



DR. TALENT RUSERE PHD THESIS

Political Science & Public Administration

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University Of Oxford



**The Politics of Post-Colonial
Recovery in Africa**

A Comparative Study of Civil Society Mobilization in Southern Africa



UNIVERSITY OF
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Professor Talent Rusere Phd Thesis - The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa – University of Oxford

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POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PHD THESIS

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Abstract of Thesis

The central thesis of this work is that the political choices made by former liberation movements profoundly shape the relationship between the state and civil society, creating divergent political opportunity structures that mediate the impacts of global technology on post-colonial recovery. Through a comparative analysis of post-apartheid South Africa and Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF, this research finds that technology is not a neutral force; its ability to drive positive change or serve as a tool

of repression is fundamentally contingent on a country's governance, its institutional integrity, and the resilience of its civil society.

Abstract of findings

1. Divergent state-civil society relations: Post-colonial recovery outcomes in Southern Africa are not uniform. South Africa's negotiated settlement, while yielding a strong constitutional framework, also led to a complex and often contradictory relationship between the ANC and civil society. This "contested constitutionalism" provides legal and formal channels for mobilization but is undermined by institutional decay and elite co-optation. In contrast, Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF, consolidating power through intra-elite conflict and authoritarianism, has systematically closed off civic space, creating a repressive environment where state-civil society relations are defined by antagonism and intimidation.

2. Varied civil society mobilization strategies: These divergent political opportunity structures necessitate different mobilization strategies. In South Africa, professionalized CSOs leverage litigation, independent media, and advocacy to hold power accountable, while marginalized grassroots movements resort to direct action and protest against persistent inequality. In Zimbabwe, civil society operates in a high-risk environment, relying on informal networks, digital platforms, and covert strategies to challenge a repressive regime that uses patriotic history discourses to delegitimize dissent.

3. Technology as a double-edged sword: Global technology acts as a double-edged sword, presenting both opportunities and risks depending on the political context.

•**South Africa:** Technology has accelerated innovation, expanded financial inclusion, and provided platforms for advocacy. However, its

benefits are unevenly distributed due to a persistent digital divide rooted in socioeconomic inequalities.

•**Zimbabwe:** Technology has provided some resilience amidst economic collapse, particularly through mobile money. However, the ZANU-PF regime also weaponizes it for repression through internet shutdowns, surveillance, and online censorship, particularly evident around election cycles.

4. Geopolitical rivalries and digital vulnerability: African economies are increasingly a site of geopolitical competition, particularly between the US and China. This creates dependency risks for countries like South Africa, which must navigate competing technological and investment interests. In highly vulnerable nations like Zimbabwe, the regime exploits these rivalries by aligning with powers that offer financial investment in exchange for a blind eye to human rights abuses.

5. Uneven post-colonial recovery: The different state-civil society dynamics, mediated by technology, contribute to uneven post-colonial recovery. South Africa, despite its institutional decay and lingering inequalities, benefits from a resilient civil society and a more robust tech ecosystem. In Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF's repression of civil society has contributed to a cycle of perpetual economic and political crisis, severely limiting the potential for democratic and sustainable recovery.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that the nature of state-civil society relations and the mediating role of global technology are critical variables for understanding post-colonial recovery. The contrasting paths of South Africa and Zimbabwe highlight that sustainable development and democratic consolidation require not only technological adoption but also a resilient civil society and a state

committed to constitutionalism and inclusive governance. Ignoring these crucial political factors risks misinterpreting technology's impact and overlooking the fundamental drivers of democratic progress and socioeconomic well-being in the region.

Thesis overview

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Thesis title

"The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa: A Comparative Study of Civil Society Mobilization in Southern Africa"

Subfield

Comparative Politics, African Studies, Civil Society and Development

Research questions

- How do post-colonial state structures and legacies influence the strategies and effectiveness of civil society mobilization in Southern Africa?
- What factors explain the variations in state–civil society relations across different countries in Southern Africa during periods of political and economic transition?
- How does civil society's involvement shape the outcomes of post-colonial recovery, particularly concerning human rights, governance, and democracy?

Hypothetical thesis structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

•**Motivation:** The historical context of post-colonial Africa, highlighting the challenges of state-building, economic development, and democratic consolidation. Argue that civil society plays a crucial but varied role in this process.

•**Problem Statement:** The puzzle: despite facing similar colonial legacies, Southern African states show different patterns of civil society mobilization and effectiveness. This indicates that country-specific political dynamics matter significantly.

•**Argument (Thesis Statement):** The legacy of liberation movements, the nature of state-society pacts forged at independence, and subsequent political leadership choices critically shape the political opportunity structures for civil society mobilization.

•**Methodology:** The comparative case study design, justifying the selection of two or more countries in Southern Africa (e.g., South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique) to represent different paths of post-colonial recovery.

•**Significance:** Discussion on how the research contributes to post-colonial theory, democratization studies, and the literature on civil society in Africa.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

•**Post-colonial Theory:** A review how post-colonial theorists have analyzed state formation, leadership, and external influence in Africa.

•**Civil Society in Africa:** Examining the debate on civil society in Africa, contrasting Western-centric views with perspectives that acknowledge indigenous forms of civic organizing.

•**Path Dependency:** Developing a theoretical framework that incorporates path dependency, arguing that initial conditions (e.g., liberation movement characteristics) affect later state–civil society relations.

•**Political Opportunity Structures:** Explaining how different state configurations create varied opportunities and constraints for civil society

mobilization, using concepts like competitive authoritarianism, dominant party systems, and democratic transitions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

•**Research Design:** Detailing the comparative case study approach, including the rationale for selecting specific Southern African countries based on their political trajectories (e.g., post-apartheid democracy, dominant-party state).

•**Data Sources:** Describing the use of mixed methods, including qualitative analysis of government documents, civil society reports, media, and interview data from activists, policymakers, and community leaders.

•**Fieldwork and Ethics:** Explaining the process of fieldwork, data collection, and ethical considerations for working with vulnerable populations and sensitive topics in Southern Africa.

Chapter 4: Case Study 1: South Africa

•**Background:** Analyzing South Africa's democratic transition and the role of anti-apartheid civil society.

•**Findings:** Discussion on how the legacy of the liberation movement (ANC) has influenced post-apartheid state–civil society relations. Examine contemporary issues like combating gender-based violence, corruption, and promoting human rights.

•**Analysis:** Assessment on how the political opportunity structure in South Africa, while democratic, presents challenges and opportunities for different types of civil society mobilization.

Chapter 5: Case Study 2: Zimbabwe

- Background:** Examining Zimbabwe's transition from a liberation-movement-led state to an authoritarian regime.
- Findings:** Details on how the ruling party, ZANU-PF, has constrained and repressed civil society through patriotic history discourses and brute repression.
- Analysis:** Interpreting my findings within the theoretical framework, showing how a dominant-party state suppresses civil society mobilization to maintain power, limiting political recovery.

Chapter 6: Comparative Analysis

- Discussion:** Comparing the findings from the South Africa and Zimbabwe case studies. Highlight the key differences in state–civil society relations, focusing on how different liberation movement legacies and political choices lead to divergent outcomes for post-colonial recovery.
- Impact on Theory:** Discussing how my findings support and refine existing theories on civil society, democratization, and post-colonial politics, emphasizing the role of historical trajectories and regime type.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

- Summary of Findings:** Recapitulation of the central argument and key findings regarding the varied nature of civil society mobilization and its role in post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa.
- Contribution:** My thesis's contribution to academic and policy debates.
- Limitations and Future Research:** Acknowledgement of the study's limitations and suggest avenues for future research, such as extending the analysis to other Southern African countries or examining the influence of international actors on civil society.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Talent Rusere Phd Thesis - The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa – University of Oxford
Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford
2024

The political history of post-colonial recovery in Africa is a complex, multi-faceted story of navigating the legacies of colonialism while attempting to build stable, prosperous, and independent nations. The journey has involved struggles with authoritarianism, economic dependency, internal conflict, and the challenge of fostering democratic and inclusive governance. The mid-20th century, particularly the year 1960, saw a wave of independence sweep across the African continent. This period was marked by optimism and high expectations for a future free from colonial exploitation and oppression. Leaders of independence movements promised to address historical injustices and build strong, prosperous nations. However, they faced enormous challenges inherited from colonial rule, including arbitrary borders, weak institutions, and economies designed to serve the interests of the metropole.

The initial post-independence euphoria was short-lived in many countries. The new political leaders often sought to consolidate power to achieve national cohesion and overcome ethnic divisions, frequently viewing multi-party politics as a threat to national unity. The one-party state emerged as the dominant political model across the continent. Civil societies were often suppressed or co-opted, and political pluralism diminished significantly. Insecure leaders and the politicization of the military led to a wave of successful and attempted coups, making Africa the region with the most military takeovers since 1950. Many post-colonial leaders replicated the centralized and often repressive governance styles of their former colonial masters. Ake argues that since many African leaders inherited power insecurely, they clung to power in the same authoritarian manner as their colonial predecessors.

The economic optimism of the 1960s gave way to widespread decline, often exacerbated by a legacy of resource dependency and external pressures. Former colonial powers continued to exert influence, often through multilateral institutions like the IMF and World Bank, which promoted neoliberal policies. This created a cycle of dependency, where foreign aid and loans often came with conditions that served the interests of the West rather than African development. The implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s led to budget cuts in social services, privatization, and liberalization.

While intended to foster growth, critics argue that SAPs accelerated economic decline and disproportionately harmed the poor.

The end of the Cold War significantly altered the political landscape in Africa. With Western powers less inclined to support authoritarian regimes for geopolitical reasons, and growing internal discontent, a new era of political liberalization emerged. Many states re-introduced multi-party elections and saw the resurgence of civil society movements, which had been previously repressed. Civil society organizations, including pro-democracy groups and anti-corruption watchdogs, played a crucial role in pushing for political change and monitoring elections. While the "Third Wave" brought some democratic gains, many elections were marred by fraud, and the "winner-take-all" nature of many political systems has sometimes exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Despite progress in some areas, the road to full political recovery is ongoing and faces persistent hurdles. Some regions, such as the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, continue to suffer from conflict rooted in colonial-era border decisions and inter-ethnic tensions. Corruption and weak state institutions remain widespread, hindering inclusive development and good governance in many nations. Over time, African regional organizations like the African Union have taken a more active role in promoting "African solutions to African problems," particularly in addressing peace and security challenges. Initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aim to foster regional economic integration and move away from the colonial-era model of reliance on primary commodity exports.

CHAPTER 1

Key theoretical perspectives

We can approach the history of post-colonial recovery from different theoretical standpoints:

•**Post-colonial theory:** How colonial legacies, including the imposition of Western state models and artificial borders, have created deep-seated political and economic problems in Africa. Colonial legacies, including the imposition of Western state models and artificial borders, have created deep-seated political and economic problems in Africa that persist today. These problems include political instability, ethnic conflict, and economic dependency, all of which stem from the arbitrary and extractive nature of colonial rule.

Artificial borders and ethnic division

The "Scramble for Africa" during the late 19th century carved up the continent with little regard for existing social, cultural, or ethnic realities. European colonial powers drew borders for their own convenience, often using straight lines on a map, which either divided ethnic groups or combined disparate, sometimes rival, communities into a single territory. This created a lack of national cohesion at independence, as loyalty often remained with ethnic or communal groups rather than the newly formed state. In countries like Nigeria and Sudan, artificial borders have been a central cause of internal conflict, as

different groups compete for control over the state and its resources. The division of ethnic groups across multiple countries has also contributed to inter-state conflicts and the regionalization of instability.

Imposed Western state models and authoritarianism

Colonial powers replaced or manipulated indigenous governance systems with Western-style, centralized state structures designed for control and exploitation, not public service. Post-colonial African leaders inherited these centralized, repressive state apparatuses, which they often used to consolidate power and suppress dissent. The military, police, and prisons were established as tools of coercion, not as institutions to serve the people. Traditional checks and balances on power were undermined by the colonial administration, paving the way for the "Big Man" politics and authoritarian rule that plagued many post-independence countries. Corruption was deeply institutionalized during the colonial era, as officials used material incentives to secure the cooperation of local elites. This practice of patronage and clientelism was continued and adapted by post-colonial leaders, becoming a defining feature of many African states.

Extractive economies and dependency

Colonial economic policies were designed to serve the industrial needs of the metropolitan powers, not to foster local development. African economies were fundamentally restructured to focus on the extraction of raw materials and the production of cash crops for export, often disrupting local subsistence agriculture and food security. This created a dependent relationship on international markets and a vulnerability to fluctuating commodity prices. Colonial rule dismantled existing indigenous economies, markets, and trade routes, creating new infrastructure like railways and ports that connected the resource-rich hinterlands directly to the coast for export, bypassing local economic networks. Colonial practices like land expropriation, forced labor, and discriminatory policies entrenched deep socio-economic disparities that persist in many African countries. The combination of artificial borders and extractive governance models created

a difficult environment for building stable, cohesive nation-states after independence. With weak national institutions, political identities often defaulted to ethnic or religious affiliations. Politicians frequently exploited these divisions for political gain, further straining national unity.

Many post-colonial states emerged as "fragile authoritarian" regimes, lacking the capacity to provide basic services and deliver inclusive development. This fragility makes them vulnerable to military coups, insurgencies, and external interference. Even after independence, former colonial powers and external actors sometimes intervened in African politics, supporting compliant leaders or backing coups to protect their interests.

•Neopatrimonialism:

Post-colonial African leaders have often combined modern state structures with traditional patronage systems to maintain power, a phenomenon known as neopatrimonialism. While African nations inherited the formal institutions of Western states, such as bureaucracies, legal frameworks, and parliaments, these were frequently subverted to serve personal and group interests rather than public ones. This has undermined the development of genuine institutional rule, leading to corruption, instability, and limited accountability.

Neopatrimonialism as a political strategy

New African leaders used the modern state apparatus to extend and formalize traditional patron-client networks, creating a system where loyalty to the leader superseded official procedure. In this system, leaders (patrons) maintain their political support by distributing state resources, such as public sector jobs, government contracts, and access to state funds, to their supporters (clients). This practice systematically undermines the professional bureaucracy, replacing merit-based appointments with political allegiance. The judiciary, civil service, and legislature are often filled with loyalists, which prevents them from acting as independent checks on the executive. The leader's ability to control

state resources becomes the primary mechanism for holding power, diverting public funds from essential services to private gain and political rewards.

Hybrid state structures

The formal, rational-legal state and the informal, personalistic patronage network coexist in a complex and often contradictory relationship.

•**The veneer of modernity:** On the surface, African states operate with Western-style constitutions, laws, and ministries. However, beneath this modern façade, informal rules and relationships based on personal loyalty and ethnic identity often dictate how the state actually functions.

•**Conflicting logics:** The formal institutions and their impersonal rules are constantly at odds with the personalized demands of the patronage system. Leaders must balance the need to project an image of a modern, functioning state to the international community with the domestic political necessity of rewarding their supporters.

The combination of modern state structures and traditional patronage systems has had several profound effects on the development of genuine institutional rule. The state's formal institutions are systematically weakened as they become instruments of personal power. This leads to a low capacity for governance, as leaders prioritize political survival over effective policy implementation. The judiciary is often compromised, with judges appointed based on loyalty rather than merit. This undermines judicial independence and the rule of law, making it difficult to hold the powerful accountable for corruption or abuse of power. The institutionalization of corruption through patronage networks creates a systemic problem that is difficult to address. The struggle to control state resources fuels political infighting and can lead to cycles of instability, as leaders and their factions compete for access to the state's wealth. The focus on distributing state resources for political ends discourages productive economic activity and investment. Public spending is often misallocated, and investors are deterred by an environment where property rights and contracts are not secure.

While neopatrimonialism remains a dominant feature of many African states, it is not static. The system is facing increasing pressure from both internal and external forces. Citizens are more aware of government failures and are demanding greater accountability. International donors and organizations have pushed for reforms aimed at strengthening institutions and curbing corruption. While some reforms have shown limited success, others have merely been integrated into the existing neopatrimonial framework, with leaders adopting the language of reform while continuing to practice patronage politics.

•**Path dependency:** The initial choices made by post-colonial leaders and the circumstances of decolonization created long-term political trajectories in Africa that are difficult to change due to the concept of **path dependency**. The decisions made during the immediate post-independence period locked many countries into specific institutional, economic, and political paths, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that has been challenging to break.

The immediate post-colonial era was defined by a critical choice: whether to pursue inclusive, multiparty democracy or to centralize power. Faced with artificial colonial borders that grouped diverse ethnic groups and underdeveloped state institutions, many leaders chose the latter to consolidate control. In many countries, the ruling party—often a former liberation movement—transitioned from an anti-colonial force to a single, authoritarian power. This move was frequently justified in the name of national unity and development.

This initial choice established a pattern of leadership where power was concentrated in the hands of the executive. It suppressed political opposition and entrenched the idea that the state serves the interests of the ruling elite rather than the public. This legacy of authoritarianism has made transitions to genuine democracy challenging, even with the resurgence of multiparty politics in the 1990s.

Economic strategy and resource allocation

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Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

Early leaders also made critical choices regarding economic policy, largely inheriting and adapting the extractive colonial economic model. The colonial infrastructure, built to extract raw materials, was repurposed to fuel the economies of the newly independent nations. Rather than investing in diversification, many leaders focused on controlling and exploiting these resource sectors. This created "rent-seeking" economies, where state resources were distributed through patronage to maintain political support. This entrenched dependency on global commodity markets and created an elite that had little incentive to build transparent, broad-based economic institutions. This early economic path created a vicious cycle of corruption, economic inequality, and stunted development. Attempts to diversify the economy have faced powerful opposition from entrenched interests benefiting from the existing system.

Institution-building and state legitimacy

The circumstances of decolonization and early leadership decisions profoundly shaped the nature and legitimacy of state institutions. Many African nations inherited administrative, legal, and military structures designed for control, not for public service. These institutions lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the populace. Instead of transforming these institutions, many leaders adopted and used them for personal and political gain. This perpetuated a model of governance based on coercion and patronage rather than rule of law and accountability. The lack of genuine institutional rule made African states vulnerable to instability, coups, and civil conflict. The inability to build state legitimacy from the ground up made it difficult to resolve conflicts peacefully and ensure citizens felt a stake in the political process.

Case Study of Zimbabwe, South Africa & Democratic Republic of Congo as examples of enduring trajectories in the Southern Africa

South Africa

After apartheid ended, the South African government adopted key neoliberal economic policies, which critics argue have perpetuated the country's high levels of inequality rather than transforming them. While the post-apartheid state successfully dismantled the formal structures of racial segregation, the economic system built on colonial and apartheid-era extraction and racialized capitalism largely remained.

Upon taking power in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) faced immense pressure, both domestically and internationally, to maintain economic stability and attract foreign investment.

•**Abandonment of the RDP:** The ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), initially focused on state-led redistribution and social programs, was largely sidelined by 1996.

•**Implementation of GEAR:** The government introduced the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategy. GEAR prioritized fiscal discipline, privatization, trade liberalization, and deregulation to attract foreign capital.

•**Pressure from elites and international bodies:** This policy shift was influenced by pressures from a powerful, predominantly white business community and international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The fear of capital flight from the country was a significant factor driving this conservative turn.

Consequences of neoliberal policies

The adoption of neoliberal policies contributed to the persistence of inequality and the reinforcement of existing economic structures.

•**Deepened inequality:** Instead of reversing apartheid's legacy, GEAR is often criticized for having deepened the existing economic inequality. While inequality between racial groups has seen a slight decline, inequality *within* the Black population has risen dramatically, creating a small Black elite while leaving the majority of Black people in poverty.

•**Increased unemployment:** Despite initial promises, neoliberal policies failed to generate significant job growth, leading to stubbornly high unemployment rates. The prioritization of capital-intensive production over labor-intensive industries meant that low-skilled Black workers continued to be disproportionately excluded from the formal economy.

•**Concentrated wealth:** The neoliberal era saw wealth and economic power become even more concentrated. Critics point to the phenomenon of "state capture," where politically connected elites manipulate state institutions for personal enrichment, as a later symptom of this trajectory. A 2019 World Inequality Lab report found that the wealth gap in South Africa remained largely unchanged since the end of apartheid.

•**Financialization and de-industrialization:** The economy increasingly relied on finance and resource extraction, with a corresponding decline in the manufacturing sector. This de-industrialization further hampered job creation and economic diversification.

Persistence of economic apartheid

Decades after the end of political apartheid, critics argue that economic apartheid continues to exist.

•**Structural barriers:** While social spending and grants expanded significantly and helped mitigate extreme poverty, they did not fundamentally challenge the structural barriers preventing the majority of South Africans from accessing wealth.

•**Lack of structural change:** The policies failed to address fundamental issues of asset ownership, particularly land. Land reform remains a contentious issue, and the highly skewed land distribution, rooted in colonial and apartheid-era dispossession, underpins ongoing inequality.

