The Spiralling of Corporate Corruption and the Plummeting of Corporate Governance and Ethical Leadership in African Institutions

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Abstract

Generally, several factors around the corporate world influence different nations technologically, socially, economically, and politically. Specifically, this paper focuses on the African continent's politics concerning corporate corruption, corporate governance, and ethical leadership. This study aims to critically reflect on and evaluate the significance of curbing and combating corruption, promoting governance and ethics in Africa, and furthering and practising those principles. It employed a case study research design with a random sampling approach. Secondary data was analysed using content analysis, incorporating a critical assessment of relevant in-depth literature reviews to attain the study objective. The study results revealed that: Unethical leaders succumb to corruption, causing Africa's corruption to spiral out of control. Ethical leaders, on the other hand, resist corruption; African leaders and authorities should take steps to fight corruption through ethics and governance; African corporations have become increasingly corrupt; corporate governance and ethical leadership have declined in Africa; African politicians have uncurbed power to advance their private gains, and finally, African leaders need to change their mindsets and cultures to achieve economic growth. This study emphasises and reiterates the importance of dealing effectively with corporate corruption and advancing governance and ethics to benefit the African population and the continent. It further provides a broad and deeper understanding of corruption, ethics, and governance. The conceptual, strategic model provided by this study may be selected and used by African leaders, authorities, boards of directors, shareholders, and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), as a tool to address corruption in African organisations and institutions.

Keywords: Africa, Corporate Corruption, Corporate Governance, Ethical Leadership, Political Effects

Introduction

In many parts of the world, corporate corruption has been a constant for centuries. Yet it triggers concerns that the situation has deteriorated under post-independence African nations at the expense of corporate governance and ethical leadership on this continent. Resultantly, the legacy of African colonialism is contributing to corporate challenges and organisational stagnation (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2020). Moreover, this phenomenon disadvantages and fuels further socio-economic challenges facing marginalised Africans. According to Xue et al., (2022), corporate corruption is any immoral, illegitimate, and pre-planned misconduct committed by employees of an organisation for personal benefit who have opposite values to those of their employer. For this reason, many employers match their recruitment practices to their organisational culture to determine whether they are compatible with their current staff and future potential employees (Jiao, 2021). In response, corporate governance was established and developed to curb malicious employees and protect the interests of investors, entrepreneurs, shareholders, organisations, and state institutions (Yusoff, Ahman & Darus, 2019).

Nonetheless, corrupt practices in the corporate world have been around for a long time. Regrettably, they persist and continue to be prevalent. These challenges stem from poor corporate governance in organisations, which are then affected by intense economic crises with adverse ramifications on their survival and sustainability (Al Amosh & Khatib, 2021; Hazaea et al., 2021). Several malpractices, including unethical leadership, corporate corruption, and poor corporate governance, led to the global financial crisis, especially in the Middle East nations (Ahmed et al., 2020). In other parts of the world, such traditions are linked and result in financial losses associated with unethical leadership and inadequate corporate governance. Volkswagen, for example, was involved in an emissions scandal because it submitted inaccurate and misleading information to protect and preserve its sustainability reputation and status for monetary gain (Kamarudin, Ariff & Ismail, 2021). As a result, the organisation forked out a staggering amount of US$63 billion because of this action (Jung & Sharon, 2019). In retrospect, the early 2000s saw significant corporate misconduct involving large companies such as WorldCom and Enron in the United States; meanwhile, scandals surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic are rife today (Sivaprasad & Mathew, 2021).

The African nations, however, are not immune and exempt from these undesirable and unethical corporate issues. It is disheartening that these misconducts and malpractices threaten foreign direct investment into the African continent (Agoba et al., 2020). Mlambo (2019) states that deceit and ethics-free corporate practices whereby public funds are being misused and mismanaged for personal gain have become rampant and uncontrollable in most African public sectors, resulting in appalling and insufficient service delivery for the poor. Among the scandals in South Africa involved nepotism, payments to ghost and deceased employees, fraudulent claims, and overpayments from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), Covid-19 relief schemes that involved public officials and local politicians, and tenders awarded inequitably, resulting in irregular expenditures (Sebake & Mudau, 2020). In Zimbabwe, misappropriation, and embezzlement of taxpayers' money by public officials and the state are impeding both the countries and its citizens' development because most projects lack the funding required to execute essential and basic needs (Chigudu, 2020). A severe financial crisis took place in the banking industry in Uganda, resulting in their bankruptcy and insolvency due to corporate misbehaviour, gross financial mismanagement, and negligence (Mathuva & Nyangu, 2021). In Ghana, Avortri and Agbanyo (2020) found that the board of directors and top management engaged in financial misconduct by misrepresenting bank financial statements to avoid being exposed to misusing bank funds and defrauding the bank.

Corporate Governance in Africa in Context

The term corporate governance encompasses the framework of regulations, customs, and procedures through which a corporation is steered and supervised (Chigudu, 2020). It was initially articulated in the 1930s by American scholars Bailey and Means (Chen, 2024), who were pioneers in analysing the dynamics between shareholders and management, as well as the organisational and managerial structures of corporations. Their groundbreaking research laid the groundwork for corporate governance standards and has since evolved into a pivotal area of inquiry within the realm of business and management. On the other hand, Professor Weian Li is widely recognised for his pioneering work in broadening the scope of corporate governance from internal to external governance (Zhou, 2021). Meanwhile, Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2020) argue that the historical path of African colonialism has significantly influenced the current corporate governance terrain, leading to organisational inertia and hindering advancement in the region.

In the context of corporate corruption, the absence of proper incentives in a corporate environment can pave the way for corruption to proliferate in corporate affairs (Al-Faryan, 2024). Thus, analysing the substantial costs stemming from the separation of ownership and control is increasingly essential, particularly in the context of frequent and recurring corruption (Wawrosz, 2022). According to Al-Faryan and Shil (2023), the lack of effective governance heightens the risk of corruption, especially in the lack of a system of accountability and transparency. Corruption is a pervasive issue deeply entrenched in many countries worldwide. Consequently, these nations encounter significant hurdles in attaining economic development, struggle to establish democratic governance, and often grapple with compromised social justice and the rule of law (Al-Faryan & Shil, 2023).

