (2019) note that nineteenth-century Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States such as Tuskegee Institute under Booker T. Washington played a key role in nurturing African-American and African leaders. Lawrence (2021) emphasises that HBCUs produced global figures including Kwame Nkrumah, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Ralph Bunche, who each advanced Pan-African ideals of liberation and unity.

These educational institutions became critical incubators for anti-colonial thought and helped link African struggles with global movements for racial justice. The literature shows that education has always been intertwined with Pan-African aspirations, both as a tool of domination under colonialism and as a vehicle for emancipation thereafter.

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descriptive, focusing on early intellectual movements rather than examining how contemporary African universities integrate Pan-African ideals into teaching, research, and policy. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design to examine how higher education institutions (HLIs) contribute to the advancement of Pan-Africanism in Africa. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this study because it facilitates the in-depth interpretation of complex social and institutional dynamics. According to Sofaer (1999), qualitative methods are instrumental in reducing uncertainty around specific phenomena by capturing nuanced meanings and contexts that quantitative techniques might overlook. In this study, qualitative inquiry allows for an interpretive understanding of how Pan-Africanist ideologies are conceptualised, communicated, and enacted within academic institutions.

3.1 Research Design and Data Sources

The research employs a document-based qualitative approach (Bowen, 2009), using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consist of institutional policy documents, strategic plans, and educational frameworks from purposively selected universities, namely the University of Johannesburg, the University of Lusaka, and Great Zimbabwe University, chosen for their explicit commitment to Pan-African values and cross-border collaboration. Secondary data include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reports from organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) that engage with the role of higher education in continental integration and Agenda 2063.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through systematic document analysis of policy texts, institutional reports, and archival materials (Bowen, 2009). This was complemented by thematic reviews of scholarly literature and, where accessible, speeches or public addresses by university leaders and policymakers were incorporated to provide institutional perspectives. The analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identifying recurring patterns, narratives, and contradictions. Both inductive and deductive coding were applied to develop themes around key concepts such as curriculum decolonisation, institutional responsibility, educational transformation, and continental solidarity.

3.3 Credibility and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, findings were cross-verified across multiple data sources through triangulation (Patton, 1999). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to account for researcher bias and positionality, ensuring transparency in interpretation. Because the study relied solely on publicly available institutional and archival documents, no ethical risks to human participants were anticipated. Nevertheless, ethical standards were upheld through accurate citation, acknowledgement of all sources, and adherence to academic integrity protocols.

3.4 Methodological Limitation

While the study is limited by its reliance on document analysis, which may not fully capture the lived experiences within universities, this method was appropriate for identifying how Pan-African ideals are formally represented in institutional frameworks. Future research could build on this work by incorporating field-based interviews or participatory case studies to explore how such ideals are practically implemented.

In summary, this methodology provides a robust qualitative foundation for interpreting how higher education institutions act as catalysts for Pan-African renewal, aligning their policies and practices with continental goals of unity, self-reliance, and educational transformation.

FINDINGS

Results indicate that higher learning institutions (HLIs) remain central to realising Pan-African goals by fostering intellectual growth, leadership, and socio-political awareness across the continent. The evidence shows that universities have historically served as hubs of anti-colonial activism, political thought, and intellectual independence (Lulat, 2005; Mamdani, 1993). Institutions such as Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria have produced generations of scholars and activists who contributed to Africa's liberation and postcolonial development (Biney, 2011; Sherwood, 2012).

The analysis identified five key themes that define how higher learning institutions advance Pan-African ideals: curriculum reform and decolonisation, academic mobility and collaboration, research and development, inclusivity and leadership, and digital transformation and sustainability. Higher education continues to play a transformative role in addressing Africa's shared challenges through five key dimensions: curriculum reform, academic mobility, research and development, inclusivity, and digital transformation.

4.1 Curriculum Reform and Decolonisation

Findings show that most African universities still operate on colonial academic structures that marginalise African knowledge systems and languages (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). However, several universities are reforming curricula to embed African philosophies, indigenous languages, and Pan-African content. These efforts

align with the goals of cultural revival and identity restoration (Molla & Cuthbert, 2018).

4.2 Academic Mobility and Collaboration

Cross-border initiatives such as the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) and the Pan-African University have enhanced regional integration and student mobility (World Bank, 2020; African Union, 2019). Examples like the University of Johannesburg's Africa by Bus and annual international festivals demonstrate how cultural exchange fosters continental solidarity.