•**Reshaping of elites:** While the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program has brought some Black South Africans into business and government, it is seen by many as creating a narrow Black elite rather than fundamentally redistributing wealth to the masses.

Zimbabwe

Decades after Robert Mugabe's initial choices to consolidate power through patronage and the later land seizures, Zimbabwe continues to grapple with the profound and lasting political and economic crises his actions initiated. The current government under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, despite promises of reform, has largely failed to reverse the entrenched issues, and in some areas, has deepened them.

Entrenched patronage and institutional decay

Mugabe's initial consolidation of power relied heavily on building a robust system of patronage that rewarded political loyalty over merit.

- Loyalty-based appointments:** The civil service, judiciary, and military were staffed with party loyalists to ensure control and suppress dissent. This practice undermined the independence of state institutions.

- Continuation under Mnangagwa:** Though he promised a "new dispensation," Mnangagwa, a longtime Mugabe ally, has overseen a continuation of this system. Military influence over the government has increased, and critics argue that anti-corruption efforts have selectively targeted political opponents while protecting allies.

- Obstacles to accountability:** This entrenched patronage has created a political culture where corruption is rampant and accountability is weak, making meaningful institutional reform exceptionally difficult.

The destabilizing effects of land seizures

The "Fast-Track Land Reform" program initiated in 2000, ostensibly to correct colonial land imbalances, had devastating long-term economic consequences.

•**Agricultural collapse:** The often violent and chaotic seizure of white-owned commercial farms crippled the agricultural sector, once the backbone of the economy. The loss of experienced farmers, infrastructure, and access to international markets resulted in a massive decline in productivity.

•**Perpetuated poverty:** While the program did redistribute land to some Black farmers, it also displaced thousands of Black farmworkers. Many beneficiaries lacked the capital, experience, or tenure security to farm successfully, and the disruption contributed to widespread food insecurity.

•**Financial sector damage:** The land seizures destroyed the collateral for billions of dollars in bank loans, leading to the collapse of local banks and damaging the financial system.

•**Ongoing challenge:** Despite efforts to address the issue, including a 2020 compensation deal for seized farm infrastructure, the land reform program's legacy continues to hinder agricultural recovery and overall economic stability.

Inability to reverse the economic decline

The post-Mugabe government has largely failed to reverse the downward economic spiral.

•**Continued economic crisis:** Years of economic mismanagement, hyperinflation, and a collapsed currency under Mugabe have left the country in perpetual crisis. The Mnangagwa administration's austerity measures and currency reforms have brought little relief, with the cost of living skyrocketing for ordinary citizens.

•**Lack of investor confidence:** Foreign direct investment (FDI) remains low due to ongoing policy uncertainty, corruption, and the legacy of expropriations. Despite the "open for business" rhetoric, the environment is still seen as high-risk by many international investors.

•**Informal economy:** The formal economy has largely collapsed, with over 90% of the workforce now in the informal sector. This limits tax revenues and formal job creation, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and economic stagnation.

Persistent political instability

The change in leadership from Mugabe to Mnangagwa did not usher in a new era of political stability or democracy.

•**Contested elections and repression:** Subsequent elections, including the 2018 vote, were marred by irregularities and violence against the opposition.

•**Shrinking civic space:** The Mnangagwa government has intensified its repression of political opposition and civil society, using legislation like the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Bill to stifle dissent.

•**Resilient authoritarianism:** The continued dominance of the ruling ZANU-PF party and the military's deep involvement in politics demonstrate a fundamental resilience of authoritarianism, making a genuine democratic transition elusive.

In essence, Mugabe's policies created deep-seated structural problems that continue to plague Zimbabwe. The political trajectory of a centralized, patrimonial state and the economic trajectory of a collapsed, extractive economy have proven immensely difficult to alter, even with a change in leadership.

The Democratic Republic of Congo

The lack of a middle class or effective governing infrastructure at independence, combined with decades of kleptocratic rule, created an enduring state of instability and extractive economic practices that continue to this day.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a stark example of how the lack of a middle class and effective governing infrastructure at independence, combined with decades of kleptocratic rule, created an enduring state of instability and extractive economic practices. This dynamic has locked the country into a persistent cycle of violence and underdevelopment, despite its vast resource wealth.

The absence of a middle class at independence

In 1960, the newly independent Congo possessed a thin layer of formally educated "évolués" but lacked a broad-based middle class with economic independence or political leverage.

- **Belgian colonial policy:** Belgian rule deliberately suppressed the development of an educated, politically conscious African elite to maintain control. Congolese were restricted from holding skilled positions or private property until the final years of colonial rule.
- **Limited political base:** The absence of a strong middle class meant there was no natural constituency to demand good governance, hold leaders accountable, or push for inclusive economic policies.
- **Intensified ethnic divisions:** Political parties that emerged at independence were often organized along ethnic or regional lines, lacking national cohesion. This made the country vulnerable to manipulation by leaders who exploited ethnic differences for political gain.

Ineffective governing infrastructure

The colonial administration prioritized resource extraction and control over nation-building, leaving behind a weak and ineffective state apparatus.

- **Inherited coercive state:** The post-colonial state was not built to serve citizens but to manage resource exploitation and control the population. Leaders inherited a repressive military and a system of administration designed to extract wealth for colonial powers.
- **Inadequate service provision:** The vast country's infrastructure, particularly roads and transport networks, was underdeveloped and fragmented, making it difficult to link different regions and provide basic services to the population.
- **Limited state capacity:** The new government lacked the skilled civil servants, technical expertise, and tax base to effectively manage the state, implement policies, and control its territory.

Decades of kleptocratic rule under Mobutu

Following independence, Mobutu Sese Seko's 32-year kleptocratic rule (1965–1997) exacerbated these initial weaknesses and solidified a system of institutionalized corruption.

- Destruction of institutions:** Mobutu used the state as a personal slush fund, diverting billions of dollars of national wealth for his lavish lifestyle. He systematically undermined and dismantled formal institutions, replacing merit with personal loyalty and patronage.
- Entrenched corruption:** Mobutu's system, known as "zairianization," involved seizing foreign-owned assets and redistributing them to his cronies. This established a culture of rent-seeking and corruption that permeated every level of the state.
- Deliberate neglect of infrastructure:** Public funds that could have maintained or developed the country's infrastructure were instead plundered. By the 1990s, much of the country's infrastructure had collapsed.

Enduring instability and extractive practices

The combined effect of these factors has locked the DRC into a long-term political and economic crisis.

- Perpetuation of extractive economy:** The kleptocratic rule cemented the colonial-era extractive model. Powerful elites, often with foreign backing, continue to illegally exploit the country's mineral wealth, including gold, tin, and coltan, to fund armed groups and corrupt officials.
- Intensified conflict:** The struggle to control resource-rich areas in the eastern DRC has fueled a perpetual cycle of violence and ethnic conflict. Foreign armies and rebel militias continue to operate with impunity, often supported by neighboring states and international interests seeking access to minerals.

•**Impeded institutional reform:** Efforts to rebuild the state and combat corruption have been hampered by the deeply entrenched kleptocratic networks that benefit from the current system. Political power and access to resources are intertwined, making it difficult to hold powerful actors accountable.

•**Limited democratic consolidation:** The legacy of authoritarianism and institutional weakness has made a transition to a stable, functioning democracy exceptionally challenging. Elections are often marred by irregularities, and power remains concentrated around a narrow elite.

Despite facing similar colonial legacies, Southern African states show different patterns of civil society mobilization and effectiveness because country-specific political dynamics significantly influence how these legacies are navigated and expressed. Factors such as the nature of the decolonization process, the history of the ruling party, institutional choices, and the political settlement all play a pivotal role in shaping state-civil society relations.

Problem Statement:

The puzzle: despite facing similar colonial legacies, Southern African states show different patterns of civil society mobilization and effectiveness. This indicates that country-specific political dynamics matter significantly.

The circumstances surrounding a country's independence and subsequent political choices have had a profound and lasting impact on its political trajectory and the space for civil society.

Liberation movements and post-independence relations

In countries where independence was won through armed struggle, the relationship between the state and civil society is particularly complex and often contentious.

•**South Africa vs. Zimbabwe:** Both the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) transitioned from liberation movements to ruling parties. However, their approaches to civil society diverged significantly.

•**South Africa:** Following a negotiated transition, civil society was formally incorporated into the new constitutional framework. A vibrant civic space persists, though civil society organizations (CSOs) that challenge the ANC are sometimes marginalized.

•**Zimbabwe:** After 2000, ZANU-PF became deeply hostile to CSOs perceived as challenging its dominance, leading to systematic harassment and repression. This has forced civil society to adopt a survivalist posture within a heavily restricted civic space.

Economic settlement and elite alliances

The economic and political deals struck at or after independence significantly influenced the state's capacity and the political space for mobilization.

•**Botswana vs. Zimbabwe:** Both experienced British colonialism, but their post-independence trajectories were drastically different.

•**Botswana:** The relatively smooth transition and discovery of diamonds allowed the state to fund a developmental program without relying on broad-based taxation or patronage. A dominant ruling party presided over a largely stable democracy, leaving civil society with a less confrontational but sometimes marginalized role.

•**Zimbabwe:** The political settlement failed to resolve the land issue equitably, which later became a tool for the ruling party to consolidate power through patronage and expropriation. The resulting economic crisis forced civil society into an adversarial position.

The power of neopatrimonialism

Neopatrimonialism—where formal state structures are used to mask informal patronage networks—plays a crucial role in shaping the civil society space. Democratic reforms and institutions, such as elections and anti-corruption agencies, are frequently undermined by neopatrimonial practices. In Zimbabwe, the ruling party leveraged ethnic and regional divisions, creating a "us vs. them" logic to marginalize and polarize civil society. In countries with less aggressive neopatrimonialism, CSOs may engage in "democratic lawfare," using the legal system to challenge the incumbent's actions. In more restrictive settings, civil society often faces co-optation or outright confrontation.

Electoral integrity and democratic backsliding

The quality of a country's electoral process and overall democratic health directly impacts civil society's effectiveness. In many African states, elections have failed to translate into tangible socioeconomic improvements, leading to public disillusionment with the democratic process. In Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, electoral processes have been captured by elites, eroding public trust and undermining civil society's electoral monitoring role. As democratic backsliding accelerates, governments often shrink the space for civil society by passing restrictive legislation, controlling media, and harassing activists. This forces CSOs to either go underground or focus on less politically sensitive issues like service delivery.

The influence of donor funding

International donor funding, while essential for many CSOs, also introduces distinct dynamics that shape mobilization efforts.

•**South Africa:** Post-apartheid, the reduction in funding from Western donors shifted the landscape for civil society, pushing some organizations to professionalize or seek local funding. In Zimbabwe, donors have played a crucial role in supporting human rights work,

but the reliance on foreign funding has also exposed CSOs to accusations of being foreign agents by the state. Donor priorities can sometimes influence civil society's agenda, favoring certain issues over others and potentially distracting from local priorities. While Southern African states share a similar colonial starting point, the divergence in their political dynamics—driven by differences in transition, elite capture, neopatrimonial practices, electoral integrity, and donor influence—explains the varied patterns of civil society mobilization and effectiveness observed across the region.

Argument:

The legacy of liberation movements, the nature of state-society pacts forged at independence, and subsequent political leadership choices critically shape the political opportunity structures for civil society mobilization.

The political opportunity structures for civil society mobilization in Africa have been critically shaped by the legacy of liberation movements, the nature of state-society pacts forged at independence, and subsequent leadership choices. This critical analysis reveals how these factors have created divergent trajectories, ranging from relatively open civic spaces to deeply entrenched authoritarianism that limits or co-opts civil society. The character of the anti-colonial struggle profoundly influenced the post-independence relationship between the state and civil society. In countries where independence was won through armed struggle (e.g., Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola), the victorious liberation movement often retained its centralized, command-and-control structure. This military-style organization was ill-suited for democratic governance and fostered an intolerance for dissent, viewing political opposition as a betrayal of the revolution. Upon taking power, many former liberation movements integrated civil society allies into the new government. This blurred the lines between state and civic life and created a patronage system where loyalty to the ruling party was rewarded with state resources, effectively neutralizing potential critics. In Zimbabwe, for example, the ZANU-PF government's co-optation of war

veterans and other loyalists cemented its dominance, particularly after 2000. Liberation movements often used their historical role as liberators to claim a unique legitimacy to rule indefinitely. This has allowed them to frame critical civil society organizations as unpatriotic or as puppets of foreign interests, particularly when those organizations challenge the ruling party's narrative or actions.

The nature of state-society pacts at independence

The political settlements negotiated at independence played a crucial role in determining the long-term relationship between the state and its citizens.

•**Pacted transitions:** In some cases, like South Africa's negotiated transition, the founding pact included constitutional safeguards for a formal civic space. However, this often demobilized more radical, grassroots movements in favor of institutionalized, professionalized civil society organizations (CSOs).

•**Contested transitions:** In countries with more contentious or failed transitions, the state-society pact was weaker or non-existent. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, the lack of a cohesive state at independence, exacerbated by decades of kleptocratic rule, created an environment of enduring instability and limited state reach, which both enabled and constrained civil society's role.

•**Exclusionary pacts:** Many post-independence pacts were built on exclusionary principles, often favoring certain ethnic or regional groups while marginalizing others. This fueled internal divisions and made it difficult for civil society to mobilize on a unified, national basis, forcing many organizations to operate along sub-national lines.

The choices made by successive leaders following independence have either reinforced or departed from these foundational trajectories, critically shaping the political opportunity structure for civil society. A common outcome in many African states is the emergence of neopatrimonialism, where leaders use modern state institutions for personal enrichment and to distribute patronage. This system undermines democratic accountability and the

rule of law, making it challenging for civil society to hold leaders accountable. CSOs that challenge this system risk state harassment, co-optation, or closure.

Leaders' choices have often been shaped by internal political threats and external pressures from international donors. In the 1990s, the so-called "third wave" of democratization, often influenced by conditional aid, compelled many African leaders to introduce multiparty elections. However, incumbents often adapted, using fraudulent elections and political manipulation to maintain power, leading to democratic stagnation and backsliding.

The result in many cases has been a "hybrid regime," combining the formal institutions of democracy with authoritarian practices. In these contexts, civil society faces significant challenges, including surveillance, political persecution, and legal restrictions on freedom of association. The resilience of civil society under these conditions often depends on its ability to navigate both formal legal challenges and informal networks of power. In some cases, a change in leadership has led to a re-evaluation of state-civil society relations. For example, recent transitions in countries like Botswana have been hailed as a sign of democratic resilience, while military coups in other parts of Africa have further demonstrated the failures of elite governance.

In countries with a history of polarized liberation struggles, a pervasive "us-vs-them" mentality often defines the relationship between the ruling party and opposition, including civil society. This severely constrains the ability of CSOs to act as neutral advocates for broader public interests. Across Africa, there are contradictory trends of both democratic backsliding and civic resistance. Civil society has shown resilience by adapting its strategies, such as engaging in "democratic lawfare" to challenge authoritarian practices through legal means.

The initial legitimacy derived from liberation has been challenged by ruling parties' failures to deliver on development promises. This has led to public dissatisfaction and a growing tolerance for military intervention aimed at correcting misgovernance, further complicating the democratic landscape. The dominance of former liberation movements or entrenched ruling parties has often limited meaningful electoral competition and the alternation of power, frustrating citizens who feel their voices are not being heard through formal

channels. This has prompted civil society to seek alternative avenues for political participation.

Methodology:

Explaining the comparative case study design, justifying the selection of two or more countries in Southern Africa (e.g., South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique) to represent different paths of post-colonial recovery.

This study will utilize a **comparative case study design** to analyze how post-colonial legacies and state structures influence civil society mobilization in Southern Africa. This methodology is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social and political phenomena in their real-world context, moving beyond superficial descriptions to provide in-depth, contextualized explanations.

Comparative case study design

This design involves an intensive analysis of a small number of cases to identify similarities, differences, and causal patterns. It is a powerful tool for theory-building and testing, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how broader theoretical propositions operate under varying contextual conditions.

The methodology will follow these key steps:

1. Define the research question: The core question is how colonial legacies and post-colonial state structures influence the strategies and effectiveness of civil society

mobilization in Southern Africa, with an acknowledgment that country-specific dynamics lead to divergent outcomes.

2. **Select cases:** A small number of countries will be purposefully selected based on theoretical criteria, rather than random sampling.

3. **Conduct within-case analysis:** Each country will be studied individually to provide a "thick description" of its political history, state-civil society relations, and the factors influencing civil society mobilization. This involves in-depth data collection through interviews, document analysis, and media reports.

4. **Perform cross-case comparison:** The findings from the individual case studies will be compared to identify patterns, causal mechanisms, and key differences in state-civil society relations across the countries.

5. **Identify alternative explanations:** The analysis will consider and test alternative explanations for the observed outcomes to strengthen causal inferences.

Justification for country selection

The selection of countries is justified by applying a modified version of the **Most Different Systems Design**, in which countries with broadly similar backgrounds (colonial legacy, regional context) are compared to explain differences in a particular outcome (civil society effectiveness). This allows the study to hold the regional and colonial legacy constant while highlighting the impact of different post-independence trajectories.

Selected cases: South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique.

Criterion	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Mozambique
Colonial Power	British (with extended period of white-minority rule)	British (with a unilateral declaration of independence by white minority)	Portuguese (distinct colonial administrative model)
Path to	Negotiated transition after	Armed struggle leading to	Armed struggle (FRELIMO)

Independence	a long liberation struggle; constitutional democracy established	independence; initial democracy eroded by authoritarian rule	followed by a civil war; socialist one-party state at independence
Post-Independence Trajectory	Formal, institutionalized democratic system with a dominant ruling party; vibrant but sometimes marginalized civil society	Transition from a repressive settler regime to an authoritarian and neopatrimonial state; hostile environment for civil society	Transition from a socialist one-party state to a liberalized, multi-party system; FRELIMO remains dominant; civil society operates under watchful state oversight
Outcome (Civil Society Space)	Relatively open civic space, but with challenges related to inequality and ruling party dominance	Highly constrained civic space, marked by state harassment and political repression	Mixed civic space; some state-society collaboration, but with limited room for critical dissent

Why i have chosen these cases

1. Varying liberation legacies: The three countries represent distinct liberation and post-independence trajectories. South Africa's negotiated transition led to a formal, institutionalized democratic system, while Zimbabwe's armed struggle transitioned into autocracy. Mozambique's history of a socialist one-party state and civil war offers a third variant, where the former liberation movement (FRELIMO) remains a dominant political force.

2. Different patterns of state-civil society relations: The selected cases exhibit varied patterns of state-civil society relations, from South Africa's complex yet relatively open civil society to Zimbabwe's hostile environment and Mozambique's more co-optative system. This variation is key to understanding the different outcomes.

3. Common regional context: As members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), these countries share a regional context, including historical ties, economic interdependencies, and exposure to similar regional and international pressures. This allows the study to control for these variables and focus on explaining the internal, country-specific differences.

By comparing these three distinct cases, the study can provide a nuanced analysis of how the interplay between historical legacies, specific political trajectories, and elite choices shapes the political space for civil society mobilization across Southern Africa.

Significance:

Discussing how the research contributes to post-colonial theory, democratization studies, and the literature on civil society in Africa.

This research makes several significant contributions to post-colonial theory, democratization studies, and the literature on civil society in Africa by moving beyond general claims to provide a nuanced, comparative analysis grounded in country-specific dynamics.

Contributions to post-colonial theory

•**Refining path dependency:** While existing post-colonial theory highlights the enduring impact of colonial legacies, this study refines the concept of path dependency. By comparing cases like South Africa and Zimbabwe, it demonstrates that a similar colonial starting point does not lead to a singular outcome. Instead, different political settlements and elite choices create distinct, and often difficult-to-reverse, political trajectories, even within a single region.

•**Historicizing neopatrimonialism:** The study places the concept of neopatrimonialism within a historical framework, showing how it emerged not as a continuation of pre-colonial practices but as an adaptation of centralized, repressive colonial administrative structures. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the specific ways in which modern state

structures were blended with traditional patronage systems varied across the cases, leading to different degrees of institutional strength and civil society co-optation.

•**Beyond state-centric views:** The research moves beyond state-centric analyses by highlighting the complex role of civil society as both a product of and a force against colonial and neocolonial power structures. It demonstrates how civil society organizations (CSOs) navigate, resist, and, at times, are co-opted by state-driven neopatrimonialism, providing a more detailed picture of agency in the post-colony.

Contributions to democratization studies

•**Critique of transition narratives:** The study offers a critical perspective on the "third wave" of democratization narratives, which often overemphasize the role of elections. By examining cases like Zimbabwe, it demonstrates that the introduction of multi-party elections often coexists with authoritarian practices, limited political competition, and rare alternance of power.