In terms of ethical leadership, its failures during the initial years of the twenty-first century have heightened awareness about the pivotal significance of ethical leadership (Amory et al., 2024). In light of this avowal, Shiundu (2024) emphasised the significance of ethical leadership, stressing the need for leaders to adhere to ethical principles, make decisions based on ethical considerations, and build robust relationships. According to this scholar, ethical leaders exhibit traits such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, concern for others, and awareness of societal implications. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the perception of ethical leadership may be shaped by various contextual elements (Shiundu, 2024).

The problem is the increasing prevalence of corporate scandals in African organisations, with the perpetrators and other involved parties facing minimal consequences. Thus, there is uncertainty and concern about the effectiveness of the strategies and tools employed by African authorities to combat and diminish this phenomenon.

The current body of scholarly work has thoroughly examined corporate governance, corruption, and ethical leadership across different contexts. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature on these factors within the political sphere. As a result, this research study addresses this unexplored area. Accordingly, it strives to expand on the existing body of knowledge, distinguishing itself as a pioneering effort by undertaking this initiative, thereby contributing significant value to the field. Therefore, this study is unique, emphasising its high degree of novelty, and significantly enhancing its overall originality.

As a result, this study is driven and motivated by identifying the knowledge gaps related to the increase in corporate corruption and the concurrent decline of effective corporate governance and ethical leadership in Africa. It endeavours to conduct a thorough analysis, and the significance of mitigating and preventing corruption, while promoting good governance and ethical standards within the African context. It aims to examine the ramifications of combatting corruption, advancing robust governance, and upholding ethical principles.

Corporate Corruption

Corporate corruption is a misuse of official power by a corporate delegate for personal or organisational advancement (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020). This activity can take several forms, including bribery, fraud, embezzlement, and other unethical practices that undermine the honesty and equity of corporate procedures (Chigudu, 2020; Orudzheva & Sluhan, 2023). Its repercussions can adversely affect the corporation involved, and its employees, shareholders, customers, and the broader society. An environment tainted by corporate corruption erodes trust, distorts markets, and impedes economic growth (Hoinaru et al., 2020). In markets manifested by pervasive corruption, private enterprises, and governmental bodies are susceptible to pressure to partake in illicit activities such as bribery (Orudzheva & Sluhan, 2023). According to the 2023 Global Corruption Barometer, a substantial percentage of the population in multiple countries perceives an upward trend in corruption (Brock, 2023). Thus, there seems to be a concerning pattern emerging, showing a rise in corrupt behaviours. This factor could potentially have extensive and grave consequences for the communities involved. Hence, it is essential to combat corporate corruption to promote ethical business behaviour and uphold the tenets of corporate governance. Notwithstanding, it is imperative to note that the primary emphasis of this study is on corporate corruption. This concept can be viewed from four different perspectives (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020), as outlined below:

Firstly, it can regarded as a rational action stemming from a cost or benefit analysis (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020). This perspective suggests that individuals within a corporation may engage in corrupt activities if they believe the benefits outweigh the potential costs. Secondly, corporate corruption can also be considered a cultural norm that enables or constrains illicit behaviour within companies (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020). This perspective emphasises the influence of the organisational culture on the prevalence of corrupt practices.

Another perspective views corporate corruption as an institutionalised practice that arises from cognitive, normative, and regulatory pressures (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020). This assertion suggests that corrupt behaviour can become ingrained within an organisation due to various internal and external factors. Finally, corporate corruption can be associated with managerial moral failure and decision-makers (Castro, Phillips & Ansari, 2020). This viewpoint highlights the ethical dimension of corruption and reinforces the responsibility of individuals in positions of authority within corporations.

According to this study, corruption is not a spontaneous phenomenon but rather a predetermined occurrence masterminded, driven, and inspired by the greed for money committed by immoral individuals to harm the oblivious and innocent victims in all forms of malicious damage. Corporate corruption among corporations hinders various forms of development for both the country and humanity, resulting in a poor quality of life (Hoinaru et al., 2020). Although corporate corruption is punishable in certain circumstances, companies and people engage in illicit activities and unacceptable work behaviours that have detrimental effects on shareholders and other involved stakeholders (Fauser & Utz, 2021). For instance, a study focused on corporate governance practices when analysing the failure of UT Bank in Ghana. Despite the bank's professed adherence to governance principles promoting efficiency, transparency, accountability, and integrity, these principles were consistently overlooked and violated (Appiah et al., 2023). According to this study, this negligence contributed to the bank's collapse. Additionally, the study pointed out that potential red flags were ignored and disregarded, indicating that the non-executive directors failed to carry out their responsibility to consider and behave autonomously in the bank's and depositors' best interests (Appiah et al., 2023). Moreover, this phenomenon disadvantages and fuels socio-economic challenges facing marginalised Africans.

For instance, it prevents tourism from flourishing and creating jobs for locals, harming economic growth in the African countries involved (Osinubi et al., 2021). Through irregular awarding of tenders in South Africa, political interference and participation amplified the already severe corruption in municipal business operations (Mngomezulu, 2020). Zimbabwe's political interference in state affairs negatively impacted government institutions, as corrupt undertakings by remorseless politicians increased (Chipere, 2020). Meanwhile, the Northern parts of Africa are experiencing rising political instability and corruption that prevent them from obtaining financial assistance and stability through foreign aid (Alhassan et al., 2021).