4.3 Research and Development

African universities are advancing research on health, agriculture, and renewable energy that directly addresses local development needs (Bloom et al., 2006). Programs such as the African Leadership University's innovation-driven curriculum and the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute illustrate how research and training can align with continental priorities (Biney, 2011; Harvard ALI Social Impact Review, 2020).

4.4 Inclusivity and Leadership

Findings reveal persistent barriers to access and gender equity, with tertiary enrolment still below 6% in many countries (Global Partnership for Education, 2017). Yet, institutions are increasingly introducing scholarships, flexible learning options, and women's mentorship programmes. These strategies promote inclusivity and produce leaders grounded in Pan-African values (Mazrui, 1995; AU, 2006).

4.5 Digital Transformation and Sustainability

Digitalisation has enabled remote learning and knowledge sharing through platforms such as the African Virtual University. However, underfunding and weak infrastructure limit scalability (World Bank, 2020). Sustainable financing and governance reforms remain essential for progress (UNECA, 2023).

DISCUSSION

The findings reaffirm that higher learning institutions are indispensable in translating Pan-Africanism from political philosophy into institutional practice. Historically, they served as the intellectual backbone of decolonisation; today, they are pivotal in shaping a self-reliant and united Africa.

5.1 Curriculum Reform as Ideological Renewal

The persistence of Eurocentric curricula highlights a continuing colonial influence that constrains Africa's epistemic independence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Reforming university syllabi is not merely an academic exercise but an ideological one; it reclaims Africa's intellectual agency. Incorporating African philosophies, indigenous languages, and contextualised histories fosters critical consciousness and cultural confidence among students (Molla & Cuthbert, 2018).

This process aligns with the broader decolonial movement across the Global South and reflects Pan-Africanism's call for epistemic justice, a reclaiming of knowledge spaces once monopolised by the West.

5.2 Academic Mobility and Knowledge Exchange

Academic mobility embodies Pan-Africanism's vision of unity through shared learning. Programs like ACE and the AU's Pan-African University illustrate how structured collaboration can break down borders, redistribute expertise, and strengthen regional identity (World Bank, 2020; African Union, 2019).

Initiatives such as Africa by Bus operationalise Pan-African ideals in everyday practice, moving beyond theory to lived solidarity. Through such exchanges, HLIs are not just producing graduates; they are shaping Pan-African citizens capable of acting across boundaries.

5.3 Research, Innovation, and Knowledge Sovereignty

The shift toward research grounded in Africa's realities represents an important ideological turn. By prioritising local relevance over Western validation, universities contribute to the creation of knowledge sovereignty, a central aim of Pan-Africanism. Partnerships with governments and industries enhance this process, ensuring that academic work informs real-world policy (Charomo et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, resource constraints, brain drain, and donor dependency continue to challenge this autonomy (Bloom et al., 2006). Achieving research self-reliance requires strategic investment and inter-university cooperation.

5.4 Challenges Limiting Institutional Impact

Despite these gains, structural challenges persist. Limited funding, low enrolment rates,

inadequate infrastructure, and political instability constrain universities' transformative potential (Global Partnership for Education, 2017). The continued dominance of Eurocentric paradigms undermines Pan-African education, producing graduates disconnected from African realities (Nkoane, 2006).

Governance issues and brain drain exacerbate inequality, draining the continent of its intellectual capital (Mamdani, 1993). Without reforms in leadership, accountability, and resource allocation, HLIs risk reinforcing rather than resolving dependency cycles.

5.5 Opportunities and the Road Ahead

The digital era offers new frontiers for Pan-Africanism. E-learning platforms and research networks allow African institutions to share resources and reach dispersed student populations (Harvard ALI Social Impact Review, 2020). Aligning higher education strategies with the African Union's Agenda 2063 ensures coherence between educational transformation and continental development goals (African Union, 2019).

Leadership programmes rooted in ethics and community engagement can create a generation of Pan-African leaders driven by service rather than status (Mazrui, 1995; AU, 2006). Sustainable financing, public-private partnerships, and institutional accountability will be key to maintaining momentum.

CONCLUSION

The analysis underscores that higher learning institutions are not peripheral actors but central catalysts in realising Pan-African aspirations. Through curriculum reform, collaborative research, and inclusive education, they bridge the gap between ideology and implementation. Yet, to sustain this progress, HLIs must overcome funding shortages, epistemic dependency, and governance weaknesses.

Ultimately, the future of Pan-Africanism depends on universities' ability to embed unity, cultural pride, and innovation within their structures and graduates. By aligning education with the principles of Agenda 2063, Africa can transform its universities into engines of integration, empowerment, and self-determination.

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