•**Nuanced understanding of civil society's role:** While some democratization literature idealizes civil society as a force for democratic change, this research provides a more nuanced understanding. It shows that CSOs in Africa are not a monolithic entity and their ability to influence policy and hold governments accountable varies significantly depending on the political context. The study illuminates how factors like donor funding, ruling party dominance, and institutional weakness can limit civil society's effectiveness, even in relatively more open democratic spaces like South Africa.

•**Explaining democratic backsliding:** By comparing cases that have experienced different levels of democratic backsliding, the research contributes to the understanding of why some African nations have stagnated or regressed politically. It highlights how the subversion of electoral integrity, the use of state resources by incumbents, and constitutional manipulation are common tactics that undermine the consolidation of genuine democracy.

Contributions to the literature on civil society in Africa

Professor Talent Rusere Phd Thesis - The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa – University of Oxford

Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

•**Comparative insights:** The comparative case study design offers rich, context-specific insights that are often lost in large-N statistical studies. By focusing on South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, the research provides a detailed account of the diverse ways civil society adapts and responds to distinct political environments.

•**Agency and resilience:** The study showcases the resilience of civil society in repressive environments. In highly constrained contexts like Zimbabwe, CSOs have developed innovative strategies, such as using informal networks or external partnerships, to circumvent state restrictions. This contributes to the literature on social movement theory and how actors mobilize in challenging political opportunity structures.

•**Challenging normative assumptions:** The research challenges the notion that Western models of civil society and democracy are universally applicable or desirable. It highlights how traditional forms of community organization and "civic culture" play a role that Western-centric models of CSOs often overlook. It explores how hybrid forms of civic engagement, including collaborations and conflicts with traditional leaders, continue to shape political outcomes.

CHAPTER 2:

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Review how post-colonial theorists have analyzed state formation, leadership, and external influence in Africa

The political history of post-colonial Africa is a story of navigating complex and persistent challenges related to state-building, economic development, and democratic consolidation.

Civil society has played a crucial but varied role throughout this history, acting as both an ally and an adversary to the state, and often filling the gaps where government has failed.

The challenges of the post-colonial state

State-building

African states were not constructed by their citizens but were instead imposed by European colonial powers with little regard for pre-existing ethnic, cultural, or linguistic divisions. This left a legacy of fragmented nations, arbitrary borders, and deep-seated ethnic and religious divisions.

•**Weak institutions:** The institutional infrastructure left behind was often weak and designed for colonial control, not for fostering legitimate, responsive, and equitable governance.

The institutional infrastructure inherited by African states at independence was fundamentally weak, designed for colonial control and resource extraction, rather than for fostering legitimate, responsive, and equitable governance. This legacy created a lasting fragility, as the new nations had to build from a foundation structured to serve foreign interests, not local populations.

Coercive and extractive purpose

The primary objective of colonial institutions was to facilitate control and economic exploitation, not to develop an accountable state. This was achieved through:

•**Hierarchical administration:** Colonial powers, whether through direct or indirect rule, established centralized, top-down administrative systems. Power flowed from the colonial authorities downwards, with little or no accountability to the local population.

•**Lack of legitimacy:** Colonial rule operated through coercion and domination, not consent. Indigenous leaders were either replaced or co-opted and stripped of their traditional authority, becoming instruments of colonial policy. This undermined the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the people, fostering a deep-seated distrust that persisted after independence.

•**Extractive economy:** The state's administrative and legal structures were geared toward exploiting natural resources and labor for the benefit of the metropole. The legal system, for example, prioritized protecting colonial property rights over indigenous land tenure or resource claims.

Fragmented and weak state capacity

The institutions left behind at independence often lacked the capacity to govern effectively, leading to a state that struggled to project power beyond urban centers.

•**Insufficient resources and human capital:** Colonial administrations were intentionally small and underfunded, especially outside of "settler" colonies. At independence, this left a massive institutional void, with a shortage of trained local administrators and technical experts to run the new state.

•**Infrastructure for extraction, not integration:** Infrastructure like railways and ports were built to link resource-rich areas to the coast for export, not to integrate the national economy or connect different regions for internal development. This infrastructure legacy reinforced economic fragmentation and limited the state's reach across its territory.

•**Exploitation of ethnic divisions:** In many cases, colonial administrators politicized and intensified ethnic identities to aid in their "divide and rule" strategy. This legacy of ethnic-based manipulation left post-colonial states with internal divisions that politicians could exploit, often at the expense of national unity and institutional development.

Legacy of patrimonialism and unaccountability

The colonial institutional model laid the groundwork for the post-independence rise of neopatrimonialism, where personal loyalty and patronage replaced formal, merit-based governance.

•**Subversion of bureaucracy:** The imported Western bureaucratic model was subverted by the colonial practice of using officials to enforce personal rule and distribute patronage. After independence, new leaders replicated this system, weakening state institutions by making appointments and resource allocations based on personal and political connections rather than on formal rules.

•**Weak checks and balances:** The colonial system lacked genuine accountability mechanisms or a separation of powers. This made it easier for post-independence leaders to consolidate power, suppress dissent, and dismantle any formal institutions of accountability that were put in place at independence.

•**Blurring of public and private:** Colonial officials often exploited their positions for private gain, a practice that set a dangerous precedent for post-independence leaders. This blurring of the line between personal and state wealth became a core feature of neopatrimonialism and systemic corruption in many African nations.

Consequences for equitable and legitimate governance

The lasting impacts of this weak institutional inheritance include:

•**Lack of trust:** The state's history as an instrument of control and extraction has made it difficult for citizens to trust government institutions, weakening the social contract necessary for effective and equitable governance.

•**Persistence of inequality:** The economic and legal structures inherited from colonialism have allowed a new elite to benefit from the extractive state model, perpetuating deep-seated inequalities in wealth and power distribution.

•**Vulnerability to fragility:** Weak state capacity and institutional legitimacy make African countries vulnerable to conflict, corruption, and political instability. The state's inability to

effectively manage resources and resolve internal grievances can often lead to state failure or internal strife

•**Contested legitimacy:** Post-colonial leaders, often inheritors of a coercive colonial state, struggled to build a sense of national identity and legitimacy. This led many to resort to authoritarian tactics and one-party rule to maintain power and suppress opposition.

•**Zero-sum politics:** The winner-take-all political systems that emerged often encouraged ethnic and regional competition for state resources, further undermining national unity and stability.

Economic development

Colonialism left African economies dependent on the extraction and export of raw materials, with little investment in domestic manufacturing or diversified production.

•**Neocolonialism:** Former colonial powers and multilateral institutions continued to influence economic policy through aid and loans tied to neoliberal policies, which often benefited external interests.

During the post-independence period in Africa, former colonial powers and multilateral institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, continued to exert significant influence over the economic policies of African nations. This influence often occurred through conditional aid and loans that promoted neoliberal policies, which often benefited external interests at the expense of local development. This dynamic has been described by some as neocolonialism, where economic control replaced direct political rule.

Conditional aid and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

In the 1980s and 1990s, many African countries faced economic crises, driven by factors such as commodity price crashes, high interest rates, and mounting debt. The IMF and World Bank responded with loans tied to stringent conditions known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).

The key components of SAPs included:

- Austerity measures:** Drastic cuts in government spending, especially on social services like health, education, and infrastructure.
- Privatization:** The sale of state-owned enterprises to private, often foreign, companies.
- Liberalization:** The removal of trade barriers, tariffs, and exchange controls to open up African markets to foreign goods and capital.
- Deregulation:** The removal of government regulations that restricted the operation of foreign businesses.
- Export-oriented focus:** A shift from diversified economies towards producing and exporting raw materials, similar to colonial-era models.

Consequences for African economies and external interests

The implementation of SAPs and other conditional aid programs had far-reaching and controversial effects, often strengthening external control over African economies and creating lasting problems.

Weakened local industries: The removal of trade barriers exposed nascent African industries to fierce competition from cheaper, subsidized imports from wealthier nations. This led to the collapse of many local businesses and hampered diversification away from primary commodity exports.

Increased dependency: The emphasis on primary commodity exports trapped African economies in a cycle of dependency on fluctuating global prices. This made them

vulnerable to external economic shocks and deepened their reliance on foreign loans and aid.

Reduced social spending: Austerity measures disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations. The introduction of user fees for healthcare and education meant many poor families could no longer afford essential services. This eroded human capital and increased poverty and inequality.

Loss of economic sovereignty: Critics argue that the conditions imposed by international institutions undermined the economic sovereignty of African nations. Governments were pressured to adopt policies that served external, neoliberal agendas rather than addressing their unique development challenges. As a result, critical policy choices were made in Washington D.C., rather than in African capitals.

Reinforcement of extractive practices: Neoliberal policies often facilitated the plunder of natural resources by foreign multinational corporations. The privatization of state-owned enterprises and the opening of markets made it easier for external companies to acquire control over valuable assets and extract resources with minimal regulation or taxation. Practices like transfer pricing allowed these companies to minimize tax payments in Africa, with profits being booked abroad.

Exacerbated corruption: While often justified as a way to combat corruption, some studies suggest that aspects of SAPs, particularly privatization and deregulation, actually created new opportunities for corruption. The non-transparent sale of state assets to well-connected elites, often working with foreign interests, became a common feature.

The cycle of debt and aid: The combination of economic policies that failed to stimulate broad-based growth and the high interest rates on loans often trapped African countries in a vicious cycle of debt. They were forced to take on new loans just to service existing debts, perpetuating their financial dependence on external powers.

The influence of former colonial powers and multilateral institutions through conditional aid created a post-colonial economic framework that, far from fostering equitable development, reinforced the extractive and dependent structures established during the colonial era. The resulting neoliberal policies deepened inequalities, weakened state capacity, and made African economies more susceptible to external influence, which primarily served the interests of foreign capital.

Civil Society in Africa:

Examining the debate on civil society in Africa, contrasting Western-centric views with perspectives that acknowledge indigenous forms of civic organizing.

The debate on civil society in Africa is marked by a critical tension between Western-centric views and perspectives that acknowledge and validate indigenous forms of civic organizing. The Western-centric model, often exported by international donors, tends to prioritize formal, structured organizations like non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate for liberal-democratic values. In contrast, a more nuanced African perspective recognizes a broader, more historically embedded landscape of civic life, encompassing traditional authorities, community associations, and informal networks that operate differently but are equally significant.

Western-centric views and their limitations

Western-centric perspectives often frame civil society in Africa through the lens of liberal democracy and governance, highlighting formal, donor-funded organizations.

•**Focus on formal NGOs:** Much of the Western discourse concentrates on NGOs that address human rights, environmental issues, and democratic reform. This approach

prioritizes organizations that mirror Western institutional structures, often to the exclusion of other civic actors.

•**Donor influence:** This perspective is reinforced by international aid, which directs funding toward organizations aligned with donor priorities. As a result, many African CSOs become dependent on foreign funding, which can compromise their legitimacy in the eyes of local populations and make them vulnerable to accusations of being foreign agents.

•**Limited scope:** By focusing narrowly on formal, urban-based NGOs, this view overlooks the vast majority of civic activity that occurs at the local and rural levels. It struggles to account for the complex web of social relationships and power dynamics outside the formal political sphere.

•**Historical amnesia:** Western perspectives often ignore or devalue the long history of indigenous civic organization in Africa, treating the modern, formal NGO as the primary or only legitimate form of civic engagement.

Perspectives acknowledging indigenous forms of civic organizing

African and decolonial scholars challenge the Western-centric model by highlighting the rich tapestry of indigenous civic life that existed long before colonialism and continues to thrive today.

•**Pre-colonial roots:** Indigenous forms of civic organizing were often based on kinship, ethnicity, age-sets, and common ancestry. These systems featured their own mechanisms for governance, decision-making, and collective action, though colonial powers often suppressed or co-opted them.

•**Diversity of forms:** Indigenous civic organizing includes a variety of actors that do not fit the Western mold of a formal NGO. These can include:

•**Traditional authorities:** Local chiefs, elders, and lineage heads often act as representatives and spokespeople for their communities, managing land disputes, regulating conflict, and performing ceremonial duties.

•**Community-based organizations (CBOs):** These often informal, grassroots groups rely on indigenous knowledge systems to address local problems and foster community engagement.

•**Faith-based organizations:** Religious groups, both Christian and Muslim, have long provided social services like education and healthcare, forming a core part of many communities.

•**Blurring of boundaries:** African perspectives recognize that in many contexts, the line between "civil society," the family, and the economy is not as distinct as in Western thought. This can lead to a more holistic, community-focused approach to problem-solving.

The ongoing debate and its implications

The tension between these two perspectives has significant implications for how civil society in Africa is understood and supported.

•**Hybrid models:** Some scholars argue for a hybrid approach that integrates Western concepts with indigenous practices to create more culturally sensitive and effective governance models. This approach acknowledges the need to contextualize policies while also incorporating universally accepted values like accountability.

•**Legitimacy and effectiveness:** Ignoring indigenous forms of civic organizing can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of development initiatives. Projects that fail to engage with or respect existing community structures often fail to achieve their goals.

•**Challenging normative assumptions:** By highlighting the strengths of indigenous civic forms, the African perspective challenges the normative assumption that Western-style, liberal-democratic civil society is the only viable model for fostering development and democracy. It suggests that a deeper understanding of indigenous knowledge and practices is essential for creating genuinely sustainable and empowering civic engagement in Africa.

Path Dependency:

Developing a theoretical framework that incorporates path dependency, arguing that initial conditions (e.g., liberation movement characteristics) affect later state–civil society relations

Initial conditions present at or shortly after independence, such as the characteristics of the liberation movement and the nature of the decolonization process, set in motion a dynamic of **path dependency** that critically shapes the long-term relationship between the state and civil society in Africa. This theoretical framework argues that choices made during these formative moments create institutional, economic, and political trajectories that are difficult to alter, influencing the entire opportunity structure for civil society mobilization.

Theoretical framework: Path dependency and state-civil society relations

1. The Critical Juncture of Decolonization

The moment of decolonization acts as a "critical juncture"—a short period during which a specific set of choices are made that significantly influence the political and economic trajectory for decades to come.

•**The initial decision:** A key choice at this juncture is whether to establish an inclusive, pluralistic political system or to consolidate power under a single, dominant party or leader. This decision is often influenced by the nature of the liberation movement itself.

•**Case example: South Africa vs. Zimbabwe:** In South Africa, a negotiated transition led to a constitutional democracy with formal space for civil society. In contrast, Zimbabwe's victorious liberation movement, ZANU–PF, moved to consolidate power, leading to a path of authoritarianism.

2. The Legacy of the Liberation Movement

The characteristics of the anti-colonial struggle, particularly the organizational form and ideology of the liberation movement, leave a lasting imprint on state-civil society relations.

•**Hierarchical vs. horizontal organization:** Movements with a centralized, military-style command structure often translate this into a hierarchical, top-down mode of post-independence governance, where dissent is viewed with suspicion. Movements with a more decentralized, grassroots network may produce a more inclusive and pluralistic political culture.

•**Legitimacy narrative:** Liberation movements that successfully seize power often frame their historical role as the sole legitimate authority, justifying one-party rule and delegitimizing political opposition and critical civil society.

•**Co-optation of civil society:** In countries where CSOs were aligned with the liberation movement, they were often co-opted into the new state apparatus, blurring the lines between state and civil society and creating a patronage-based system.

3. Institutional Reinforcement and Feedback Loops

Once a path is chosen, institutions are established that reinforce the initial decision, creating positive feedback loops that make alternative paths increasingly costly or impossible.

•**Institutional reinforcement:** The consolidation of power in a single party, for instance, leads to the co-optation of key state institutions (e.g., the judiciary, electoral commission, and civil service). These institutions then serve to protect the incumbent's interests rather than acting as independent checks on power.

•**Informal institutions and neopatrimonialism:** Neopatrimonial practices, where formal state structures are used for personal and patronage-based rule, become institutionalized. Leaders' ability to distribute state resources for political ends discourages broad-based opposition and strengthens the incumbent's control.

•**Economic incentives**: Economic policies that focus on resource extraction or rent-seeking also reinforce the existing political path. Since a small elite benefits from this extractive model, they have a strong incentive to maintain the status quo and resist reforms that would promote accountability and broad-based development.

4. The Constrained Agency of Civil Society

The path created by initial conditions and institutional reinforcement profoundly constrains the agency of civil society.

•**Varying opportunity structures**: The political opportunity structure—the configuration of power, institutions, and elite allies that influences mobilization—differs significantly across countries based on their unique paths.

•**Open space**: In systems with a more pluralistic path, CSOs can use formal channels like the courts and the legislature for advocacy, leading to more institutionalized and cooperative relations with the state.

•**Closed space**: In more authoritarian systems, CSOs are pushed toward more confrontational, high-risk strategies or must operate covertly.

•**Strategic adaptation**: Civil society organizations adapt their strategies in response to these constraints. In Zimbabwe's repressive environment, CSOs focused on survival and indirect forms of mobilization. In South Africa's more open environment, they engage in formal lobbying and legal challenges.

Conclusion of the framework

This path dependency framework provides a robust explanation for the divergence in state-civil society relations across Africa despite similar colonial legacies. It shows that initial choices at decolonization, influenced by the liberation movement's characteristics, set a long-term trajectory. This trajectory is then reinforced by institutional choices and informal practices like neopatrimonialism, creating distinct political opportunity structures

that shape civil society's strategies and effectiveness for decades to come. The initial conditions and subsequent choices act as a powerful constraint on democratic development and civic engagement.

Political Opportunity Structures:

Explaining how different state configurations create varied opportunities and constraints for civil society mobilization, using concepts like competitive authoritarianism, dominant party systems, and democratic transitions in Africa.

Political Opportunity Structures (POS) are the dimensions of a political environment that either encourage or discourage civil society mobilization. In Africa, variations in state configurations, such as competitive authoritarianism, dominant party systems, and democratic transitions, create distinct sets of opportunities and constraints for civil society organizations (CSOs).

Competitive authoritarianism

Competitive authoritarian regimes are hybrid political systems where formal democratic institutions, such as elections, exist but are routinely manipulated by the incumbent party to maintain power.

Opportunities:

•**Expansion of civic space during liberalization:** The initial phase of political liberalization in some authoritarian regimes can create temporary openings for CSOs to operate. In some cases, incumbents may allow for some dissent and associational freedom to gain international legitimacy or manage internal opposition.

•**Access to external support:** CSOs can use the presence of formal democratic institutions to appeal to international donors and organizations for funding, training, and diplomatic support. This external linkage can help to shield CSOs from some forms of state repression.

•**Exploiting institutional weaknesses:** CSOs can leverage the "rules of the game" in competitive authoritarianism, such as constitutional clauses or election laws, to challenge incumbents legally. In Malawi, for instance, CSOs successfully mobilized against presidential attempts to manipulate constitutional rules to stay in power, leading to incumbent defeat.

Constraints:

•**Abuse of democratic institutions:** Incumbents can use their control over the state apparatus to put CSOs at a significant disadvantage. This can involve arbitrarily denying registration, harassing activists, or using state-controlled media to discredit civil society.

•**Co-optation:** Regimes may attempt to co-opt prominent CSOs or their leaders by offering them positions or financial support. This can weaken civil society movements by creating internal divisions and compromising their independence.

•**Intensified repression:** When CSOs become too successful or pose a credible threat, the regime may intensify its repressive tactics, leading to violent crackdowns, arrests, and the passing of restrictive laws.

Dominant party systems

In dominant party systems, one party holds power for an extended period, often through a combination of electoral and extra-electoral advantages. Elections are held regularly but are rarely competitive enough to challenge the ruling party's dominance.

Opportunities:

- Cooperative engagement:** Some CSOs may find opportunities for collaboration with the dominant party, especially on non-political issues like service delivery or development projects. This can allow CSOs to secure resources and operate with some degree of government approval, albeit with limited autonomy.
- Exploiting internal party divisions:** Dominant parties are not monolithic. CSOs can sometimes exploit internal divisions or rivalries to advance their agendas, especially if they align with the interests of a particular faction.

Constraints:

- Controlled mobilization:** The ruling party often controls the channels of mobilization and public participation, making it difficult for independent CSOs to operate freely. This can involve restricting public gatherings, controlling the media, and limiting access to state institutions.
- Legislative restrictions:** Dominant parties can use their legislative majorities to pass laws that restrict CSOs, for instance, by imposing onerous registration requirements or limiting their access to foreign funding. Mozambique's FRELIMO party has used this approach to constrain civil society.
- Patronage and clientelism:** The dominant party may offer patronage to CSOs that align with its interests while denying resources and access to those that are critical of the government. This can undermine civil society's independence and foster a culture of clientelism.