It has become a common practice in the Kenyan private sector to recruit managers based on their ethnicity either because of linguistic convenience, cultural preference, or because they belong to a specific group endorsed by those who possess the authority to hire (Njagi, 2020). In line with this tradition, political patronage plays a role in appointing individuals in filling vacancies because of their associations with politicians (Zheng, Schram, & Doğan, 2021). Consequently, it causes imbalances in society, ballooning injustices and inequalities that are already problematic and thus attacking a sense of dignity in the population. In addition, corporate corruption hinders African citizens' ability to share and enjoy African resources so that all Africans participate in these resources, not just a few.

Corporate Governance

According to Chigudu (2020), corporate governance is administered within organisations to sustain and create a culture of sound corporate governance and organisational prosperity. Effective corporate governance relies on proper, appropriate, and sound controls to manage conflict of interests among all stakeholders in institutions and organisations worldwide to sustain themselves while improving the economy (Pham et al., 2021). In supporting these initiatives, the board of directors are tasked and entrusted to oversee and supervise management to ensure that corporate governance is advanced in business institutions to protect the interests of shareholders (Jao et al., 2019). Individuals in these roles must exercise independence to achieve their mandates effectively and efficiently with diligence and precision. In this sense, female directors are preferred and perceived as better than their male counterparts due to their independence and commitment to refraining from deficient and questionable corporate governance practices (Al Lawati, Hussainey & Sagitova, 2021). Contrary to this assertion, this study argues that organisational corporate challenges are not intrinsically associated with individual demographics, such as race, ethnicity, or gender. Instead, accountability rests with the individual's traits and moral values. Accordingly, the focus should be on eradicating corporate governance failures in the African continent.

Recently, numerous South African companies have encountered significant corporate crises, leading to detrimental effects on the organisations and society at large. One notable example is the Fidentia Group and Leisure-net (Maroun & Cerbone, 2020). These authors further postulate that the crises significantly impact society, affecting employees, customers, investors, and the wider community. The aftermath of these corporate crises may result in financial setbacks, a decline in trust within the business realm, and potential cascading effects on the South African economy and society. More recently, the Steinhoff scandal has also been a prominent example of corporate turmoil in this country (Amede & Ilaboya, 2023). According to Ahmed & Anifowose (2024), corruption has a detrimental impact on sustainable development, while corporate governance has a notable and positive effect. This study further asserts that in countries where corruption is pervasive, the positive impact of robust corporate governance on sustainable development becomes even more significant. Contrarily, Chen (2024) argues that the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, which originated from the United States subprime mortgage crisis, had extensive and profound implications for economies, businesses, and investors worldwide. This scholar further asserts that the crisis can be attributed to the failure of corporate governance and unfolds in three stages: the accumulation, amplification, and outbreak of governance risks. This calamity had a significant impact that reverberated throughout the global financial system.

As such, African companies and corporations involved in anti-good corporate governance scandals and corrupt activities threaten the economy and society (Chigudu, 2020). Seemingly, an operation involving political big shots swindling state funds and resources threatens and weakens corporate governance on African soil (Bonga, 2021). These study claims are supported and corroborated by another research study. Similarly, a research study conducted by Fagbadebo (2019) shows that corporate governance has been submerged and eroded in Africa by elegant political leaders. It is thus imperative that these organisations must adhere to corporate governance principles outlined and stipulated in all corporate governance rules and regulations. It appears that in theory, company laws are black-and-white, but in practice they are not implemented and applied as recommended.

Ethical Leadership

Shiundu (2024) highlighted the critical importance of ethical leadership, emphasising that leaders should consistently adhere to ethical principles, make well-informed decisions based on ethical considerations, and cultivate strong, trustworthy relationships rooted in ethical behaviour. This author further opines that ethical leaders demonstrate integrity, transparency, accountability, empathy, and a profound understanding of the impact of their decisions on society. Therefore, leaders must embody ethical traits and act as role models for their followers. In support of this view, a study contends that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the reflective moral attentiveness of employees within an organisational setting (Al Halbusi et al., 2024). According to the social learning theory, leaders hold significant status and power within the organisational hierarchy, making them influential sources of observation and emulation. Consequently, they can effectively serve as role models for employees, thereby impacting their moral development and decision-making processes (Al Halbusi et al., 2024)

By implementing an effective turn-around strategy, Africa can resolve its challenges and achieve its development goals through selfless, principled, moral, and ethical leaders. To earn the trust of voiceless and vulnerable communities, ethical leaders aim to demonstrate their worth by maintaining honesty and integrity (Göçen, 2021). One of the African countries was the subject of this case study. Recent research conducted by Donkor and Zhou (2020) found that Ghanaian ethical leadership confirms that servant leadership is beneficial to the intended beneficiaries because it improves the socioeconomic status of its population by providing necessities. Ngubane (2021) argued that the African public and private sectors lack ethical leaders capable of turning the tide on the escalating scandals and corporate misconduct.

A decrease in ethical leadership is evident in Nigeria, preventing development that benefits its citizens and future generations (Olatunde, Niyi & Sunday, 2020). It is also the case that Somalia's lack of ethical leadership standards is characterised and composed of non-existent morals and values that shape the nation's ability to compete among other African states in terms of its economic growth (Hassan, Zain & Ajis, 2019). Due to a decline in ethical, decent, and principled leadership in Zimbabwe, public funds were misused and disbursed through acquisitiveness and unethical practices ((Chigudu, 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars oppose this tradition and behaviour within organisations. For this reason, Nangoli et al. (2020) cautioned that ethical leaders have a conscience and integrity that contributes to their qualities such as honesty, responsibility, and accountability for organisational sustainability and ordinary people's wellbeing.

It is worth noting that ethical leadership is also eroding in the private sector (Ngubane, 2021). A case in point occurred in Uganda. In this country, a lack of efficient and monitored ethical leadership has led to several banks going under and many people's jobs being lost (Mathuva & Nyangu, 2021). Politicians' involvement in corporations has not been fruitful for Africa, as it undermined and disregarded ethics and ethical leadership values (Hoinaru et al., 2020). On the African continent, this custom contributes to the fading and diminishing of ethical leadership. It is evident that African politicians have grown to be conscience-free; they do not adhere to, and respect corporate laws enacted by themselves to maintain African organisations. The effect is that ethical leadership on the African continent is reduced to a mere principle on paper and not in practice. As a result, businesses and state institutions are at risk due to the waning of corporate governance and ethical leadership.

Political Effects

There are various ways in which politics can affect corporations, including political patronage, political instability, political interference, and political power. Even though political patronage is disguised and pretended as trust, the appointment of candidates by politicians in Africa often encourages corruption. Hence, political patronage is also an avenue, channel, and vehicle through which political corruption and interference are promoted and implemented in organisations (Zheng et al., 2021). As a result, political interference in organisations often leads to organisational corruption and a failure of corporate governance due to poor leadership (Huang & Yuan, 2021). For this reason, Dragomir, Dumitru, and Feleagă (2021) argued that the encroachment of political influence through power has a detrimental impact on the functioning of institutions and stakeholder groups. A study in Europe revealed that politicians' involvement in companies and organisations usually results in poor assessments that cast a negative light on these institutions (van Elsas et al., 2020). There are many challenges and social problems in Africa because most poor people are exploited and neglected by politicians who forcefully participate in the operations of many organisations for their benefit (Mekoa, 2019).

Political intercession in other African states is the driving force behind scandals such as hiring politicians' friends and families; meanwhile, those without political connections pay bribes to enter the job market, even though they are less qualified than their competitors (Zheng et al., 2021). This situation highlights the pervasive impact of political connections on the job market and the challenges faced by those who rely on merit-based opportunities. However, some researchers and academicians disapprove of this tradition and condemn it. According to Nomarrwayi et al. (2020), appointing individuals to positions of power based on political connections rather than merit and qualifications has a detrimental impact on the quality of services provided to society. These appointees are highly likely to lack the capacity to effectively carry out their duties, ultimately leading to a decline in delivering quality services to the public. Similarly, Zimbabwean politicians often partake in undue interference and mismanagement of their authority when overseeing public institutions (Chipere, 2020). This conduct has resulted in a substantial deficit of funds vital for sustaining pivotal projects geared toward advancing the country and improving the provision of public services (Chipere, 2020). In another sense, politicians are strategic and cunning in their approach as they conduct their illegal business practices. Mbandlwa et al. (2020) observed that politicians often leverage their authority to cover up any evidence linking them to financial misconduct and malpractices. These academics claim that they achieve this by issuing verbal instructions to stakeholders involved, thus ensuring that their involvement remains untraceable. A triangular model of political effects on corporate corruption, corporate governance, and ethical leadership is displayed and illustrated in Figure 1.

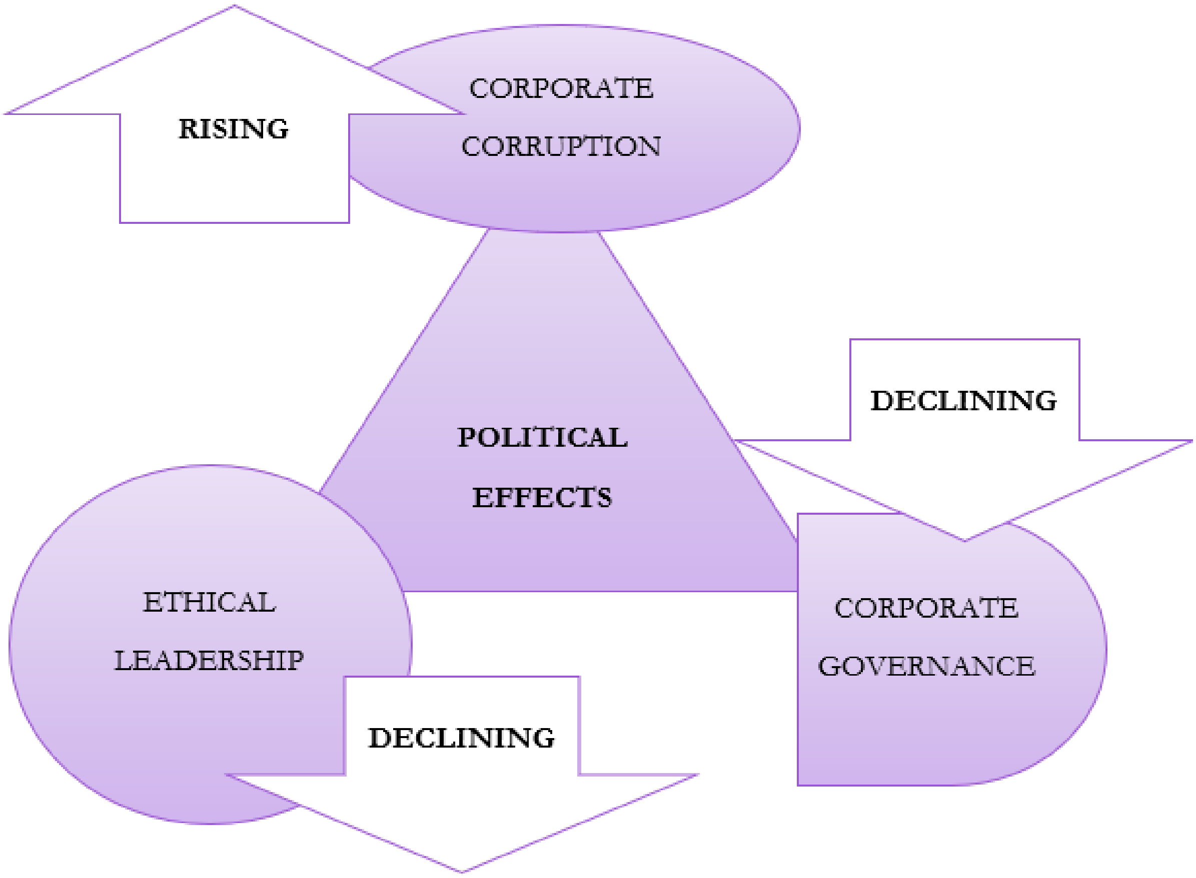

Figure 1: Triangular Model for Political Effects on Corporate Corruption, Corporate Governance, and Ethical Leadership. (Source: Author)