Democratic transitions

Democratic transitions are periods of significant political change during which an authoritarian regime is replaced by a more democratic one. This process involves political liberalization, constitutional reform, and the introduction of competitive elections.

Opportunities:

•**Widening of civic space:** During a transition, the relaxation of repressive laws creates a window of opportunity for CSOs to organize and mobilize more freely. In Africa, the early 1990s saw a wave of transitions that allowed CSOs to play a critical role in building democratic institutions.

•**Influence on new institutions:** CSOs can exert significant influence over the design of new democratic institutions, such as electoral bodies, human rights commissions, and constitutional frameworks.

•**Increased public demand for accountability:** Transitions often coincide with a vocal public demand for accountability, transparency, and an end to corruption. CSOs can capitalize on this public sentiment to hold the new government to its promises and press for further reforms.

Constraints:

•**Risk of democratic backsliding:** The optimism of a democratic transition is not always sustained. In Africa, many transitions have experienced reversals, with new governments resorting to authoritarian methods.

•**Fragmentation of civil society:** During transitions, civil society can become fragmented as groups with different agendas and priorities emerge. This can weaken the collective voice of civil society and reduce its influence.

•**Shift in donor priorities:** The enthusiasm of international donors for supporting civil society can wane over time, especially if the new government proves to be unresponsive to reforms. This can threaten the financial sustainability of many CSOs.

Conclusion

The political opportunity structure in Africa is not static; it is shaped by the dynamic interplay between state configurations and civil society actions. For CSOs, navigating these different environments requires strategic adaptation, including leveraging temporary openings in competitive authoritarianism, engaging cautiously within dominant party

systems, and guarding against democratic backsliding during transitions. Ultimately, the success of civil society mobilization in Africa depends on its ability to understand and respond to the specific opportunities and constraints presented by each political context.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Detailed comparative case study approach of post-apartheid democracy in South Africa, dominant-party state in Mozambique

Based on my researches on political science and human rights reports, here is a comparative case study approach outlining the political opportunity structures for civil society in post-apartheid democratic South Africa versus the dominant-party state of Mozambique.

Comparative analysis framework

Variable	South Africa (Post-Apartheid Democracy)	Mozambique (Dominant-Party State)
State configuration	A robust multi-party constitutional democracy with strong constitutional protections, an independent judiciary, and a free press. Recent concerns, however, include institutional decay and state capture.	A dominant-party state where the ruling FRELIMO party has been in power since independence in 1975. While multi-party elections are held, they are regularly marred by fraud allegations, and the party maintains a deep hold over state institutions.
Constitutional and legal environment	A constitution widely considered progressive, which protects rights to equality, freedom of expression, and association. It is backed by a capable, albeit under-resourced, judiciary that can challenge state overreach.	Formal democratic reforms were introduced in 1990, but political power remains heavily concentrated within FRELIMO. Civil society institutions are often described as "embryonic and fragile".
Political landscape and space	A vibrant multi-party system with diverse opposition parties and a large, visible, and vocal civil society. While the ANC has historically dominated, the 2024 election saw it lose its majority, forcing it into a Government of National Unity.	An "almost closed" political system dominated by FRELIMO. The main opposition, RENAMO, has been weakened, though independent figures like Venancio Mondlane have recently gained prominence.
Mobilization and protest	Civil society has extensive experience and a tradition of mobilization from the anti-apartheid struggle. Protests, both conventional and non-conventional, are a regular feature of the political landscape, though sometimes met with police repression. The shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, for example, faces significant threats.	Mobilization is tightly controlled and often met with state repression. The 2024 elections saw the biggest protests in Mozambique's history in response to alleged fraud, which were met with deadly force and mass arrests.
Media environment	A generally free and diverse press that is a crucial watchdog for civil society. Independent journalism can expose corruption and state failures, although concerns about press freedom and intimidation do exist.	State-controlled media is a tool of FRELIMO, limiting independent coverage. Activists and opposition figures have turned to social media to mobilize supporters and circumvent censorship.
Economic context and challenges	High levels of inequality, poverty, unemployment, and corruption create widespread public dissatisfaction and weaken the state's capacity to	While resource-rich, Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries. The economy is heavily influenced by a

address social needs. This creates fertile ground for social movements advocating for socio-economic justice.

FRELIMO-linked elite, and rent-seeking and corruption are significant problems.

Case study analysis: Civil society mobilization

Opportunities for civil society

South Africa:

- Constitutional protections:** The constitution provides a solid legal basis for CSOs to operate freely, challenge government decisions in court, and protect fundamental rights.
- Independent judiciary:** A strong, independent judiciary offers CSOs a key avenue for accountability, forcing the state to comply with its own laws. [Human Rights Watch's 2025 report](#) highlights multiple instances of CSOs using the courts to protect human rights.
- Vibrant media:** A diverse and often critical media landscape ensures that civil society issues receive public attention and scrutiny.
- International connections:** South African CSOs can effectively leverage international human rights networks and funding to support their work.

Mozambique:

- Limited formal openings:** While the transition to a multi-party system in the 1990s created some openings, the space for independent action has narrowed.
- Strategic co-optation:** Some CSOs may find limited opportunities for collaboration with FRELIMO on service delivery or development projects, but at the risk of compromising their independence.
- Emergence of new tactics:** In response to state repression and electoral fraud, independent political actors and some civil society groups have effectively used social media to mobilize a younger, more urban demographic.

Constraints for civil society

South Africa:

- State capacity and corruption:** The erosion of state capacity and high-level corruption ("state capture") have damaged public trust and diverted resources, making it harder for CSOs to achieve their goals.
- Violence and intimidation:** Activists, particularly those in grassroots movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo, face significant threats, violence, and even death, hindering their work.
- "Downsized democracy":** Public policy-making processes are often dominated by elite CSOs, NGOs, and interest groups with resources, marginalizing the participation of grassroots movements and the poor.

Mozambique:

- Deep party-state overlap:** The lines between FRELIMO and the state are blurred, allowing the ruling party to use state resources and power to control civil society and marginalize opposition.
- Electoral fraud and violence:** Recurrent allegations of electoral fraud and state-sanctioned violence create a climate of fear, discouraging mobilization and undermining the legitimacy of formal democratic processes.
- Limited institutional access:** Unlike South Africa, Mozambique's institutions offer less reliable avenues for challenging the state. The Constitutional Council, for example, is heavily influenced by FRELIMO appointments.
- Intimidation and persecution:** Activists and opposition figures face direct repression, including politically motivated charges, asset freezes, and killings.

Conclusion

A comparative case study of South Africa and Mozambique reveals how different political opportunity structures shape civil society mobilization.

•**In South Africa**, a relatively open formal democracy provides **broad opportunities** through constitutional rights, a powerful judiciary, and a free media. However, pervasive corruption, state failures, and targeted violence against grassroots activists create significant **constraints**.

•**In Mozambique**, a dominant-party state and deeply entrenched party-state relations create an environment of profound **constraint**, with formal democratic institutions serving to legitimize FRELIMO's rule. Civil society actors face immense risks, relying on informal networks and social media for limited mobilization, often in the face of brutal repression.

Ultimately, civil society resilience and strategy differ fundamentally in these two contexts: adaptation to existing but narrowing opportunities in South Africa versus courageous, and often dangerous, defiance in Mozambique.

Mixed methods of governance in post-apartheid South Africa & Mozambique.

Civil society mobilization differs fundamentally in post-apartheid South Africa and dominant-party Mozambique due to contrasting political opportunity structures. While South Africa's constitutional democracy provides extensive formal freedoms, its civil society contends with legacies of inequality and institutional challenges. In contrast, Mozambique's dominant-party state maintains tight control over political space, forcing civil society into a more constrained and often defiant mode of operation.

South Africa: Detailed analysis

In post-apartheid South Africa, civil society operates within a uniquely contradictory political opportunity structure. It leverages robust constitutional protections and liberal

democratic institutions that were hard-won during the transition from apartheid, even as it contends with the debilitating effects of systemic corruption, institutional decay, and persistent inequality. This creates a complex and often perilous environment for mobilization, where opportunities are significant but deeply compromised by the state's failures to deliver on its democratic promise.

Leveraging liberal democratic institutions

Judicial activism

South Africa's progressive Constitution provides a powerful tool for civil society organizations (CSOs) to challenge state overreach and hold power accountable. The country's independent judiciary serves as a crucial check on executive power, and CSOs have effectively used litigation to advance their causes.

- Protecting rights:** The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) famously used the courts to pressure the government into providing anti-retroviral drugs, saving countless lives during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

- Challenging corruption:** Watchdog organizations like Corruption Watch have successfully litigated cases, exposing systemic graft and holding officials accountable.

Vibrant media and public discourse

Compared to its authoritarian neighbors, South Africa enjoys a relatively free and diverse media landscape. This provides CSOs with a platform to publicize grievances, expose wrongdoing, and influence public opinion, even if coverage is sometimes episodic rather than systemic. Investigative journalism, in particular, played a critical role in uncovering the widespread "state capture" scandal during the Zuma presidency.

Independent commissions and checks on power

The Constitution establishes several independent institutions to support and strengthen democracy, known as "Chapter 9 institutions." These include the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission, and the Auditor-General. CSOs can interact with these bodies to pursue accountability and advocate for marginalized communities. The Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, while initiated by the government, relied heavily on evidence brought forward by CSOs and investigative journalists.

Mobilizing against institutional decay

Despite these liberal spaces, civil society's work is significantly constrained by a parallel process of institutional decay.

State capture and systemic corruption

•**Erosion of public trust:** Widespread corruption, especially the systemic state capture that diverted vast public funds for private gain, has severely eroded public trust in democratic institutions.

•**Weakened state capacity:** Corruption and mismanagement have crippled the state's capacity to deliver essential services, such as reliable electricity, water, and housing. This creates fertile ground for social movements protesting against poor service delivery.

Co-optation and fragmentation

•**Elite pact:** A "corporate pact" has emerged, where some well-resourced and professionally managed CSOs have a collegiate relationship with the state. This can marginalize and delegitimize more radical or grassroots movements that challenge the government directly.

•**Marginalization of grassroots voices:** While the state engages with established NGOs, grassroots movements and community leaders often feel unheard and excluded from formal policy processes.

Violence and intimidation

•**Threats to activists:** Despite constitutional rights, activists—especially those in grassroots and land rights movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo—face constant threats, intimidation, and violence from both state and non-state actors. This echoes apartheid-era repression and undermines the promise of a safe democracy.

•**Police misconduct:** Research from human rights organizations has documented a pattern of police misconduct during peaceful protests, creating an environment of fear among community activists.

The 2024 elections and the Government of National Unity (GNU)

The 2024 elections, in which the ANC lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994, marked a significant shift in the political landscape. The formation of a GNU presents both new opportunities and potential challenges for civil society mobilization.

•**New avenues for influence:** The coalition government may be more responsive to civil society pressure as it seeks legitimacy and stability. CSOs can potentially influence coalition partners and leverage new political fault lines to advance their agendas.

•**Uncertainty and instability:** The GNU is an elite pact, and its stability is not guaranteed. Depending on its composition and internal dynamics, it could either facilitate reform or create more political uncertainty, impacting the ability of CSOs to plan and mobilize effectively.

•Civil society in South Africa exists in a paradoxical space, simultaneously empowered by a liberal constitutional framework and crippled by the institutional failures of the state. Its ability to "leverage liberal spaces" depends on its resilience in the face of ongoing challenges like systemic corruption, institutional weakness, and political violence. The

post-2024 political realignment, particularly the emergence of the Government of National Unity, introduces new uncertainties, but also new avenues for CSOs to push for greater accountability and social justice within an increasingly fragile democratic project.

Opportunities

- Strong legal and constitutional framework:** The 1996 Constitution offers robust protections for freedom of assembly, expression, and association. Civil society organizations (CSOs), including watchdog groups like Corruption Watch, have successfully used the judiciary to challenge government overreach and protect human rights.
- Vibrant and diverse media:** A free and active media provides a critical platform for CSOs to publicize grievances, expose corruption, and hold power to account. The media's role has been particularly crucial in uncovering systemic failures like "state capture".
- Legacy of anti-apartheid mobilization:** The country's history of social and political activism has instilled a deep tradition of mobilization, giving rise to powerful grassroots movements. The shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, for instance, continues to champion the rights of the poor and marginalized.
- Partnerships with the state:** In some areas, CSOs find opportunities for collaboration with the government, particularly in service delivery and development, leveraging their expertise to support national programs.

Constraints

- Elite co-optation and fragmentation:** A "corporate pact" has emerged where some CSOs, particularly resource-rich NGOs, have developed a collegiate relationship with the state, potentially marginalizing radical social movements and accountability to local communities.
- Institutional weakening and corruption:** Erosion of state capacity and high levels of corruption undermine public trust and weaken the state's ability to address social needs.

This creates a challenging environment for CSOs to enact change and creates a cycle of public dissatisfaction.

•**Violence against activists:** Despite constitutional protections, grassroots movements and community activists frequently face intimidation, harassment, and violence, particularly when challenging powerful local or national interests.

•**ANC dominance and political interference:** Historically, the ANC's deep roots in civil society and its long-standing political dominance have challenged the independence of some civil society groups. The party has, at times, expressed criticism and leveled accusations against CSOs that are critical of its governance. The recent formation of a Government of National Unity following the 2024 elections introduces new dynamics, with potential shifts in power and opportunity for CSOs.

Mozambique: a constricted and controlled political space

Opportunities

•**Narrow windows of engagement:** The formal existence of multi-party elections and democratic institutions, though manipulated, provides limited opportunities for CSOs to challenge the state through legal and formal channels.

•**Social media as an alternative platform:** Given state control over traditional media, CSOs and opposition figures increasingly use social media platforms to mobilize supporters, expose corruption, and circumvent censorship, particularly since the highly contested 2024 elections.

•**Donor engagement:** International donors play a significant role in funding Mozambican civil society, providing financial and technical support to organizations and promoting policy dialogue.

•**Strategic engagement with power:** Some CSOs strategically cooperate with FRELIMO on specific development projects to secure funding and operate with some degree of

government approval. However, this often comes at the risk of compromising independence.

Constraints

•**Dominant-party control:** The ruling FRELIMO party exerts pervasive control over state institutions, blurring the line between party and state. This limits civic space and channels of mobilization.

•**Restrictive legislative environment:** The government has repeatedly attempted to introduce or pass restrictive laws, such as the proposed 2023 NGO bill, that would grant it discretionary powers to control and suspend CSOs. While faced with opposition, these efforts represent a constant threat to civil society freedom.

•**Repression and violence:** Activists, human rights defenders, and critical journalists operate in a highly unsafe environment, facing intimidation, threats, and physical violence. The brutal crackdown following the 2024 elections highlights the state's readiness to use force against dissent.

•**Limited access to formal institutions:** Unlike South Africa, Mozambique's formal institutions, such as the judiciary and electoral bodies, are often heavily influenced by the ruling party. This limits the ability of CSOs to seek redress or hold the state accountable through formal channels.

•**Skepticism and fear:** Decades of dominant-party rule and episodes of violence and repression have created a culture of fear and skepticism among the population. This can suppress public participation and mobilization, especially in local communities.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

In Mozambique, the ruling FRELIMO party has systematically controlled and constricted the political space, forcing civil society organizations (CSOs) and opposition movements to

navigate a high-risk environment. Since the highly contested October 2024 elections, this constriction has intensified, marked by brutal crackdowns, targeted legislative changes, and the strategic manipulation of both traditional and digital media.

Entrenched party-state overlap

FRELIMO's long-standing dominance has blurred the lines between the ruling party and state institutions, undermining their independence and capacity to serve all citizens impartially.

•**Political capture of institutions:** State institutions, including the judiciary, electoral bodies, and state-owned media, operate under the heavy influence of the ruling party. As a result, CSOs face limited success when seeking redress through formal channels. This was on full display during and after the 2024 elections, when the electoral commission was accused of widespread irregularities that favored FRELIMO.

•**Patronage and co-optation:** FRELIMO maintains control through extensive patronage networks, rewarding loyalty with access to resources and contracts. This system can co-opt or marginalize CSOs, creating incentives for groups to align with the ruling party to ensure their survival, thereby compromising their autonomy.

Intensified repression and violence

The post-2024 election period has seen a dramatic escalation of state repression against dissent.

•**Excessive force against protesters:** Following opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane's calls for protest against the election results, Mozambican security forces used unlawful, excessive force, including live ammunition, against demonstrators. [Amnesty International](#), [Southern Africa Human Rights Lawyers High Commission](#) and other human rights organizations documented hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and mass arrests between October 2024 and January 2025.

•**Targeted violence against activists and journalists:** Activists and journalists, especially those covering election-related activities, are subjected to violence, harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary arrest with impunity. This climate of fear discourages critical reporting and civil society action.

•**Internet and media restrictions:** The government restricts access to the internet and social media platforms during critical moments, limiting the ability of activists to mobilize and disseminate information. This reflects a shift in state tactics to control information in the digital age.

Restrictive legislative environment

The government uses legislation and administrative measures to further control and silence civil society.

•**Proposed NGO law:** The government has repeatedly attempted to pass a highly restrictive law on non-profit organizations. Despite being shelved after international pressure and civil society protest, this draft legislation would grant the state discretionary power to control and shut down CSOs, effectively legalizing ongoing repressive practices.

•**Weaponization of legislation:** The state uses existing laws, such as those related to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism, to place additional burdens on CSOs and portray critical organizations as threats to national security.

Civil society response and resilience

Despite the shrinking civic space, Mozambican civil society has developed resilient strategies for mobilization.

•**Digital activism:** Activists, particularly the youth, increasingly rely on digital platforms to organize and voice dissent. This circumvents state-controlled traditional media and connects a broader, more urban demographic. Movements like *Cabo Delgado Também é*

Moçambique have used digital activism to raise awareness of conflicts and humanitarian crises.

•**Limited donor-driven partnerships:** International donors continue to support Mozambican CSOs, particularly in areas like humanitarian aid, though this support can be complex to deliver within the restrictive political context. While some CSOs partner with the government on development projects, others maintain their critical distance.

•**Informal networks:** In areas where formal civic action is too risky, informal community networks continue to operate, building social resilience and providing support outside of the state's reach.

Analysis of constraints on mobilization

Constraint	Manifestation in Mozambique	Impact on Civil Society
Institutional bias	Control over electoral bodies and judiciary	Challenges formal avenues for accountability, forcing CSOs into high-risk protest or alternative strategies.
Legal restrictions	Attempts to pass restrictive NGO laws	Creates a constant state of insecurity, criminalizes dissent, and limits legal space for independent CSOs.
Physical repression	Brutal crackdowns on protests, targeted violence	Deters open defiance, leads to casualties and arrests, and creates a climate of fear.
Information control	Internet shutdowns, media intimidation	Limits ability to coordinate, publicize abuses, and inform the public, although social media offers partial workarounds.

Mozambique's political landscape offers stark contrasts to post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike South Africa's robust constitutional framework, Mozambique operates with limited

legal protections, where formal democratic institutions are often used to legitimize FRELIMO's continued dominance. The severe repression seen after the 2024 elections highlights the risks for Mozambican civil society, forcing activists to rely on a mix of digital strategies, international pressure, and persistent, often dangerous, grassroots mobilization. The outcome of ongoing protests and reform calls remains uncertain but underscores the profound challenges of civic engagement under dominant-party rule.

Comparative conclusion

The comparison reveals a stark contrast between South Africa's **pluralistic but compromised** civic space and Mozambique's **highly restricted and controlled** one.

- In South Africa, the challenge for CSOs is to navigate a complex environment where formal freedoms coexist with deep-seated inequality, corruption, and threats to grassroots movements. The recent shift in the balance of power within the political system may open new avenues for influence or create new uncertainties.
- In Mozambique, the primary challenge is sheer survival in an environment characterized by state-party control and repression. Mobilization is often reactive, defensive, and forced into less visible channels like social media. The paths of these two countries underscore how state configuration, combined with historical legacies and contemporary political dynamics, fundamentally shapes the opportunities and constraints available to civil society.

Fieldwork and Ethics:

The process of fieldwork, data collection, and ethical considerations for working with vulnerable populations and sensitive topics in Southern Africa.

Fieldwork involving sensitive topics and vulnerable populations in Southern Africa requires a meticulous, multi-layered approach to fieldwork, data collection, and ethics. The core

challenge is navigating potential risks to both participants and researchers, including physical, emotional, and political harm, while also ensuring the research is respectful, meaningful, and valid. A decolonizing research methodology is also crucial, respecting indigenous knowledge and addressing power imbalances.