Figure 1 demonstrates that due to the influence of African politics in organisations where politics have authority: corporate corruption is on the rise, as indicated by the upward arrow, while corporate governance and ethical leadership are declining, as indicated by the downward arrows. Powerful political elites' intervention in the political space has negatively impacted corporate governance in various government institutions, resulting in the slow provision of primary services to South Africans (Mngomezulu, 2020). In institutions where politics are not in charge, authorities in such institutions influence corporate corruption, corporate governance, and ethical leadership. The rationale is that authoritative individuals that have power over subordinates in organisations use their power to accomplish their missions through hierarchical seniority frequently used to intimidate junior employees (Puni & Hilton, 2020). In Africa, controlling and bullying management are tools employed to promote corruption while undermining corporate governance and ethical leadership (Katelouzou & Zumbansen, 2020). Despite this assertion, it is imperative to note that not all authorities and politicians promote corrupt activities for private gain. Al-Chaarani et al. (2022) observed that senior officials enabled good corporate governance in Lebanon to sustain and develop the banking industry, which, in turn, contributed significantly to the economy.

Notably, political corruption inhibits economic growth and corporate development; meanwhile, it has adverse psychological and emotional effects on workers vulnerable to political power abuse (Huang & Yuan, 2021). Accordingly, in democratic states, such as those found in most African nations, political parties that win elections overwhelmingly become the ruling parties. As such, the ruling party is automatically in charge of the government. This system enables politicians to gain power as most are positioned at the top and hold the highest offices. These individuals occupy various positions such as the president, ministers, deputy ministers, governors, public protectors, mayors, and so forth. These positions authorise them to appoint shareholders who will be accountable to them for their actions.

A shareholder is a person, organisation, or institution that owns shares in a company. Shareholders are responsible for appointing the boards of directors who report and account to them. Typically, the CEO is a board member responsible and accountable for supervising top management. The Chief Operations Officers (COOs), Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), and Chief Procurement Officers (CPOs), and other executives are among the CEO's subordinates. The entire chain is controlled and managed from the top-down: right down to the employees on the ground. This authoritative power is based on seniority in any organisation as you ascend the hierarchy (Puni & Hilton, 2020). Public institutions are controlled and managed by the government, not private ones, thus politicians operate within them than private organisations.

In essence, the data presented in Figure 1 illustrates a concerning trend of increasing corporate corruption, declining corporate governance, and decreasing ethical leadership. The graphic illustration depicts a concerning trend, highlighting the urgency of conducting a thorough investigation and considering necessary measures to tackle these significant challenges.An overview of the power-play platform in organisations is displayed and shown in Figure 2.

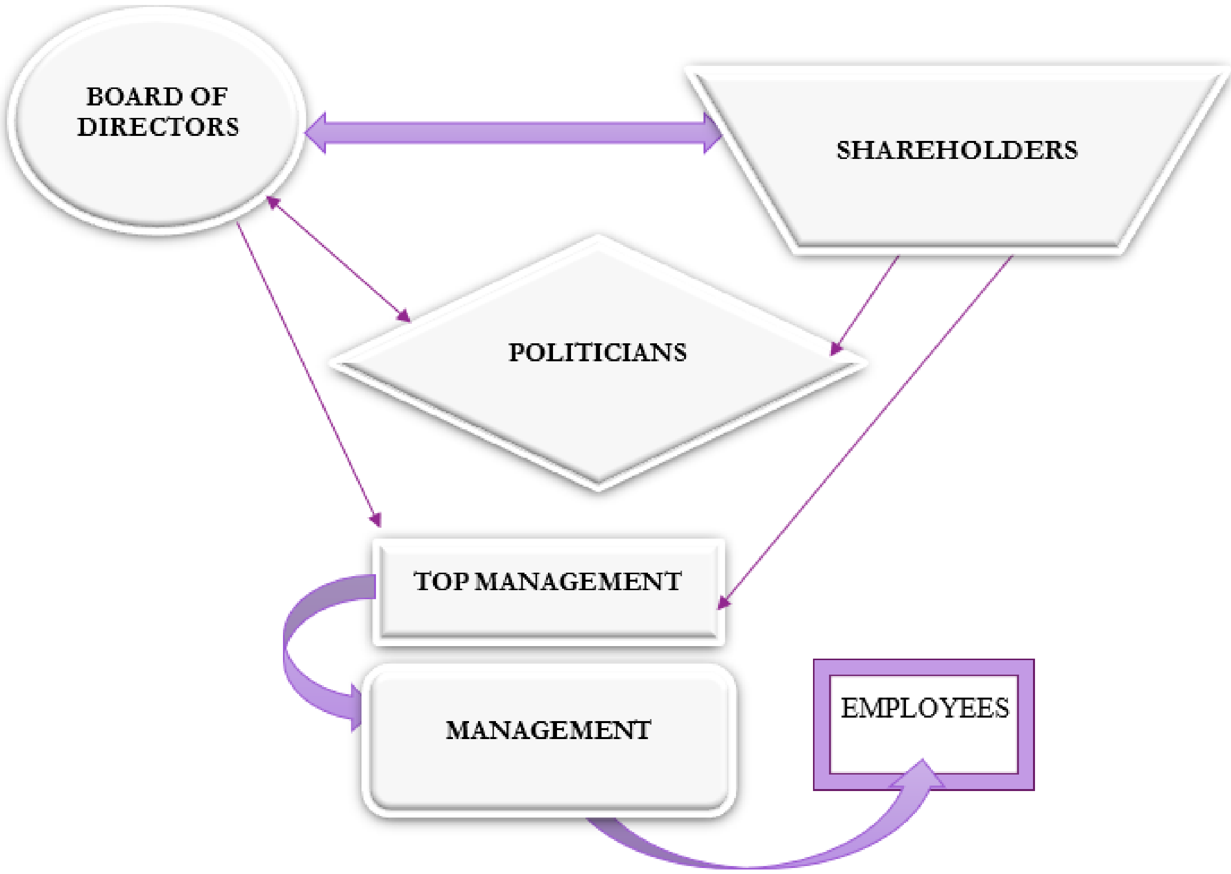

Figure 2: Power Play in the Corporate Platform. (Source: Author)