The process of fieldwork and data collection

1. Pre-fieldwork planning

- Decolonizing methodology:** Prioritize an African-centric research design that values indigenous knowledge, cultural norms, and local perspectives. This means engaging the community as active collaborators, not just subjects.
- Institutional ethics clearance:** Obtain formal ethical approval from both the researcher's home institution and relevant ethics committees within the target country. In South Africa, committees such as the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) and university-level boards are essential. In Mozambique, obtaining government clearance and possibly working with local universities is necessary.
- Safety assessment:** Conduct a thorough risk assessment covering physical safety, emotional well-being, and potential political repercussions. This includes evaluating the security situation in specific fieldwork locations and developing contingency plans.
- Building local relationships:** Identify and engage with local gatekeepers, community leaders, and trusted organizations early on. This builds credibility and helps navigate complex local dynamics.
- Training and team composition:** Train researchers on the specific cultural, social, and political contexts. Consider hiring local researchers who possess a deep understanding of local nuances and language.
- Pilot study:** Conduct a small-scale pilot study to test data collection tools and identify unforeseen challenges related to access, language, or participant vulnerability.

2. Data collection with vulnerable populations

•**Community entry:** The entry process must be respectful and transparent. This involves explaining the research purpose to community leaders and gaining their trust and endorsement before approaching individuals.

•**Informed consent:** For vulnerable populations, informed consent requires extra care. It must be a continuous process, not a one-time signature. Participants must fully understand the purpose, risks, and their right to withdraw at any time, without penalty. In cases of low literacy, consent should be read aloud and documented verbally or with a thumbprint, with a neutral witness present.

•**Face-to-face interviews:** Using semi-structured interviews allows for probing deeper into sensitive topics while providing a flexible framework. Building rapport is paramount, and researchers should listen more than they speak. Interviews should be conducted in a safe, private space chosen by the participant.

•**Focus group discussions (FGDs):** FGDs can be effective for gathering diverse perspectives but require careful facilitation, particularly with sensitive topics. Researchers must ensure dominant voices do not silence others and that participants feel safe sharing information without fear of reprisal from their community.

•**Observation:** Observing interactions within communities, such as civil society meetings or public gatherings, can provide contextual data that complements interview findings. Researchers must be mindful of their positionality and potential influence on events.

3. Ethical considerations

•**Do no harm (non-maleficence):** This is the foundational principle. Researchers must minimize physical, psychological, and social risks to participants. This includes managing expectations to avoid participants perceiving the research as a source of material benefits.

•**Respect for persons (autonomy and protection):** Recognize the right of participants to self-determination. This is particularly important for vulnerable individuals who may have diminished autonomy due to their circumstances. It includes respecting their decision to participate or decline at any stage.

•**Beneficence:** Ensure the research's potential benefits outweigh the risks. In Southern Africa, this means research should aim to contribute to meaningful social change, empowerment, or policy improvement, rather than simply satisfying academic curiosity.

•**Justice:** Ensure that the benefits and burdens of the research are distributed fairly. Avoid exploiting vulnerable populations or focusing on easily accessible groups simply for convenience. The research should not further marginalize or stigmatize those already disadvantaged.

•**Confidentiality and anonymity:** In contexts where sensitive information could lead to political persecution, social stigma, or physical harm, protecting participant confidentiality is paramount.

•**Data management:** Store all data securely using password protection, encryption, and restricted access.

•**Reporting:** Use pseudonyms for individuals, organizations, and sensitive locations. Aggregate findings to prevent the identification of individuals. In some cases, withholding specific information may be necessary.

•**Researcher well-being:** Acknowledge that exposure to trauma and distress during fieldwork can impact researchers, especially those with less experience. Debriefing sessions, peer support, and access to counseling are important ethical considerations for the research team.

•**Reporting and dissemination:** Ensure research findings are accessible and meaningful to the communities involved. This may include presenting results in local languages and formats. For sensitive topics, carefully consider how findings are disseminated to avoid unintended harm to participants.

This rigorous approach ensures the research is not only academically sound but also socially responsible, ethical, and protective of the participants who contribute to it.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: SOUTH AFRICA

Background : A comprehensive Analysis of South Africa's democratic transition and the role of anti-apartheid civil society.

The anti-apartheid civil society was instrumental in South Africa's democratic transition, but its role shifted dramatically after the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994. The transition from an adversarial to a collaborative relationship with the state presented both opportunities and challenges for civil society organizations (CSOs). While many CSOs moved into government and formal consultative roles, others have become critical voices challenging the failures of the post-apartheid state to achieve socioeconomic equality.

The anti-apartheid civil society: Mobilizing for transition

During apartheid, civil society was a broad, diverse, and dynamic force that resisted the state from outside its formal structures. It was a crucial component of the "anti-apartheid movement" and operated on local, national, and international fronts.

Key components of anti-apartheid civil society:

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Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

•**The United Democratic Front (UDF):** The UDF was a broad-based, non-racial coalition of hundreds of anti-apartheid organizations, including trade unions, student groups, religious bodies, and community organizations. It coordinated internal resistance in the 1980s and organized boycotts, demonstrations, and other forms of civil disobedience.

•**Trade Unions:** Powerful trade unions like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) mobilized workers on both economic and political issues. The trade union movement was a highly organized force that challenged both capitalist exploitation and apartheid policies.

•**Religious Organizations:** Churches, particularly the South African Council of Churches, provided moral and political leadership in opposing apartheid, offering sanctuary to activists and documenting human rights abuses.

•**International Anti-Apartheid Movement:** International solidarity movements mobilized global opinion and pressured foreign governments and corporations to impose sanctions, contributing significantly to the isolation of the apartheid regime.

The post-apartheid transition: A shifting landscape

With the end of apartheid and the ANC's victory in the 1994 elections, the political opportunity structure for civil society changed fundamentally.

The absorption of civil society into the state

•**Activist exodus:** Many anti-apartheid activists, who had gained experience in organizing and policy development, transitioned into government positions, leaving a vacuum in civil society.

•**Shift from resistance to reconstruction:** The focus of many CSOs shifted from dismantling apartheid to working with the new government on nation-building, reconstruction, and development.

•**Formal consultation:** The government established formal consultation mechanisms, such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), to institutionalize dialogue between the state, business, labor, and CSOs.

Post-apartheid challenges and emerging civil society

The shift to a neoliberal economic path and the ANC's long-term dominance created new challenges that led to the emergence of a new generation of CSOs and social movements.

Confronting neoliberalism and socioeconomic inequality

•**Economic policies:** The ANC government's adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy was criticized for abandoning the more redistributive goals of its initial Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

•**New social movements:** This ideological shift and the persistence of high inequality, unemployment, and poverty fueled new protest movements in the late 1990s and 2000s, including the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Abahlali baseMjondolo, and the Anti-Privatisation Forum.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

•**CSO input:** CSOs played a critical role in shaping the TRC's mandate and operation, with many former activists serving as commissioners or contributing to the process.

•**"Kleenex Commission" criticism:** While providing a public platform for victims' stories, the TRC was criticized for its limited tangible impact on justice and reparations. The Khulumani Support Group, a CSO, has continued to challenge the legacy of the TRC in court.

Navigating institutional decay and corruption

•**Whistleblowing and advocacy:** CSOs like Corruption Watch and the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) have become key players in exposing and fighting corruption, particularly during the era of "state capture".

•**Defending democratic institutions:** When democratic institutions are under threat, CSOs have played a crucial role in defending them. This includes mobilizing to support Chapter 9 institutions and using the courts to ensure the rule of law.

Anti-apartheid civil society was a foundational pillar of South Africa's democratic transition, providing the moral, political, and organizational force that helped bring down the apartheid regime. However, its post-1994 story is one of complex adaptation. Some CSOs have been absorbed into formal consultative processes, while others, driven by the persistent realities of inequality and institutional decay, have revitalized the protest tradition. This dynamic, and often tense, relationship between civil society and the state underscores the continuous evolution of democratic politics in South Africa. The legacy of the anti-apartheid movement lives on, but it has been repurposed and redirected to tackle the unfinished business of social and economic justice.

A comprehensive Discussion on how the legacy of the liberation movement (ANC) has influenced post-apartheid state–civil society relations. Examine contemporary issues like combating gender-based violence, corruption, and promoting human rights.

The African National Congress's (ANC) legacy as a liberation movement has profoundly influenced post-apartheid state-civil society relations, creating a complex dynamic of both cooperation and tension. While the transition to a constitutional democracy opened

significant opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs), the ANC's hegemonic culture and institutional failings have constrained their effectiveness, particularly regarding key issues like gender-based violence (GBV), corruption, and human rights.

Ambiguous relations: From liberation comrades to government and critics

The "corporate pact" and co-optation

In the early post-apartheid years, many CSOs, particularly well-resourced NGOs with educated and professional staff, shifted from resisting the state to collaborating with it. A "corporate pact" emerged, in which the ANC-led government provided a permissive legal and funding environment for NGOs, fostering a collegial relationship.

•**Positive impact:** This collaboration, formalized through platforms like the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), facilitated policy input and helped institutionalize democratic processes.

•**Negative impact:** This arrangement benefited more professionalized CSOs and marginalized grassroots movements, which are often less organized and vocal. Critics argue this relationship made some CSOs less accountable to the marginalized communities they represent and more reliant on government-provided resources.

Absorption of activists

The ANC's legacy led many seasoned anti-apartheid activists to transition into government roles, leaving a leadership vacuum in civil society. While this provided a wealth of experienced policymakers, it also weakened the independent civil society sector by depleting its human capital and leadership pool.

The emergence of a critical civil society

Over time, as the ANC's failures to address socioeconomic inequalities and corruption became apparent, a new, more critical and confrontational civil society emerged. This includes grassroots movements and watchdog organizations that challenge the government from outside its formal consultation structures.

Contemporary issues: State-civil society engagement

Combating gender-based violence (GBV)

Despite enacting progressive legislation, the state's response to the GBV crisis has been widely criticized by civil society for being ineffective.

•**CSO mobilization:** Civil society, including organizations like the Shukumisa Campaign, plays a crucial role in advocating for stronger GBV prevention and response policies. They provide support services, run awareness campaigns, and pressure the government for greater accountability.

•**Government-civil society gaps:** CSOs have highlighted significant gaps in government policy implementation, including a lack of synchronization between different service providers, such as the police and healthcare facilities. The ANC Women's League (ANCWL), while active on GBV issues, has faced scrutiny for its perceived ineffectiveness, with some critics arguing its actions serve political rather than substantive ends.

Combating corruption

The ANC's legacy has been tarnished by widespread corruption, particularly the "state capture" scandal during the Zuma presidency. CSOs have become critical in holding the state to account.

•**Watchdog role:** Organizations like Corruption Watch and OUTA have adopted a watchdog role, exposing malfeasance and advocating for anti-corruption reforms. They use whistleblower reports and legal action to pressure the government and combat impunity.

•**The Zondo Commission:** While the government established the Zondo Commission, much of the evidence was provided by CSOs and investigative journalists, highlighting the critical role of civil society in filling accountability gaps. The ANC's slow pace in implementing the commission's recommendations, however, showcases the ongoing challenges faced by CSOs.

Promoting human rights

South Africa's Constitution is a global standard for human rights protection, and CSOs have been instrumental in defending it against threats.

•**Constitutional defense:** CSOs have effectively used strategic litigation to ensure the government upholds human rights. For example, they have successfully challenged government overreach, securing victories for vulnerable groups and affirming the rule of law.

•**Persistent social inequalities:** Despite constitutional and legal protections, human rights are often undermined by persistent social inequalities. The state's slow progress on land reform, inadequate housing, and poor service delivery provides a focal point for grassroots and human rights organizations.

The current political landscape and future relations

The 2024 elections, which saw the ANC lose its parliamentary majority for the first time, have introduced a new layer of complexity to state-civil society relations.

•**The Government of National Unity (GNU):** The new political arrangement may provide CSOs with new avenues for influence by allowing them to engage with multiple coalition

partners. However, the GNU is primarily a top-down pact, and its impact on inclusive governance remains to be seen.

•**Continued vigilance:** The political realignment underscores the need for CSOs to remain vigilant. The ANC's legacy of party loyalty and institutional erosion requires continuous monitoring to prevent the new coalition from repeating past mistakes and marginalizing civil society.

Conclusion

The ANC's legacy as a liberation movement created a complex and sometimes contradictory political space for civil society in post-apartheid South Africa. While the constitutional framework is robust, the ANC's entrenched power, institutional failings, and history of co-optation have constrained civil society's potential. CSOs have been forced to become more strategic and confrontational, acting as crucial watchdogs on issues of GBV, corruption, and human rights. The recent political changes in South Africa highlight the need for continued vigilance and underscore the critical role of an independent, resilient civil society in holding the government accountable to its democratic promises.

Analysis:

A comprehensive assessment how the political opportunity structure in South Africa, while democratic, presents challenges and opportunities for different types of civil society mobilization.

The political opportunity structure in South Africa presents a complex duality for civil society mobilization. On one hand, a liberal constitutional framework, independent judiciary, and legacy of mass mobilization provide significant opportunities. On the other, the effects of institutional decay, state capture, deep-seated inequality, and targeted

repression against grassroots activists present formidable challenges. Different types of civil society, from formal NGOs to grassroots movements, navigate this contradictory landscape in distinct ways.

Opportunities for civil society mobilization

1. Constitutional protections and judicial activism

•**Leveraging legal recourse:** The 1996 Constitution enshrines fundamental rights such as freedom of assembly, expression, and association. CSOs can use litigation to challenge state failures, protect human rights, and hold officials accountable.

•**Enforcing accountability:** The independent judiciary acts as a critical check on executive power, providing an avenue for CSOs to secure policy changes and enforce constitutional mandates. The Treatment Action Campaign's successful legal battle to force the government to provide antiretroviral drugs is a prime example.

2. Vibrant media landscape

•**Watchdog function:** South Africa's relatively free and diverse media provides a vital platform for CSOs to publicize grievances and expose corruption. Investigative journalism has been instrumental in uncovering systemic malfeasance, with CSOs often providing key information and advocacy support.

3. Formal participatory mechanisms

•**Institutionalized engagement:** The government has established formal channels for CSO participation, such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), that offer opportunities for influencing policy. This allows some CSOs, often those with greater professionalization and resources, to engage in official policy-making processes.

4. Legacy of anti-apartheid activism

•**Organizational tradition:** The decades-long struggle against apartheid instilled a strong tradition of civil and social activism. This legacy is carried on by a new generation of social movements that continue to mobilize against persistent socioeconomic inequalities.

Challenges for civil society mobilization

1. Institutional decay and state capture

•**Erosion of trust and capacity:** Widespread corruption and systemic "state capture" have severely undermined public trust in democratic institutions and weakened the state's capacity to deliver essential services. This necessitates constant vigilance from CSOs but also saps public energy and resources.

•**Ineffective institutions:** While independent commissions (Chapter 9 institutions) are meant to provide checks and balances, their effectiveness is often hampered by budget cuts, political interference, and inadequate enforcement of their findings.

2. Co-optation and marginalization

•**"Corporate pact":** Some critics argue a "corporate pact" emerged between resource-rich NGOs and the state, marginalizing grassroots movements and critical voices. This professionalized sector can become less accountable to the communities they represent while dominating access to state resources and official forums.

•**Ignoring grassroots issues:** Municipal and state-level consultative processes are often dominated by powerful interests, sidelining community-based organizations (CBOs) and other local actors from having a meaningful impact on decisions like service delivery and local development planning.

3. Repression and intimidation

•**Violence against activists:** Despite constitutional protections, grassroots and community activists—particularly those advocating for land rights or against illegal evictions, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo—face constant threats, intimidation, and violence. This echoes apartheid-era repression and demonstrates the state's potential for coercion.

•**Suppression of protest:** While the right to protest is protected, the police often respond with undue force, harassment, and arrests during demonstrations, creating a climate of fear.

4. The dominance of the ANC

•**Single-party hegemony:** For a long period, the ANC's dominance at the national level limited political opportunities for opposition forces and civil society. While the 2024 elections and the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) have altered this dynamic, the party's deep-seated institutional control remains a factor.

•**Politicization of civil society:** The ANC has sometimes sought to undermine or discredit CSOs critical of its policies by portraying them as politically motivated or aligned with opposition parties.

Impact on different types of civil society mobilization

1. Formal NGOs and think tanks

•**Strategic engagement:** These CSOs are best positioned to leverage formal opportunities. They have the resources and expertise to engage in litigation, participate in official policy forums, and use media platforms to advance their agendas.

•**Advocacy challenges:** However, they risk being co-opted or marginalized if they are too critical of the government. Funding and organizational sustainability can also be challenging, particularly for those heavily dependent on international donors.

2. Grassroots and social movements

•**Confrontational tactics:** Facing limited access to formal avenues, these movements primarily rely on direct action, protests, and informal networks. Their mobilization is often localized, focusing on issues like service delivery, evictions, and land rights.

•**Vulnerability to repression:** While their tactics gain visibility, they are also most vulnerable to state repression and targeted violence. The informality of their organizing structure can also make sustained mobilization difficult.

3. Community-based organizations (CBOs)

•**Local-level focus:** CBOs often operate at the local level, engaging with municipalities and communities on specific issues. Their opportunities and challenges are defined by local-level politics, which can be highly polarized and plagued by clientelism.

•**Limited policy impact:** Despite being deeply rooted in communities, CBOs often struggle to translate local-level concerns into national policy changes, and their voices can be overshadowed by more powerful national NGOs.

Conclusion

South Africa's democratic political opportunity structure is a double-edged sword for civil society. While it provides a legal and constitutional foundation for activism, the realities of institutional decay, corruption, and persistent inequality necessitate a constant struggle. Different types of civil society have adapted by exploiting specific opportunities while confronting distinct challenges. The recent shift in the political landscape with the formation of a Government of National Unity further complicates this dynamic, creating new uncertainties and re-emphasizing the need for a vigilant, independent, and resilient civil society.

CHAPTER 5

Case Study: Zimbabwe

BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe's transition from a liberation-movement-led state to an authoritarian regime.

Zimbabwe's political trajectory since its independence in 1980 serves as a powerful illustration of a transition from a liberation-movement-led state to a consolidated authoritarian regime. While initially promising a multi-party democracy, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has systematically eroded democratic norms, particularly since the late 1990s when facing significant opposition. The so-called "new dispensation" following the 2017 coup has continued and consolidated these authoritarian practices.

The consolidation of authoritarianism: A historical breakdown

1980–1990: Initial challenges and the Gukurahundi massacres

•**Failed nation-building:** The initial post-independence period was marked by deep political conflicts between the victorious ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), which was popular in Matabeleland.

•**Gukurahundi:** Between 1983 and 1987, the ZANU government, using its North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, carried out a series of brutal massacres in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. This campaign of state-sponsored violence against Ndebele civilians

and ZAPU supporters culminated in a 1987 Unity Accord that effectively dissolved ZAPU and established a de facto one-party state under ZANU-PF.

Late 1990s: The rise of opposition and ZANU-PF's turn to repression

•**Socioeconomic decline:** The late 1990s saw growing public discontent fuelled by economic decline, the consequences of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank structural adjustment programs, and pervasive corruption.

•**Constitutional challenge and the birth of the MDC:** This discontent catalyzed the formation of a new opposition movement. Trade unions and a coalition of civic groups successfully campaigned against a proposed constitutional amendment in 2000, forcing a humiliating defeat on ZANU-PF. This coalition subsequently formed the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), posing the first major electoral challenge to ZANU-PF.

2000–2017: Entrenchment of authoritarian tactics under Mugabe

•**Fast-track land reform:** In response to the growing threat from the MDC, ZANU-PF launched the politically motivated Fast-Track Land Reform program. This violent and chaotic process, in which commercial farms were forcibly seized, served to punish the white commercial farming community and their workers (perceived as MDC supporters), and to create a new patronage base for ZANU-PF loyalists.

•**Weaponization of law:** To weaken the opposition and civil society, ZANU-PF passed draconian legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in the early 2000s. These laws were used to restrict public gatherings and control the independent press.

•**Politicization of the judiciary:** When the judiciary resisted executive overreach, Mugabe's government purged it of independent judges, replacing them with party loyalists who rubber-stamped ZANU-PF's actions.

•**Electoral violence and manipulation:** Elections became synonymous with state-sponsored violence and intimidation. Following its parliamentary defeat and Mugabe's loss in the first round of the 2008 elections, ZANU-PF unleashed a brutal campaign of violence

("Operation Makavhoterapapi?") that forced the MDC presidential candidate to withdraw from the runoff.

•**Operation Murambatsvina:** In 2005, the government launched "Operation Murambatsvina" ("Clear the Filth"), a mass demolition of informal housing and businesses in urban areas, which were traditionally strongholds of the MDC. This displacement of hundreds of thousands of people was widely seen as an attempt to punish the opposition's voter base.

2017–Present: The "new dispensation" and continuity of control

•**The 2017 coup:** In November 2017, internal power struggles within ZANU-PF led the military to stage a coup that ousted Robert Mugabe and installed Emmerson Mnangagwa as president.