Figure 2 illustrates how certain politicians exert pressure on shareholders and the board of directors by flexing their muscles to commit corporate corruption. In turn, these two groups cascade the pressure to top management as they have power over them. Management then applies the pressure on the management team to execute the task according to the politicians' instructions and unethical demands. Ultimately, management puts pressure on employees who succumb to the pressure. They fear losing their jobs if they fail to follow the malpractices and scandals demanded and imposed upon the board of directors and shareholders by powerful politicians (Puni & Hilton, 2020). Based on this hypothesis, this study developed a definition of corporate corruption as follows: Corporate corruption is a premeditated commercial crime against human rights, human dignity and human development used as a tool to benefit a few influential individuals while disadvantaging the masses of the poor and vulnerable individuals.

Therefore, power-play dynamics in organisations demonstrate how some politicians exploit, abuse, and intimidate their subordinates to benefit unduly and misuse organisational resources due to their unethical behaviour and greed (Almeida et al., 2021). Due to this affirmation, politicians have excess power to commit corruption through intimidation and the instruction of their employees. Furthermore, politicians use this power to strategically place and deploy themselves in key positions to further their ulterior motives of corruption. While this may be the case, employees are still susceptible to corruption. Some employees are involved and partake in these activities, such as CEOs, COOs, CFOs, CPOs, executives, senior managers, middle managers, junior managers, and employees at the grassroots level for personal gain and to scam the shareholders (Xue, 2022).

The diagram above demonstrates the hierarchical organisation structure and the power relationships within. However, it is imperative to note that politicians do not belong to an organisational structure. Figure 2 portrays the political influence of politicians on shareholders, the authority of shareholders over the board of directors, and the leverage of the board of directors on the CEO. Additionally, it illustrates the CEO's power over the CFO and subsequently on Supply Chain Management (SCM), highlighting the potential political effects on management and employees.

How the Study was Conducted?

The research utilises a case study research design, which involves the random selection of institutions from diverse regions across Africa. This design was selected and regarded as the best fit for this study due to its capacity to offer comprehensive insights into the distinctive circumstances and influential factors related to corporate governance and corruption within various African institutions. The in-depth content analysis derived from these case studies was crucial in bolstering the credibility of the research findings, as they directly align with the study's objectives.

This analysis was selected as the appropriate method and conducted on this data. This technique was preferred because it allowed the researcher to sift through the articles and choose those that were relevant to the study (Kyngäs, Mikkonen & Kääriäinen, 2020). In this respect, from the vast amount of information retrieved from the search, the researcher narrowed the article pool to 60-70 in the final analysis through a thorough synthesis of data collected for this study (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). Table 1 displays that the data sources for the final articles employed in this study were from 2019-2024. The first column shows that the inclusion and exclusion method was deployed and selected in the current study.

In other words, articles older than five years were unutilised, and those four years or less were selected and used in this paper. Further, the keywords typed and used to collect the data for this study are indicated in column two of Table1. This table displays the online search engines or databases used and selected under column 3 to access the relevant data gathered for this study.

Finally, the method employed in the current study was helpful and appropriate because it enabled the researcher to develop a conceptual model as a practical contribution to this paper. Table 1 displays the data sources and resources of this study.

Table 1: Data Sources and Study Resources

Published Articles	Keywords	Search Engines
(2019-2024)	Corporate Corruption	Scopus
Inclusion: 4 years or less	Corporate Governance	Web of Science
Exclusion: 5 years or more	Ethical Leadership	Research Gate
	Political Interference	SAGE Research Methods
	Corporate Scandals	Taylor & Francis online
	Qualitative Content Analysis	Google Scholar
	Africa	Springer Link

(Source: Author)

Table 1 above contains a detailed overview of the data sources and resources employed in the study. It also outlines the specific search engines utilised for data collection in the current research. Additionally, it presents a catalogue of the keywords employed to procure the study's data.

What did the Study Find?

Results

The following part presents the results and discussion based on the theoretical foundations of the study. Several significant findings were revealed in the current study. First, African leadership and relevant authorities should work toward reducing corporate corruption and promoting and implementing governance and ethics. This finding signifies that establishing a transparent and equitable business environment is critical to fostering the prosperity of the economy and society. Second, the research findings indicated a notable rise in corporate corruption within various African organisations and institutions. The discovery strongly suggests the existence of systemic factors that may be driving this increase, potentially exerting influence on the economic and social environment of the region. Interestingly, a prior literature review supports this finding. In this regard, Mekoa (2019) confirms that African corporations are witnessing an escalation in corruption.

Thirdly, the results indicated that corporate governance within organisations and ethical leadership in institutions are decreasing across the African continent. This trend signals the need for urgent attention and action to address the potential ramifications on business practices, organisational culture, and overall ethical standards regionally. This finding is reinforced by a recent study. In this context, Mbandlwa et al. (2020) found that corporate governance and ethical leadership are shrinking and thus pose a threat to African leadership. Fourth, it emerged from the study findings that African politicians have excessive power to advance their interests through commercial crimes. This finding indicates a significant correlation between the political influence of African leaders and their involvement in illicit activities for personal gain. Similarly, Orudzheva and Sluhan (2023) established that in economies characterised by pervasive corruption, private and public sector organisations experience substantial motivations to partake in illicit practices like bribery.

Finally, the results indicated a need for African leaders to change their corrupt culture and immoral philosophical ideologies to improve the economic status of Africans from poverty and underdevelopment. This finding suggests that to improve the economic status of Africans and reduce poverty and underdevelopment, African leaders must address the prevalent culture of corruption and adopt more ethical and moral philosophical ideologies. This measure would require a significant shift in leaders' approach to governance and policy-making, focusing on transparency, accountability, and the promotion of values to prioritise the long-term well-being of African societies. Thus, the continent can make substantial progress towards meaningful and sustainable development by employing this approach. Moreover, this result is supported and confirmed by other researchers in the same field and discipline. Specifically, African leadership is facing a crisis and is incapable of effectively practising good corporate governance and applying ethical leadership principles to benefit marginalised African communities (Chigudu, 2020; Chipere, 2020). Following is a discussion of this study.

The discussion part of this study presents the following subheadings: The Impact of Politics on Corruption, Governance, and Ethics; and the Causes, Targets, and Outcomes of Authority Abuse.

The Impact of Politics on Corruption, Governance, and Ethics

Study findings revealed that African political effects on corruption, governance, and ethics are significant. In terms of corporate corruption, African political effects contribute to and stimulate its rise. Zheng et al. (2021) confirm this finding as they found that politics are associated with escalating corruption in most African nations. The political deployment of qualified individuals to fulfil their mandates may be a successful and productive strategy in Africa. Notwithstanding, in most cases, it does more harm than justice due to unfit and inept politicians occupying high positions; meanwhile, people not aligned with politics but capable of doing the job are overlooked and not placed in those positions. In light of these arguments, it appears that corruption on the African continent is approaching normalisation. Regrettably, it plunges the poor into new depths of poverty and enriches corrupt officials.

Concerning corporate governance and ethics, African political effects contribute to their plummeting. Correspondingly, another study suggested that the dwindling corporate governance and ethical leadership can also be attributed to and associated with African politics (Huang & Yuan, 2021). In this way, African leaders and authorities seem to disregard and disobey local corporate laws. This tradition has resulted in a leadership crisis in Africa. Hence, these groups are called upon to change their culture and approach for the benefit of all Africans.

Causes, Targets, and Outcomes of Authority Abuse

Figure 3 illustrates a conceptual model to combat corporate corruption in Africa.

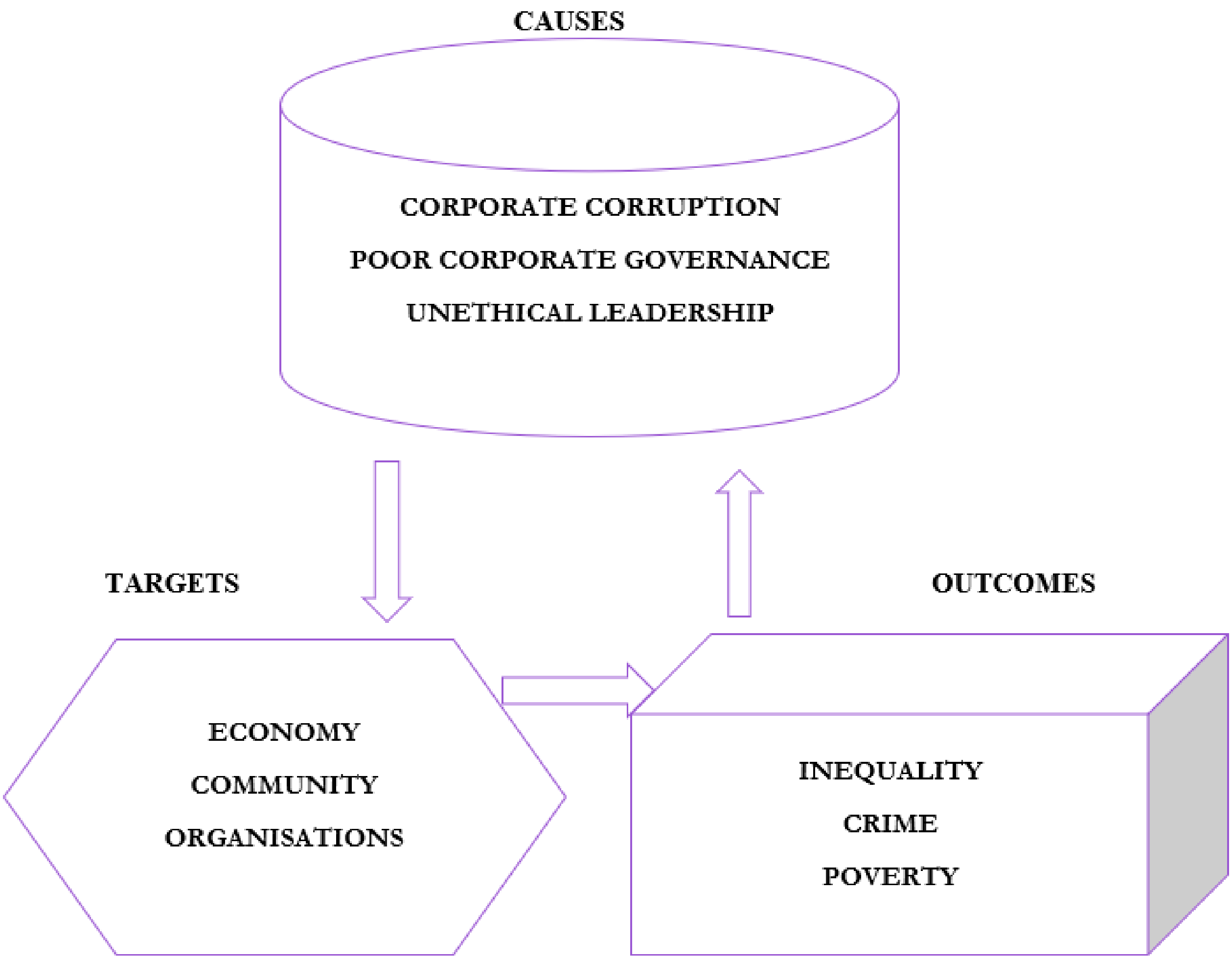

Figure 3: Conceptual Strategic Model to Combat Corporate Corruption. (Source: Author)