•**Continuity, not change:** Despite initial promises of a "new dispensation," Mnangagwa's administration has continued authoritarian practices. Key elements of the repressive state apparatus have remained intact, and the military's role in political life has been institutionalized.

•**Targeting dissent:** Repression has intensified against civil society organizations (CSOs), the opposition, and journalists. New legislation, like the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill and the Patriotic Bill, further constricts civic and political space.

•**Flawed 2023 elections:** The 2023 elections were widely condemned by both domestic and international observers, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which for the first time noted that the elections were neither free nor fair. The election was marred by allegations of fraud, intimidation of rural voters, and partisan manipulation of state institutions.

•**Securitization and violence:** The Mnangagwa regime has continued to rely on securitization, with the military, police, and shadowy youth militias used to intimidate and punish political opponents and suppress dissent.

Key mechanisms of authoritarian consolidation

•**Lawfare:** ZANU-PF consistently uses legal strategies to maintain power by passing restrictive laws, undermining the independence of the judiciary, and using the courts to target opponents.

•**Partisan control of state institutions:** The ruling party maintains control over critical institutions like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the judiciary, and the security forces, compromising their impartiality and using them to secure political victories.

•**Patronage and clientelism:** ZANU-PF relies heavily on a vast patronage network, using state resources to reward loyalty and create a base of supporters. This includes channeling scholarships, jobs, and informal trading opportunities to party cadres.

•**Historical narratives:** The regime weaponizes the history of the liberation struggle, using nationalist and sovereigntist rhetoric to delegitimize the opposition and CSOs as "agents of the West".

•**Information control:** State-controlled media propagates ZANU-PF's narrative and denies independent media and opposition parties equitable coverage.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's journey from liberation to authoritarianism was not an inevitable outcome but a result of deliberate choices made by the ZANU-PF elite, particularly in response to opposition challenges since the late 1990s. The regime has systematically eroded democratic institutions, using a mix of legal repression, electoral manipulation, and targeted violence to maintain power. The 2017 coup and the "new dispensation" have ultimately reinforced, rather than dismantled, this authoritarian structure. Despite a vibrant civil society and persistent opposition, the entrenched mechanisms of ZANU-PF's control continue to suppress meaningful political competition and democratic progress.

FINDINGS

Professor Talent Rusere Phd Thesis - The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa – University of Oxford

Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

Detailed analysis on how the ruling party, ZANU-PF, has constrained and repressed civil society through patriotic history discourses and brute repression.

The ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has systematically constrained and repressed civil society through a two-pronged strategy: using patriotic history discourse to delegitimize dissent and employing brute repression to enforce compliance. While these tactics were prevalent under former president Robert Mugabe, they have been refined and intensified under his successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, particularly in the lead-up to and aftermath of the contested 2023 elections.

Weaponizing patriotic history discourses

Dividing "patriots" and "sell-outs"

ZANU-PF's "patriotic history" discourse draws on its role in the liberation struggle to claim exclusive ownership of Zimbabwe's past, present, and future. This narrative frames the party as the sole legitimate representative of the people and the ultimate custodian of national sovereignty. Any individual, opposition party, or civil society organization (CSO) that challenges ZANU-PF is branded as a "sell-out," "puppet," or "agent of the West".

•**Electoral manipulation:** This discourse serves to discredit the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and its successor, the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), portraying them as puppets of former colonial powers and therefore illegitimate contenders for power.

•**Destabilizing civic space:** This narrative creates a toxic "us versus them" mentality, making civil society activists "legitimate targets for political violence". It justifies the criminalization of their work and provides ideological cover for brutal crackdowns.

Legislative instruments

ZANU-PF has embedded this patriotic history narrative into legislation to further constrict civic space.

•**Criminal Law Codification and Reform Amendment Act (Patriot Act):** Passed in 2023, this law criminalizes anyone deemed to be "wilfully injuring the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe". This vague language can be broadly and subjectively interpreted to prosecute journalists, activists, and CSOs who report on human rights abuses or criticize the government to foreign audiences.

•**Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill:** Although not yet signed into law as of October 2025, this proposed legislation has been used to threaten CSOs since 2021. The bill would give the government unprecedented power to deregister, suspend, and monitor CSOs, and frame those with "political affiliation" as legitimate targets for suppression.

Information control and media capture

ZANU-PF controls state-owned media and uses it to propagate its patriotic narrative and suppress alternative viewpoints.

•**State-owned media dominance:** The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and state-aligned newspapers provide disproportionate and positive coverage of ZANU-PF, while demonizing the opposition and critical civil society.

•**Targeting independent media:** Independent journalists and media outlets face constant harassment, arrests, and intimidation, especially when reporting on corruption or political repression.

Brute repression and intimidation

Election-related violence and intimidation

ZANU-PF's playbook includes orchestrating violence and intimidation, particularly during electoral periods, to suppress dissent and mobilize supporters.

•**Brutal crackdowns:** State security forces, including the police and military, routinely use excessive force to disperse peaceful protests, as seen in the brutal crackdown on students and activists ahead of the August 2024 SADC summit.

•**Targeting opposition supporters:** ZANU-PF supporters, with the acquiescence of state authorities, intimidate and abuse members of organizations perceived to be aligned with the opposition.

Abductions, torture, and arbitrary arrests

The regime uses abductions and torture to instill fear and silence its critics.

•**State-sponsored violence:** High-profile cases of abductions and torture of activists and journalists, as reported by CIVICUS in September 2024, highlight the regime's willingness to use extrajudicial tactics against dissenting voices.

•**Weaponization of the justice system:** The regime weaponizes the law and the judiciary to punish critics and create a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Opposition figures and activists face lengthy detentions, trumped-up charges, and biased judicial processes.

Militarization of political space

The coup that brought Mnangagwa to power in 2017 did not demilitarize politics; rather, it institutionalized the military's involvement in electoral and political affairs.

•**Security force interference:** Statements by military commanders, such as the one in June 2024 promising to force voters to polling stations, demonstrate the military's partisan role in intimidating and influencing electoral outcomes.

•**Culture of impunity:** The failure to investigate and prosecute abuses committed by state security forces reinforces a culture of impunity, further emboldening those who use violence against political opponents and CSOs.

Comparative conclusion

The combination of patriotic history and brute repression allows ZANU-PF to simultaneously control the narrative and enforce compliance. While the patriotic discourse provides a powerful ideological weapon to label critics as enemies of the state, brute force ensures that dissent is met with swift and brutal punishment. This strategy is particularly effective in Zimbabwe, where the memory of the liberation struggle still holds significance. The effect is a shrinking civic space, where civil society's survival depends on its ability to navigate constant threats and develop resilient, often informal, strategies for mobilization.

Analysis:

Interpretation of findings within the theoretical framework, showing how a dominant-party state suppresses civil society mobilization to maintain power, limiting political recovery.

To provide a comprehensive assessment of how a dominant-party state suppresses civil society mobilization to maintain power, limiting political recovery, with Zimbabwe as a reference, it is essential to utilize several theoretical frameworks. These frameworks—including Political Opportunity Structure (POS), Political Settlements Analysis (PSA), Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony, and Competitive Authoritarianism—offer distinct lenses to analyze the multifaceted strategies employed by regimes like ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical frameworks

1. Political Opportunity Structure (POS)

The POS framework posits that the nature of a political system determines the level and type of mobilization possible for civil society organizations (CSOs). In a dominant-party state like Zimbabwe, the ruling party's actions systematically close off formal and informal political space, rendering conventional avenues for mobilization ineffective.

- Closure of formal access:** ZANU-PF has historically controlled key state institutions, including the judiciary, legislature, and electoral bodies, rendering them partisan tools rather than impartial arbiters.

- Example from Zimbabwe:** The judiciary is politicized, often delaying or issuing unfavorable rulings in politically sensitive cases involving CSOs or opposition members. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) is widely perceived as biased, with the 2023 elections drawing criticism from domestic, regional, and international observers for lacking fairness.

- Elite intolerance:** The ZANU-PF elite, particularly under Emmerson Mnangagwa's "new dispensation," has shown an intensifying intolerance for dissent. This has included using extrajudicial force and intimidation to disrupt opposition rallies and civic events.

- Example from Zimbabwe:** The 2024 crackdown on peaceful protestors ahead of the SADC summit in Harare is a recent instance of the regime using excessive force to quell dissent.

- Brute repression:** The state's capacity for repression, exercised through its security forces and aligned militia, is a core feature of its authoritarian strategy. The 2024 report by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) noted a climate of fear stifling free expression and civic engagement.

2. Political Settlements Analysis (PSA)

The PSA framework analyzes how elites forge formal and informal power-sharing arrangements (political settlements) to maintain stability. In authoritarian regimes like

Zimbabwe, this involves creating an "exclusive political settlement" that systematically excludes and constrains CSOs and opposition groups.

•**Managing competing factions:** The PSA explains ZANU-PF's internal dynamics, particularly the coup that installed Mnangagwa, as a means of managing factional rivalries within the ruling elite to maintain control.

•**Balancing reform and repression:** The Mnangagwa regime's use of both co-optation (formalizing collaboration with some CSOs) and heavy-handed repression demonstrates a strategic balancing act. By engaging some elements of civil society, ZANU-PF maintains the pretense of democratic pluralism for international audiences and donors, while simultaneously crushing more critical voices.

•**The threat of accountability:** ZANU-PF constrains CSOs because their demand for accountability poses a direct threat to the regime's political security and its access to economic resources through patronage and corruption.

3. Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony

The Gramscian framework helps explain how a dominant party, through ideological control (hegemony), shapes popular consent for its rule. CSOs and opposition movements attempt to build a counter-hegemony to challenge this control.

•**Hegemonic discourse: "Patriotic history":** ZANU-PF uses its legacy as a liberation movement to establish a hegemonic discourse that frames the party as the sole legitimate owner of Zimbabwe's past and future. CSOs and opposition are labeled as "unpatriotic" or "sell-outs" acting at the behest of Western powers.

•**State-controlled propaganda:** The government uses state media to propagate this narrative and demonize critical CSOs, while systematically denying them fair coverage.

•**Civil society response and resilience:** Despite these constraints, CSOs in Zimbabwe have adapted by forming broad coalitions, leveraging digital platforms, and focusing on issues like human rights and sustainable development to build a counter-hegemony.

4. Competitive authoritarianism

This framework describes hybrid regimes that maintain the formal trappings of democracy (e.g., elections) but manipulate the rules and institutions to entrench dominant-party rule.

•**Manipulating democratic rules:** ZANU-PF has mastered this approach by manipulating electoral laws, controlling the electoral machinery (ZEC), and using state resources for partisan purposes.

•**Instrumentalization of the state:** The ruling party conflates its interests with the state's, using public resources and institutions for partisan gain. This was evident during the 2023 elections, where the ZEC and state media were widely seen as biased toward ZANU-PF.

Limiting political recovery in Zimbabwe

The combination of these strategies explains how ZANU-PF maintains power and limits political recovery in Zimbabwe.

•**Constrained civic space:** The persistent suppression of CSOs erodes the capacity of civil society to hold the government accountable and advocate for democratic reforms.

•**Erosion of legitimacy:** The continued use of repression and electoral manipulation diminishes the legitimacy of formal democratic processes, leading to political instability and distrust in the system.

•**Perpetual crisis:** The regime's inability to address underlying socioeconomic problems, combined with its continued focus on maintaining power through repression, contributes to a cycle of perpetual political and economic crisis.

Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks of POS, PSA, Gramscian hegemony, and Competitive Authoritarianism provide a robust analytical toolkit for understanding how dominant parties

like ZANU-PF constrain civil society. Through a combination of legal restrictions, institutional capture, co-optation, and brute repression, ZANU-PF has systematically narrowed the space for mobilization, reinforcing its authoritarian control. For Zimbabwe, this means a significant—but not insurmountable—challenge to democratic recovery, placing immense pressure on resilient CSOs and opposition forces to find new strategies to build a more inclusive and just society.

CHAPTER 6

Comperative Analysis

Detailed analysis comparing key differences in state–civil society relations, focusing on how different liberation movement legacies and political choices lead to divergent outcomes for post-colonial recovery between post apatheid south africa and zimbabwe under the zanu pf rule.

Drawing from distinct liberation legacies and subsequent political choices, the ruling parties in South Africa (the ANC) and Zimbabwe (ZANU-PF) have cultivated vastly different state-civil society relations, leading to divergent paths of post-colonial recovery. While South Africa's constitutional democracy offers a contested space for civil society, Zimbabwe's dominant-party rule systematically constrains civic action.

Foundational differences in liberation movements

Aspect	African National Congress (ANC)	Zimbabwe African National Union–
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Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)

Coalition	Broad-based, with strong alliances between its military wing (uMkhonto we Sizwe), political wing (the ANC), and powerful trade unions (COSATU).	Built on ethnic and military factions, which fostered intra-elite power struggles rather than broad-based consensus.
Negotiated settlement	Ended apartheid through a negotiated, multi-party settlement that institutionalized democratic governance and enshrined a progressive constitution.	Established a government through a negotiated settlement (Lancaster House Agreement) that preserved many existing power structures while concentrating power within the victorious ZANU-PF.
Organizational structure	Operated with significant inputs from a diverse range of internal and external civil society actors.	Structured around a centralized military command and a party vanguard, a model ill-suited for inclusive post-war governance.

Divergent state-civil society relations

Aspect	South Africa: Contested Constitutionalism	Zimbabwe: Authoritarian Consolidation
Approach to civil society	Relations are marked by a complex dynamic of cooperation and tension. Initially, the ANC encouraged a "corporate pact" with civil society for reconstruction, but persistent corruption and institutional decay have fostered a more critical and adversarial stance among many CSOs.	ZANU-PF suppresses dissent through a combination of brute repression and a hegemonic ideological discourse of "patriotic history". It also strategically co-opts or creates rival, state-sponsored CSOs to undermine legitimate civic action.
Legal framework	Governed by a robust, rights-based constitution that provides CSOs legal recourse to challenge government actions, as seen in the Treatment Action Campaign's use of the courts during the HIV/AIDS crisis.	The legal framework has been weaponized through draconian laws like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill to stifle freedom of association and expression.
State institutions	While facing increasing institutional decay, key institutions like the judiciary and the media still function as potential checks on executive power. The 2024 GNU presents a new layer of complexity, potentially altering the balance of power.	Critical state institutions, including the judiciary and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), have been systematically undermined by the ruling party and co-opted to serve partisan interests.

Consequences for recovery	The existence of a critical civil society forces some degree of accountability and has slowed institutional decay. However, deep-seated inequality, corruption, and slow economic transformation persist.	ZANU-PF's approach has effectively limited civil society's ability to drive democratic change, contributing to a cycle of economic crisis and political instability.
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Impact on post-colonial recovery

Area	South Africa	Zimbabwe
Political development	A multi-party system and constitutionalism remain intact, though contested. Civil society's watchdog function provides a bulwark against complete democratic collapse.	Democracy has been hollowed out, with elections serving as instruments to legitimize ZANU-PF rule. Civil society focuses on survival and adapting tactics to a highly repressive environment.
Socioeconomic inequality	Despite significant social grants and affirmative action policies, structural inequality remains a primary challenge. This fuels a vibrant, but often repressed, grassroots social movement.	A history of state capture, corruption, and the chaotic Fast-Track Land Reform program has devastated the economy. Widespread poverty and unemployment have created a cycle of dependency and limited opportunities for social mobility.
Rule of law	The judiciary has demonstrated a degree of independence, but its capacity is tested by persistent political influence and state-level corruption. The Zondo Commission exemplifies the limits and potential of accountability mechanisms.	The rule of law is severely compromised, with ZANU-PF consistently manipulating the legal system to target opponents and shield loyalists from prosecution.

Conclusion

The divergent legacies of the ANC and ZANU-PF, combined with distinct post-colonial political choices, have resulted in fundamentally different state-civil society relations. In South Africa, a resilient civil society leverages liberal spaces to contest the failures of the post-apartheid state, slowing institutional decay but struggling against persistent socioeconomic inequalities. In Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF's authoritarian legacy, combined with strategic repression and ideological control, has severely constrained civil society, contributing to a prolonged economic and political crisis. These contrasting trajectories

demonstrate that a liberation movement's legacy and subsequent political choices are defining factors in shaping state-civil society relations and influencing the outcomes of post-colonial recovery.

Impact on Theory:

Detailed Discussing how the findings on the post apartheid south africa and zimbabwe under zanu pfsupport and refine existing theories on civil society, democratization, and post-colonial politics, emphasizing the role of historical trajectories and regime type.

Drawing on the contrasting trajectories of post-apartheid South Africa and Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF rule, the findings offer significant refinements to existing theories on civil society, democratization, and post-colonial politics. The analysis emphasizes that historical legacies and regime types are not static but are shaped by political choices, which in turn lead to divergent state-civil society relations and distinct post-colonial outcomes.

1. The Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory: Beyond simple openness

The conventional POS theory suggests that a more open political system creates more opportunities for civil society mobilization. The South Africa-Zimbabwe comparison refines this theory by adding nuance.

•**Refinement: The "Contested Openness" of South Africa:** In post-apartheid South Africa, civil society operates in a seemingly open system defined by a progressive constitution and a multi-party system. However, this openness is deeply contested.

•**Institutional decay:** As South Africa's experience with corruption and state capture shows, the *quality* of political institutions matters as much as their formal existence. CSOs must therefore not only leverage the existing "openings" but also actively contest the institutional decay caused by state capture and corruption.

•**Differential mobilization:** Formal, resourced CSOs find opportunities in litigation and policy forums, while grassroots movements confront police repression and elite co-optation. This reveals that a single POS framework is insufficient; the opportunity structure varies significantly for different types of CSOs.

•**Refinement: The "Coerced Closure" of Zimbabwe:** In Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF has systematically closed the political space through legislation and brute force. This exemplifies a highly closed POS, where CSOs must adopt new tactics.

•**State-sanctioned violence:** The use of state violence and intimidation demonstrates that the formal existence of democratic rules is meaningless without a commitment to constitutionalism. The brutality following the 2024 elections proved the regime's capacity to crush dissent, regardless of the law.

•**Informal channels:** CSOs have been forced to abandon formal channels and rely on informal networks and digital platforms for mobilization, fundamentally altering the nature of civic action.

2. Post-colonial theory: Beyond simple anti-colonialism

Post-colonial theory examines the enduring impact of colonialism on governance and power relations. The comparison of South Africa and Zimbabwe expands on this by showing how former liberation movements can both uphold and betray anti-colonial ideals.

•**Refinement: Contested Anti-colonialism in South Africa:** In South Africa, the ANC's initial commitment to a progressive and inclusive vision was gradually undermined by neoliberal policies and institutional decay. This created a new internal struggle for civil society, where they had to fight not against a colonial power, but against a post-colonial elite that had failed to deliver on its promises of social and economic justice.

•**Refinement: Anti-colonial Rhetoric as a Tool of Repression in Zimbabwe:** ZANU-PF's "patriotic history" demonstrates how post-colonial rhetoric can be weaponized to suppress civil society. By framing any opposition as "unpatriotic sell-outs," the party

justifies its authoritarian rule and violent repression, effectively turning a discourse of liberation into one of state control.

•**Betrayal of liberation ideals:** The Zimbabwean example shows how a liberation movement can betray its own emancipatory rhetoric. The creation of a "predatory elite" and the systematic violation of human rights are not aberrations but rather logical outcomes of a political culture that prioritized power retention over democratic consolidation.

3. Democratization theory: Beyond elections

Traditional democratization theory often overemphasizes the role of elections and formal institutions. The cases of South Africa and Zimbabwe highlight the importance of "everyday politics" and the resilience of civil society in sustaining democratic values even when formal institutions are failing.

•**Refinement: The Persistence of Democratic Norms in South Africa:** Despite rampant corruption and institutional decay, South Africa's civil society continues to act as a check on power. The judiciary and media provide avenues for accountability, demonstrating that democratic norms can persist even when faced with significant institutional erosion. The transition to a Government of National Unity after the 2024 elections is a testament to the resilience of democratic processes, however fragile.

•**Refinement: Co-optation and Pseudo-democratization in Zimbabwe:** Zimbabwe illustrates the concept of "pseudo-democratization," where a ruling party uses elections and other formal processes to legitimize its authoritarian rule. ZANU-PF's strategy of co-opting CSOs and manipulating elections exposes the limits of a purely institutional approach to democratization.

Conclusion

The comparison of South Africa and Zimbabwe refines core theoretical frameworks in political science. It demonstrates that the political opportunity structure is a dynamic, contested space, not a static condition. It shows how post-colonial liberation rhetoric can be both a force for justice and a tool for oppression. Finally, it highlights the importance of civil society resilience and activism in sustaining democratic values and holding power accountable, even when formal institutions are failing. The findings suggest that understanding democratic recovery in post-colonial contexts requires a holistic approach that considers historical legacies, regime type, and the ongoing struggles for justice and equality at both the institutional and grassroots levels.

CHAPTER 7

Technology and the African politics

Background

Global technology presents a complex and multifaceted geoeconomic landscape for Africa, offering both immense opportunities for development and modernization, while simultaneously posing significant risks of increased dependency and vulnerability. A critical analysis reveals that Africa's position is shaped by its engagement with global digital powers, its capacity for governance, and its internal socioeconomic dynamics.

Meanwhile Technology offers African countries a chance to bypass older, traditional models of development and move directly to modern digital infrastructure, potentially accelerating economic growth. Digital technologies can drive innovation across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, finance, and agriculture. For instance, mobile banking platforms have expanded financial inclusion for millions who were previously unbanked. The adoption of digital tools can boost productivity and create new business opportunities, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Digital integration, supported by initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) digital trade protocol, can facilitate trade and boost the continent's internal market.

There is growing investment in Africa's digital infrastructure, supported by initiatives from the World Bank, the African Union, and various development partners, as well as private-sector players. Investments in fiber-optic networks, data centers, and connectivity are essential to address infrastructure gaps and meet the continent's growing digital demands.

The opportunity exists for Africa to develop its own digital infrastructure solutions that are tailored to local needs and incorporate green technologies.

Challenges and vulnerabilities in the geoeconomic sphere

As global powers vie for influence, Africa faces the risk of becoming dependent on foreign technology and infrastructure, which can erode its digital sovereignty. The intensifying rivalry between the US and China, particularly concerning 5G technology, forces African countries to make strategic choices. While most African nations prefer to remain neutral and diversify their partnerships, geopolitical pressure is significant.

Chinese technology companies have invested heavily in Africa's digital infrastructure, including telecommunications networks and "smart city" surveillance systems. This raises concerns about data colonialism, as foreign companies gain access to vast amounts of African data, potentially enabling surveillance and control by foreign governments.

Some investments from foreign entities, particularly China, come with large loans that could create "debt traps" for African countries, jeopardizing their economic and political stability. The benefits of the digital economy are not distributed equally across the continent, and inadequate regulation poses further risks. Significant disparities in internet and device access persist along socioeconomic lines, with a large gap between urban and rural areas, as well as between different demographics. This replicates and can even amplify existing inequalities. The rapid pace of digitalization has outstripped regulatory frameworks in many African nations. This creates risks related to data privacy, cybersecurity, market monopolies, and consumer protection. While initiatives like the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy exist, their implementation varies across countries, with some nations lagging significantly in digital readiness.

The dominance of international tech companies can stifle local innovation and competition, limiting Africa's participation in the global digital value chain. Costs of connectivity, devices, and digital equipment remains high in many parts of Africa, hindering both businesses and individuals from fully participating in the digital economy. The concentration of global digital platforms in developed economies further exacerbates inequalities and power imbalances.

These platforms often extract value from African markets without contributing significantly to local economies.

Global technology's impact on Africa's geoeconomic politics is a story of promise and peril. While digital transformation offers a pathway to accelerated development, Africa is a key arena for intensifying geopolitical rivalries and faces significant risks of digital dependency, data colonialism, and debt. Navigating this complex landscape requires a proactive, strategic, and unified approach. African governments, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society, must prioritize investments in infrastructure, skills, and governance while diversifying their technological partnerships. This is essential to ensure that Africa can leverage the opportunities of the digital age to drive inclusive and sustainable growth, rather than becoming a pawn in the broader global geoeconomic game.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Detailed analysis on how global technology has impacted african economies with Zimbabwe and south africa as a case studies

Global technology has impacted African economies with divergent and complex outcomes, as exemplified by the cases of South Africa and Zimbabwe. While technology has driven growth and financial inclusion in both nations, systemic political and economic differences have dictated vastly different experiences with opportunity and vulnerability.

South Africa: Leveraging technology amidst structural inequality

South Africa, as a regional economic leader, has been able to leverage global technology to foster significant economic and social development. However, the benefits have been unevenly distributed, exacerbating existing inequalities inherited from the apartheid era.

Opportunities and advantages:

•**Vibrant and innovative tech ecosystem:** South Africa boasts a relatively advanced tech ecosystem with thriving start-ups, innovation hubs, and research centers in emerging fields like artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and fintech.

•**High internet penetration and digital service access:** South Africa has achieved relatively high internet access, with approximately 76% of its population online as of 2022. The extensive use of smartphones has driven a boom in digital services, from mobile banking and e-commerce to e-learning and entertainment.

•**Regional leadership and policy initiatives:** South Africa is a regional leader in digital policy and has a strong foundation for a thriving digital economy, positioning it to play a vital role in regional digital integration and policy harmonization.

Challenges and vulnerabilities:

•**Deep digital divide:** A persistent digital divide along socioeconomic and geographic lines, particularly between urban and rural areas, marginalizes large segments of the population. This divide is rooted in inadequate infrastructure, high data costs, and low digital literacy.

•**Institutional weakness and corruption:** Widespread corruption and institutional decay hinder effective policy implementation and public service delivery, weakening the state's capacity to address structural challenges and ensure equitable access to digital opportunities.

•**Geopolitical and economic risks:** South Africa is exposed to global tech rivalries and risks associated with digital dependency. The country also faces challenges related to inadequate power infrastructure, hindering full participation in the digital economy.

Zimbabwe: Navigating economic crisis and digital repression

Zimbabwe's experience with global technology is defined by a prolonged economic crisis and political instability under ZANU-PF's authoritarian rule. While technology has enabled some economic resilience, the benefits have been overshadowed by significant limitations and digital repression.

Opportunities and resilience:

•**Highly digitalized financial sector:** Due to hyperinflation and cash shortages, Zimbabwe's economy has become heavily reliant on digital financial services. As of 2021, 96% of all transactions were electronic, primarily via mobile money, demonstrating a high degree of financial inclusion out of necessity.

•**Mobile-based services and entrepreneurship:** Digital technology has enabled some economic activities, particularly in the informal sector, through the use of mobile money and social media platforms. Some digital entrepreneurship is emerging, albeit amidst significant hurdles.

•**Official digital strategies:** The government has introduced a "SMART Zimbabwe 2030 Master Plan" outlining ambitious goals for digital transformation. However, implementation has been inconsistent due to macroeconomic and political constraints.

Challenges and vulnerabilities:

•**Digital repression:** The ZANU-PF government, particularly in the aftermath of the 2023 elections, has increasingly used technology for repression. This includes internet and social media shutdowns, online censorship, and targeting journalists and activists, effectively turning digital tools into instruments of control.

•**High costs and poor infrastructure:** Despite relatively developed international connectivity in some areas, the cost of internet access is high, and infrastructure remains poor in rural regions. Power supply irregularities also hamper digital adoption and usage.

•**Limited foreign investment:** Political instability, a poor human rights record, and ongoing economic challenges make Zimbabwe an unattractive destination for sustained foreign investment in the tech sector.

Comparative analysis and divergent trajectories

Aspect	South Africa	Zimbabwe
Enabling environment	A largely open and competitive market with a robust legal framework (albeit one that has experienced some institutional decay).	An authoritarian state that systematically uses legislation and political leverage to control the digital sector and suppress dissent.
Digital financial services	A highly developed and competitive sector, with a broader range of services and lower transaction costs, though penetration is still challenged by the digital divide.	Mobile money-driven, born out of necessity due to economic collapse, but suffering from low interoperability, high costs, and government manipulation.
Innovation and entrepreneurship	A vibrant start-up ecosystem, a hub for regional digital innovation, and strong support for emerging technologies.	A nascent but struggling sector hampered by a lack of access to capital, macroeconomic instability, and a hostile political environment.
Digital inclusion	Striving to close the digital divide through policy and investment, though significant socioeconomic inequalities remain.	Persistent digital divides exacerbated by high costs, poor infrastructure, and state-led repression, limiting access for most citizens.
Future outlook	Positioned for continued digital growth, provided the government addresses structural inequalities and institutional weaknesses.	The future of the digital economy remains uncertain, dependent on macroeconomic stabilization and political reforms. The threat of digital repression poses a significant risk to future progress.

Conclusion

The contrasting paths of South Africa and Zimbabwe demonstrate that technology alone cannot guarantee equitable economic development. South Africa has benefited significantly from technology due to its more stable political system and a robust (if

challenged) institutional framework. However, it still grapples with significant structural issues. Zimbabwe, in contrast, has seen technology provide some resilience amidst state failure but has been held back by a repressive regime that uses technology to control rather than empower its citizens. The two cases highlight that the impact of global technology is deeply intertwined with a country's governance, political stability, and capacity to ensure inclusive access to the digital economy.

CHAPTER 8

Methodology: Assessing global technology impacts in African economies

This study employs a mixed-methods, comparative case study approach to analyze how global technology has impacted the economies of South Africa and Zimbabwe. This approach allows for both a quantitative overview of technological development and a qualitative understanding of the political, economic, and social contexts that shape these impacts.

Research design and theoretical framework

The research design is a comparative case study, allowing for an in-depth analysis of two countries with different political trajectories and economic conditions, enabling a nuanced understanding of how technology's impact is mediated by local contexts. The analysis is guided by a theoretical framework that considers four key factors:

- 1. Technological infrastructure:** The state of the country's information and communications infrastructure.
- 2. Policy and regulatory environment:** The policies and initiatives that govern the digital economy.
- 3. Human capacity and inclusivity:** The skills, income distribution, and socioeconomic factors that influence digital adoption.
- 4. State strategy:** The government's overall approach to digital transformation.

Data collection

1. Quantitative data

- Macroeconomic indicators:** Data on GDP per capita, inflation, and investment from sources like the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI).
- ICT infrastructure metrics:** Data on internet penetration rates, mobile phone subscriber numbers, and fixed-line broadband access from sources like the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).
- Digital economy indices:** Leveraging existing indices, such as the World Bank's Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A) initiative, to measure and compare the level of digital development.
- Investment flows:** Data on foreign direct investment (FDI) in the technology sector, sourced from relevant international bodies and national investment agencies.

2. Qualitative data

- Document analysis:** Analyzing government policies, legislation (e.g., South Africa's ICT policies, Zimbabwe's Patriot Act and PVO Amendment Bill), and reports from international organizations (e.g., World Bank, African Development Bank) and think tanks.
- Semi-structured interviews:** Conducting interviews with key informants, including:
 - Policymakers:** Government officials involved in ICT and economic policy to understand official strategy and implementation challenges.
 - Private sector leaders:** Executives from telecommunications companies and tech startups to gain insights into the business environment.
 - Civil society representatives:** Activists and advocacy groups working on digital rights, media freedom, and economic inclusion to capture the impact of digital repression and inequality.

•**Academic and research institutions:** Experts from universities and research centers to provide analytical perspectives and context.

•**Focus group discussions (FGDs):** Holding FGDs with different demographic groups, including informal traders, rural residents, and urban youth, to understand variations in technology access, usage, and perceived economic impact.

•**Media analysis:** Systematically analyzing both state-controlled and independent media, as well as social media, to understand public discourse, information control, and mobilization efforts.

Ethical considerations

•**Informed consent:** Ensuring participants fully understand the study's purpose, risks, and benefits, especially when discussing sensitive topics related to state surveillance in Zimbabwe.

•**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Protecting the identities of participants, particularly in Zimbabwe, where discussing political matters can be dangerous.

•**Data security:** Storing sensitive data securely to prevent unauthorized access.

•**Power dynamics:** Acknowledging and addressing the power dynamics inherent in research, especially when interviewing vulnerable populations or in politically unstable environments.

Findings from South Africa and Zimbabwe case studies

South Africa: Institutional strength vs. structural inequality

Aspect	Findings	Interpretation
Enabling	A largely open and competitive market with a	A stable political system and strong

environment	robust legal framework, leading to significant foreign and domestic investment in technology.	institutions initially fostered a favorable environment for technological development.
Financial inclusion	A highly developed and competitive fintech sector has expanded financial access, with over 50% of the population having access to banking services.	Technology has driven innovation in the finance sector, but its reach is still limited by the digital divide.
Innovation and entrepreneurship	A vibrant start-up ecosystem, a hub for regional digital innovation, and strong support for emerging technologies.	The country's strong tech capabilities position it as a regional leader, driving innovation in areas like fintech and e-commerce.
Challenges and vulnerabilities	The benefits of technology are unevenly distributed due to a persistent digital divide, high data costs, and structural inequalities. Institutional decay and corruption also hinder equitable access.	Despite opportunities, technology alone cannot solve deep-seated societal issues like inequality and institutional weakness.

Zimbabwe: Resilience amidst repression and economic collapse

Aspect	Findings	Interpretation
Enabling environment	An authoritarian state that uses legislation, intimidation, and internet shutdowns to control the digital sector and suppress dissent.	Technology is a tool of both empowerment and control, with the ruling ZANU-PF systematically constricting civic and digital space.
Financial inclusion	Mobile money has become the primary mode of transaction due to hyperinflation, demonstrating resilience but also low interoperability and high costs.	A highly digitalized financial sector was born out of necessity, showcasing innovation in a crisis but also highlighting regulatory shortcomings.
Innovation and entrepreneurship	A nascent but struggling sector hampered by a hostile political environment, lack of access to capital, and macroeconomic instability.	Economic development is severely hampered by political instability, limiting the potential of local tech entrepreneurship.
Challenges and vulnerabilities	The benefits of technology are hampered by digital repression, high costs, poor infrastructure, and a persistent digital divide, further entrenched by state actions.	The promise of technology is overshadowed by the challenges posed by a repressive regime and a prolonged economic crisis.

Comparative synthesis

The contrasting paths of South Africa and Zimbabwe demonstrate that technology's impact is not uniform across Africa. In South Africa, technology acts as both a driver of innovation and a mirror reflecting deep-seated structural inequalities. In Zimbabwe, technology has provided a coping mechanism for economic crisis but is also used as a tool of political repression. The two cases highlight that a country's governance, political stability, and capacity for inclusive access are crucial factors in determining whether technology empowers its citizens or perpetuates existing inequalities and authoritarian control.

Drawing on the findings from South Africa and Zimbabwe, a comprehensive approach to mitigating the negative impacts and maximizing the benefits of global technology in African economies requires a multi-pronged strategy. Feasible solutions must address infrastructural and regulatory deficits, while also challenging political and economic dynamics that exacerbate inequality and repression.

1. Strengthening data governance and digital rights

Challenge: Data privacy, digital sovereignty, and the use of technology for state surveillance are significant risks, especially in contexts like Zimbabwe.

Solution:

•**Implement robust data protection laws:** African nations should fast-track the implementation of data protection laws that align with international best practices. This can help prevent the misuse of personal data and build public trust in digital services. The African Union's Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention) provides a framework, but national implementation and enforcement are key.

•**Diversify technology partnerships:** To mitigate dependency and surveillance risks from dominant players like China and the US, countries should diversify their technology partnerships. This involves fostering a competitive market and collaborating with a wider range of technology providers.

•**Invest in cybersecurity expertise:** Building local cybersecurity expertise is crucial for protecting critical infrastructure, safeguarding sensitive data, and building trust in digital platforms.

2. Promoting inclusive and equitable digital access

Challenge: The digital divide remains significant in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, perpetuating and potentially amplifying existing inequalities.

Solution:

•**Universal access initiatives:** Governments should implement universal access policies to subsidize internet and device costs for marginalized communities. South Africa's experience shows that even with advanced infrastructure, high costs and socioeconomic inequalities persist.

•**Invest in public infrastructure:** Investing in public digital infrastructure, such as community WiFi and public libraries with internet access, can help bridge the digital divide.

•**Promote digital literacy:** Implement large-scale digital literacy programs to ensure that citizens, especially those in rural areas, can effectively use technology to improve their lives and participate in the digital economy.

3. Fostering a dynamic and inclusive innovation ecosystem

Challenge: The dominance of international tech companies can stifle local innovation and competition.

Solution:

•**Support local startups:** Create policies and funding mechanisms that specifically support local tech startups, particularly those led by women and youth.

•**Develop supportive regulatory frameworks:** Introduce "sandboxes" or regulatory test environments that allow innovators to test new technologies and business models without being constrained by outdated regulations.

•**Promote intra-African collaboration:** Encourage regional collaboration and knowledge sharing to develop indigenous technologies and platforms that are tailored to the African context.

4. Leveraging digital finance for genuine inclusion

Challenge: In contexts like Zimbabwe, digital finance can be heavily controlled by the state and suffer from high costs and regulatory issues.

Solution:

•**Promote mobile money interoperability:** Enforce regulations that promote interoperability among different mobile money providers to foster competition and reduce costs for users.

•**Strengthen regulatory oversight:** Establish independent and robust regulatory bodies to oversee the digital finance sector, ensuring fair practices and protecting consumers from exploitation.

•**Financial literacy programs:** Complement financial inclusion efforts with robust financial literacy programs to ensure users can make informed decisions and are not victims of digital fraud.

5. Counteracting digital repression and safeguarding civic space

Challenge: In countries like Zimbabwe, technology is used as a tool of repression, threatening freedom of expression and the ability of CSOs to organize.

Solution:

•**Regional solidarity and condemnation:** The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) must strengthen their commitment to protecting digital rights. The strong SADC observer mission report on Zimbabwe's 2023 elections demonstrated a positive step toward regional pressure, but more action is needed.

•**Support independent media and civil society:** Provide financial and technical support to independent media outlets and CSOs working on digital rights and democratic accountability.

•**Pressure for constitutional adherence:** International and regional bodies should pressure governments to adhere to constitutional principles of human rights, including freedom of expression and assembly online.

6. Strategic engagement with global tech giants

Challenge: The imbalance of power between African nations and global tech companies can limit African countries' bargaining power.

Solution:

•**Demand responsible conduct:** Engage in collective and strategic negotiations with global tech giants to demand responsible conduct, fair taxation, and investment in local digital ecosystems.

•**African-led digital strategy:** The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa provides a platform for a continent-wide approach to digital regulation and engagement with global tech players.

Conclusion

The path forward requires a holistic and contextual approach. South Africa's experience shows that even with a strong legal framework, addressing structural inequalities is paramount. Zimbabwe's experience highlights the urgent need to protect civic space and prevent technology from becoming a tool of repression. By implementing these feasible

solutions, African nations can leverage global technology for inclusive and sustainable development, ensuring that the digital revolution empowers all citizens rather than reinforcing existing inequalities and authoritarian control.

CHAPTER 9

Dependency and resource curse in Africa

This created a cycle of dependency on the global market and led to the "resource curse" in many resource-rich countries, where the profits from natural resources flow out of the country, and the economy becomes vulnerable to global price fluctuations.

The phenomenon described is commonly known as the "resource curse" or "paradox of plenty". In Africa, this situation arose from the legacy of colonial economic structures and

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Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

was reinforced by post-independence policies and practices, including the influence of multinational corporations (MNCs) and international institutions. This has resulted in a cycle of economic dependency, capital flight, and vulnerability to global market forces.

Mechanisms of the resource curse in Africa

The resource curse has manifested through several interrelated economic and political mechanisms:

Economic dependency and commodity price volatility

- **Monocrop or single-resource economies:** Many African nations inherited or developed economies heavily reliant on the export of a single or a few natural resources, such as oil, minerals, or specific agricultural products.
- **Susceptibility to global shocks:** This lack of diversification leaves the entire economy vulnerable to price fluctuations in the global commodity market. A price boom can lead to unsustainable government spending, while a bust can trigger a fiscal crisis, currency devaluation, and unemployment.
- **Dutch disease:** A booming resource sector can cause a country's currency to appreciate, making its non-resource export sectors (like manufacturing and agriculture) less competitive internationally. This can lead to a decline in these other sectors, further increasing economic dependency on the single commodity.

Capital flight and limited value addition

- **Extractive focus:** The economic model is often focused on the extraction and export of raw materials rather than on local processing and manufacturing. This means that African countries capture only a small fraction of the final value of their resources.
- **Profits flow outwards:** A significant portion of the profits from resource extraction flows out of Africa, primarily to multinational corporations that dominate the sector. Favorable,

and often opaque, contracts agreed upon during periods of weak governance or corruption ensure that MNCs, not the host nations, reap most of the financial rewards.

•**Lack of local investment:** With profits flowing abroad, there is less reinvestment in a country's domestic economy, hindering diversification and human capital development. For example, a 2019 study noted that MNC activities often fail to generate sustainable solutions for resource conflict or to invest responsibly in host communities.

Corruption and elite capture

•**Rent-seeking:** The vast, centralized revenue from resource extraction creates a powerful incentive for political elites to capture these "rents" for personal gain. This leads to corruption and the weakening of governance institutions, as ruling elites have little need to build broad-based support through taxation or public service provision.

•**Erosion of accountability:** Because leaders can generate significant revenue from resources rather than taxes, they become less accountable to the public. This can create a "rentier state" where leaders use resource wealth to pacify dissent and fund patronage networks, rather than investing in developmental programs.