Figure 3 further displays an overview of the causes, victims, and outcomes of corporate corruption within organisations, highlighted by arrows. These causes are the sources of corporate corruption. A combination of these commercial crime practices leads to economic collapse, poor service delivery to the community, and financial drain on organisations. Ultimately, the outcomes emanating from these practices are crime, increased inequality, and poverty. There is no doubt that this is an unvirtuous cycle that needs to be broken and eliminated to solve this problem. This practice is partly due to Africa being one of the most impoverished and disadvantaged continents on the planet earth. As a result of the continent's status, Africa experiences difficulties in securing and borrowing funds from the world's financial resources (Alhassan et al., 2021). In this regard, among other issues related to corporate scandals, the debt owed by the South African state as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio overwhelmingly increased by 44.3% during 2015-2016 (Nong, 2021). Therefore, African leaders must adopt effective, ethical leadership practices and principles to address this issue (Dwiedienawati et al., 2021); and refrain from a laissez-faire leadership style (Donkor & Zhou, 2020). Thus, the current study provides recommendations that may address these African challenges. Figure 3 above illustrates that corporate corruption, poor corporate governance, and unethical leadership negatively impact the economy, community, and organisations, contributing to broader societal issues. Specifically, the consequences of corporate corruption, poor corporate governance, and unethical leadership manifest as increased inequality, higher rates of crime, and heightened levels of poverty within society. For future practices, this study proposes the recommendations displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Recommendations for Future Practices

Motive	Action
To reduce, root out, and fight corruption.	Dilute the political power that encourages and drives corruption.
	Regardless of rank or status, perpetrators must be severely punished and prosecuted.
	Fraudulent or commercial misconduct proceeds unjustly received through corruption must be recovered from the culprits' pension funds.
	In cases where pensions are insufficient to cover the costs associated with corporate crime, attach the perpetrators' assets to cover the shortfall.
	Identify and close all channels and loopholes that facilitate commercial crime.
To promote, foster, and inculcate the culture and principles of corporate governance and ethical leadership practices.	In cases where perpetrators cannot account for the ridiculous bank balances in their bank accounts, freeze them and institute an investigation.
	Apply and enact mandatory rules to prohibit people convicted of corporate malpractices from working, even outside their countries.
	Ensure that the principles and intentions of the King IV report are promoted and obeyed.
	Promote good governance and ethics because they are crucial to honesty, integrity, accountability, and responsibility.
	Enhance governance and ethics to attract foreign direct investment to develop and improve economic viability.

(Source: Author)

Finally, future empirical studies are recommended to complement this research, as it has laid the groundwork for further investigation. Emphasising the significance of conducting upcoming empirical studies to expand upon the findings of this research is crucial. Adhering to this methodology, researchers can explore the subject matter and enhance the framework established in this study. In Table 2 above, each recommendation is accompanied and explained by the underlying motive and the suggested action by the study. This approach aims to provide a clear rationale for each recommendation and offer specific courses of action. The rationale is to aid policy-makers, corporate governance advocates, academics, and other stakeholders interested in the study to make informed decisions.

A review of the implications for the practice by relevant stakeholders suggests the following key points:

- A lack of ethical leadership among African leaders leads them to fail to preserve the interests of the poor in their countries.
- African states fail to adhere to and enforce corporate governance rules across their institutions.
- The continent will never progress and improve under corrupt and selfish leaders.
- The collapse of African organisations will exacerbate and increase the high unemployment in this nation.

- Poor African people will continue to suffer at the hands of the rich.
- It is not for the nation that individuals aspire to positions, but for personal gain and the benefit of their associates and associates.
- The current situation in Africa will prevent investors from investing in the continent because they cannot risk their capital in a corrupt environment lacking strategic and effective leadership to deal with this problem.
- Africans must be cautious and mindful about whom they elect to power and choose to lead them since those in power do not care about their well-being and socioeconomic status.
- In the 21st century, loyalty to political parties is a thing of the past, no longer relevant.

Conclusion

Study findings suggest that several African political effects inflate corruption while simultaneously deflating governance and ethics. They include political interference, political patronage; political corruption; political instability, and unrestricted political power. The study concludes that the continent would stay impoverished, increasing inequality and rising unemployment rates. These challenges stem from the African continent's spiralling, chronic, and severe corruption. A review of the literature employed in this study was beneficial to achieving and reaching its objectives. A methodological approach selected and used in this study also contributed to the attainment of results. In addition, the study addresses its research problem: it is common for African companies to indulge in corporate scandals without severing ties with the perpetrators and other parties involved. Consequently, it is controversial whether African authorities have effective strategies and tools to curb and reduce this practice and trend. The study results addressed this issue by revealing that: African leaders and all stakeholder groups in the chain are called upon to reduce corruption and increase governance and ethics within their organisations. The study also outlined recommendations to alleviate some of the challenges African organisations face due to corruption.

In partnership with other individuals with authority, these leaders are responsible for fighting corruption on behalf of all African citizens. In conclusion, accordingly, this study has achieved its objectives and provided significant contributions to theory and practice. Theoretically, this study contributes further a piece of knowledge and to a deeper understanding of corruption, governance, and ethics in African contexts. In practice, this study provides a conceptual framework that may be selected and used as a reference and guide for addressing organisational corruption on the African continent. For more insight into corruption, governance, and ethics in Africa and the world, further empirical and theoretical studies utilising a different methodology are suggested and recommended.

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