•**Opaque contracts:** A lack of transparency in resource contract negotiations exacerbates this problem. Agreements are often made behind closed doors, allowing corruption to flourish and denying citizens a fair share of their national wealth.

Case study: Nigeria

Nigeria, as a major oil producer, is a classic example of the resource curse. Despite immense oil wealth, the country has struggled with:

•**Over-reliance on oil:** Oil revenues have dominated the economy, leading to the neglect of other sectors like agriculture and manufacturing.

The Nigerian economy has been dominated by oil revenues, a phenomenon that has led to the severe neglect of other sectors like agriculture and manufacturing. This overreliance

on a single commodity has made the economy unstable and vulnerable to global price fluctuations, hindering sustainable and inclusive development.

The decline of the agricultural sector

Prior to the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria had a robust agricultural sector and was a major exporter of palm oil, cocoa, and groundnuts. The discovery of oil shifted the government's focus and resources away from farming, causing a sharp decline. As oil revenue became more lucrative, agriculture received inadequate government investment and inconsistent, poorly conceived policies. The sector, which employs a large portion of the population, was left to struggle with a lack of basic infrastructure, modern technology, and rural credit. A phenomenon known as the "Dutch Disease" emerged, where the booming oil sector and its foreign exchange earnings caused the Nigerian currency to appreciate. This made agricultural exports less competitive internationally and made cheaper foreign food imports more attractive. The neglect transformed Nigeria from a net exporter of agricultural produce into a net importer, compromising its food security. The agricultural workforce also faced increasing poverty as the sector declined.

The neglect of the manufacturing sector

The influx of oil wealth also had a detrimental effect on Nigeria's light manufacturing base. The oil sector is capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive, meaning it created few jobs, while manufacturing was left to languish. The government's focus on oil led to an overdependence on foreign imports. The manufacturing sector became heavily reliant on imported raw materials and equipment, making it vulnerable to currency fluctuations and high production costs. Manufacturers have long complained of inadequate electricity supply, poor transport infrastructure, and insufficient logistics, all of which drive up operational costs and hamper competitiveness. The removal of trade barriers, often a condition of international loans, exposed Nigeria's domestic manufacturing to intense competition from foreign counterparts. This led to many local factories closing down and a decline in capacity utilization.

The overreliance on oil revenues has had far-reaching consequences beyond the neglect of specific sectors. The concentration of wealth from oil revenues has fueled systemic corruption and rent-seeking among political elites. Control over oil resources has become the primary source of political power and personal enrichment, hindering accountability and good governance. While oil revenue accounts for a significant portion of government revenue, the profits are often unequally distributed and disproportionately benefit a small elite. The subsequent decline of labor-intensive sectors like agriculture contributed to massive migration to cities, rising unemployment, and deepening poverty, especially in rural areas. Nigeria's budget and long-term planning are subject to the volatile nature of global oil prices. When oil prices drop, the economy faces severe pressure, leading to cuts in government spending and fiscal crises.

Corruption: Large-scale corruption and patronage networks have siphoned off a significant portion of oil revenues.

Large-scale corruption and patronage networks have siphoned off a significant portion of Nigeria's oil revenues, leading to severe underdevelopment despite the nation's vast wealth. This issue is deeply entrenched in the country's political and economic structures.

The influx of petrodollars since the 1970s created immense opportunities for elected officials, bureaucrats, and military rulers to extract state resources. This has led to the diversion of oil revenues from public spending to private gain. The distribution of resources and opportunities, often along ethnic or regional lines, has been used to maintain political support. The complex and largely opaque operations within the oil industry make it difficult to determine the exact extent and methods of corruption. This includes areas such as the awarding of licenses and contracts, bottlenecks and inefficiencies, and the exportation and importation of refined products.

Nigeria loses billions to oil theft and wastage, with an estimated loss of **\$4 billion** in 2021 due to oil theft at a rate of **200,000 barrels per day**. Oil theft has also prevented Nigeria from meeting its OPEC production quota. Revenue losses from crude oil theft were **₦2.3 trillion** in 2023. Significant amounts of money are stolen from Nigeria yearly through organized IFFs, often linked to the oil and gas sector.

Key sectors like education, health, electricity, transportation, and infrastructure suffer from a lack of productive public spending due to this corruption. Significant corruption leads to reduced state resources and hinders economic growth. Corruption results in inefficient utilization of human and natural resources, distorted policy frameworks, and ineffective policy implementation. High levels of corruption deter Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Corruption permeates Nigerian society, leading to a lack of trust in public institutions. Nigeria ranks **140th** among 180 countries globally in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of **26**, well below the global average of **43**.

Nigeria has established agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to investigate, prosecute, and prevent corrupt practices. While some progress has been noted, these agencies face deep-rooted structural and operational challenges, including inadequate funding and political interference, which limit their effectiveness, particularly in high-profile cases. Civil society organizations advocate for greater transparency in contracts, including the establishment of a Contract Transparency Portal and stronger enforcement of beneficial ownership disclosures in the extractive industry, as mandated by the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA). The success of the PIA in addressing corruption remains to be seen and depends on the rigor of its implementation.

Revenue volatility

The economy has experienced boom-and-bust cycles tied to global oil prices, contributing to periods of fiscal crisis and instability. Nigeria's heavy dependence on oil revenues has made its economy highly susceptible to global oil price fluctuations, resulting in a persistent pattern of boom-and-bust cycles. This overreliance creates significant macroeconomic challenges and has contributed to fiscal crises and instability.

Economic vulnerability and instability

•**Export dependence:** Approximately **90%** of Nigeria's export earnings and over **50%** of government revenues are derived from the petroleum sector. This high dependence

exposes the economy to external shocks, particularly changes in global oil prices driven by geopolitical tensions, supply-demand mismatches, and technological transitions.

•**Historical recessions:** Nigeria has experienced several economic dislocations linked to oil price volatility, including recessions in **1975, 1978, 1993, 2016,** and **2020**. Recoveries in other periods were often too weak to keep pace with population growth.

•**Impact on macroeconomic indicators:** Fluctuations in oil prices have a significant impact on macroeconomic indicators, including GDP growth and the exchange rate.

•**Budgetary pressures:** Significant declines in oil prices often lead to budget crises. For example, Nigeria's **2025** budget, based on a **\$75** per barrel benchmark, faces potential deficits if Brent crude prices remain around **\$60-65** per barrel. Lower oil receipts also reduce dollar inflows, putting pressure on Nigeria's foreign reserves and the value of the naira, risking imported inflation.

Challenges and reform efforts

Declining oil prices exacerbate fiscal challenges, potentially leading to wider deficits and increased borrowing. The **2025** budget projects a deficit of **₦13 trillion** and a ballooning public debt of **₦149 trillion**. The aging oil infrastructure, poor maintenance, and persistent oil theft further constrain production and revenue generation. The current government has initiated reforms to stabilize the economy, including currency reforms, ending fuel subsidies, and efforts to boost non-oil revenues. In the first eight months of 2025, non-oil revenues accounted for three out of every four naira collected, showing a shift away from oil dependence. Despite reforms, high inflation and the cost of living remain elevated, potentially leading to heightened socioeconomic grievances and increasing the risk of unrest and recruitment by non-state armed groups.

Need for diversification in Nigeria

Nigeria's long-term prosperity hinges on building a strong industrial base and reducing its vulnerability to oil price shocks through diversification. This involves investing in infrastructure, implementing inclusive economic policies, and increasing transparency.

Building resilience requires export diversification, fiscal discipline, and creating credible stabilization mechanisms to manage revenue volatility and avoid deepening poverty and inequality. Efforts are also underway to explore pathways for economic diversification in the context of the global energy transition, which poses risks to long-term oil and gas dependency. Oil spills and poor environmental practices by MNCs have caused extensive environmental degradation, disproportionately harming local communities.

METHODOLOGY

Breaking the cycle

Escaping the resource curse is not inevitable. Strategies that have been proposed or implemented with varying degrees of success include:

- **Improved governance and transparency:** Initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) aim to increase accountability by requiring the publication of resource revenues.

•**Economic diversification**: Policies that promote investment in non-resource sectors, particularly high-knowledge industries like technology and services, can reduce dependency and create more stable growth.

•**Value addition**: Encouraging local processing and manufacturing of resources can increase the share of profits that remains in the country.

•**Strong institutions**: Building robust, independent institutions—including an effective judiciary and civil service—is crucial for managing resource revenues responsibly and ensuring accountability.

•**Sovereign wealth funds**: Establishing funds to save and invest resource revenues can protect the economy from price fluctuations and provide a stable source of long-term development funding. Botswana's successful management of its diamond wealth is a key example of this approach.

Stagnant growth and inequality

The economic decline caused by structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, combined with poor governance, exacerbated poverty and inequality. The combination of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s and the poor governance prevalent in many African states created a vicious cycle that significantly exacerbated poverty and inequality. While SAPs aimed to correct economic imbalances, their market-orthodox prescriptions often clashed with the realities of African economies, while poor governance and corruption hindered their effective and equitable implementation.

How SAPs intensified economic decline

The policies mandated by SAPs contributed to economic stagnation and decline by:

•**Cutting social services**: Austerity measures forced deep cuts to public spending on vital social services like health, education, and social safety nets. For ordinary citizens,

especially the most vulnerable, this meant a loss of crucial support and a decline in living standards.

•**Encouraging export dependency:** SAPs pressured African nations to liberalize trade and focus on exporting raw materials, a strategy that mirrored the colonial-era extractive model. This made economies more vulnerable to volatile global commodity prices, leading to boom-and-bust cycles. Research shows that during the 1980s and 1990s, African countries were forced to export more physical goods just to maintain the same level of imports due to declining prices.

•**Weakening local industries:** The rapid removal of tariffs and subsidies subjected nascent domestic industries to unfair competition from cheaper, more established imports from industrialized countries. This led to de-industrialization and job losses, particularly in the urban formal sector.

•**Prioritizing debt repayment:** Loan conditionalities prioritized debt service over domestic investment and social welfare. This led to a significant outflow of wealth from Africa to foreign creditors during a period when the continent desperately needed investment for development.

•**Promoting privatization:** The forced privatization of state-owned enterprises often resulted in these assets being sold at bargain prices to foreign companies or politically connected elites. This led to a concentration of wealth, job cuts, and less affordable services for the general public.

The role of poor governance

The failures of SAPs were amplified by the pre-existing and persistent issues of poor governance in many African states:

•**Clientelism and patronage:** Instead of implementing policies transparently, many leaders used SAPs as an opportunity to enrich themselves and their inner circles. Corrupt elites would use privatization to seize valuable state assets, and aid money would be diverted to patronage networks rather than development projects.

•**Lack of public accountability:** The authoritarian tendencies and weak accountability structures in many post-colonial African states meant that leaders faced minimal public pressure to resist or modify SAP conditionalities. This allowed governments to impose harsh austerity measures without democratic oversight.

•**Ignoring local context:** Government and international financial institutions (IFIs) frequently ignored alternative, locally-proposed solutions to economic problems. The "one-size-fits-all" approach of SAPs, imposed without adequate input from African policymakers or civil society, failed to address the unique structural issues of each country.

•**Perpetuating extractive practices:** The focus on resource exports under SAPs aligned with and reinforced the extractive economic practices favored by corrupt elites. These officials gained personal benefits from controlling resource sectors, so they had little incentive to push for economic diversification or sustainable development.

The combined impact on poverty and inequality

The combination of SAPs and poor governance led to a devastating social and economic crisis: The austerity measures and privatization policies resulted in a transfer of wealth and resources from the state and the general public to a small, politically connected elite, both foreign and domestic. The poor, who had no safety net, suffered the most from cuts in social spending and rising unemployment. The gutting of social services, deregulation, and retrenchment programs left the most vulnerable populations—including women, children, and the elderly—in even more precarious situations. This social devastation led to recurrences of socioeconomic crises. While some SAPs aimed to increase agricultural incentives, the benefits were often uneven, and the overall decline in formal sector jobs exacerbated the rural-urban divide, or at times shifted the burden more heavily to specific urban groups. The erosion of human capital through reduced spending on education and healthcare, combined with a lack of productive investment, stifled long-term, sustainable economic development. The "lost decade" of the 1980s and 1990s set many African countries back decades in their developmental trajectory.

Democratic consolidation

While many African states adopted democratic constitutions after independence, the path to genuine democratic consolidation has been challenging. The top-down, authoritarian nature of colonial rule left a powerful and persistent legacy that has made it difficult to build inclusive and pluralistic political systems in Africa. This legacy, rooted in the coercive and extractive priorities of colonial administration, produced fragile and centralized states that were ill-equipped for democratic governance at independence. This trajectory, or path dependency, set a pattern of elite control and suppressed civil liberties that has been challenging to reverse.

Centralization and concentration of power

Colonial powers established centralized authorities that disregarded existing, often more decentralized, indigenous governance structures.

The "Big Man" model: Colonial administrations often elevated select local chiefs or "Big Men" and empowered them with unprecedented authority to enforce colonial directives. This undermined traditional checks and balances and created an institutional model where a single, powerful figure dominated local communities. Post-colonial leaders often inherited and adopted this model of centralized, personalized power. Instead of decentralizing control, many leaders, having witnessed the effectiveness of colonial coercion, used these structures to consolidate power for themselves. The colonial state was designed to extract resources and control populations, not to be accountable to them. This legacy meant that after independence, the new state apparatus operated with minimal public oversight, making it easier for leaders to bypass democratic norms.

Suppression of political opposition

To maintain control, colonial regimes systematically suppressed dissent and democratic impulses among African populations. Colonial authorities enforced repressive laws to

cancel media, ban public meetings, and detain political opponents. Aspiring nationalist leaders were often arrested or exiled, stifling the development of a vibrant, diverse political landscape. Many post-colonial governments continued to use these same colonial-era laws and tactics to clamp down on opposition. This created a culture of repression and fear, where challenging the ruling party was seen as a dangerous, and often fatal, endeavor. In countries where independence was won through armed struggle, the victorious liberation movement often became the single, dominant political party. With no history of peaceful political pluralism, these parties often treated the state as their personal domain and viewed opposition as treason.

Exploitation of ethnic and regional divisions

Colonial rule exacerbated existing ethnic and regional differences and created new ones through "divide and rule" policies to simplify administration and prevent a unified resistance. By appointing local rulers based on ethnic affiliation, colonial authorities institutionalized ethnic identity as a tool for political control. This made it difficult to build a national identity that transcended ethnic ties. The arbitrarily drawn colonial borders often grouped diverse and sometimes rival ethnic groups into a single state. This created an inherent conflict for national resources and power at independence. Post-colonial leaders often exploited these divisions, using ethnic loyalty as a base for patronage networks and political mobilization. This has fueled ethnic-based exclusion, conflict, and instability in many African states.

Institutional shortcomings at independence

Even the formal state institutions inherited at independence were ill-suited for inclusive governance. Colonial powers created "gatekeeper" states with limited reach beyond urban areas and an infrastructure geared toward resource extraction rather than internal connectivity. This meant that at independence, many new nations lacked the basic infrastructure to deliver public services and project state authority across their territory. Colonial administrations were minimalist, with a shortage of trained local administrators.

This left a significant capacity gap that post-colonial governments struggled to fill. The colonial state's institutions cemented socio-economic disparities based on race and ethnicity. This entrenched unequal access to education, resources, and power, making genuine social equity a distant goal.

Elite capture

A common trajectory in post-colonial Africa saw leaders, once celebrated as liberation heroes, transform into authoritarian rulers who used the state for personal enrichment and power consolidation. This transition was enabled by a system known as **neopatrimonialism**, where modern state institutions are subverted and used as a cover for personalized, patronage-based rule. This process had its roots in the inherited colonial structures and was driven by the political and economic realities of the immediate post-independence period.

The shift from liberation movements to ruling parties

The nature of the liberation struggle itself often laid the groundwork for future authoritarianism: Liberation movements often operated with a command-and-obedience structure, a necessity for surviving brutal colonial repression. This hierarchical, top-down culture persisted after independence, concentrating power in the hands of the former guerrilla leaders. Many ex-liberators came to believe their struggle entitled them to perpetual rule. They framed any political opposition as unpatriotic or a betrayal of the revolution, stifling pluralistic politics and justifying the suppression of dissent. Having relied on military force, many newly independent leaders maintained strong ties with the armed forces, using them to intimidate rivals and secure their political positions.

The establishment of neopatrimonial systems

Neopatrimonialism blends the formal institutions of a modern state (like a constitution and bureaucracy) with informal, personalized, and clientelist practices. This enabled leaders to maintain a veneer of democratic legitimacy while operating a system of corruption and control behind the scenes.

Leveraging the state for patronage

Leaders systematically used their control over the state apparatus to reward allies and punish rivals: Public sector jobs and promotions were given to loyal supporters, family members, and those from the leader's ethnic group rather than to the most qualified candidates. This created a deeply politicized and inefficient bureaucracy. Leaders diverted state revenues—often derived from natural resources—to fund patronage networks. They used state contracts, licenses, and direct handouts to secure political allegiance, with the understanding that clients were expected to deliver support. Allegations of corruption were weaponized to remove political opponents, both within the ruling party and in the wider political arena.

Personal enrichment and corruption

The pursuit of personal gain by the ruling elite became endemic, institutionalizing corruption and weakening the state's capacity to deliver public services.

Neopatrimonialism erodes the distinction between the leader's personal wealth and the state's resources. In Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire, for example, the state was treated as the ruler's personal property, a concept that became known as "kleptocracy". As state institutions like the judiciary and civil service became instruments for personal enrichment, their integrity and functionality were destroyed. This led to a lack of accountability and the collapse of essential public services.

Case study: Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe

Robert Mugabe's journey from a revered anti-colonial freedom fighter to an autocratic ruler exemplifies this process. After independence in 1980, Mugabe used violence and patronage to sideline rival liberation movements and establish a one-party dominant state. He built a patronage system within the ruling ZANU–PF party, using state appointments and resources to reward loyalists. Allegations of corruption were used to eliminate threats to his power. Later, his disastrous "Fast-Track Land Reform" program was not a simple act of redress but a strategic use of state power. It was designed to maintain political support by seizing land from white farmers and redistributing it to loyalists and war veterans, despite the devastating impact on the economy.

The long-term impact

The neopatrimonial practices of former liberation leaders have had severe, long-term consequences: Focusing on rent-seeking and private enrichment, rather than on fostering broad-based development, has undermined economic performance across the continent. The subversion of state institutions for personal and political gain has created lasting weaknesses that new generations of leaders and reformers struggle to overcome. The combination of authoritarian tendencies and corrupt patronage systems has prevented the consolidation of genuine, responsive, and accountable democratic governance.

Third Wave limitations

The "third wave" of democratization that swept across Africa in the 1990s and 2000s resulted in the widespread adoption of multiparty elections. While this change expanded political rights and opportunities, the democratic gains have often been incomplete, with flawed elections, limited meaningful competition, and rare alternance of power. This has led to democratic stagnation, backsliding, and the rise of "liberal autocracies" where the forms of democracy coexist with authoritarian practices.

Factors contributing to flawed elections and limited alternance

Several systemic issues and strategies have limited the effectiveness of multiparty elections in promoting substantive democracy.

Subversion of electoral integrity

Incumbent leaders and dominant ruling parties use various methods to undermine electoral integrity:

- Manipulation of electoral bodies:** Electoral commissions are often controlled by the ruling party, which uses appointments and influence to ensure a favorable outcome.
- Widespread fraud and intimidation:** Practices such as ballot box stuffing, voter intimidation, vote buying, and the alteration of results are common in many African countries.
- Use of state resources:** The ruling party often uses state resources, including security forces, media, and funds, to bolster its campaign and suppress opposition.
- Flawed electoral laws:** Governments often amend electoral rules to favor the incumbent, such as changing voter registration requirements or altering district boundaries.

Incumbent power and dominance

Decades of single-party or autocratic rule gave incumbents a significant advantage over often nascent and under-resourced opposition parties:

- Lack of opposition cohesion:** Opposition parties in many countries have remained fragmented along ethnic or regional lines and have struggled to present a united front against the ruling party.

•**Constitutional manipulation:** Many leaders, after introducing initial term limits in the 1990s, later engineered constitutional amendments to extend their time in office. This has occurred in countries like Togo, Cameroon, and Uganda.

•**Legacy of authoritarianism:** A persistent culture of authoritarianism, combined with weak institutional checks and balances, has made it easy for executive power to dominate legislatures and other state bodies.

Economic incentives and "developmental" excuses

The control of state resources, often facilitated by neopatrimonial systems, provides a strong incentive for elites to remain in power:

•**Patronage and clientelism:** Rulers use state resources, jobs, and contracts to reward supporters, making it difficult for citizens to vote against their economic interests tied to the ruling party.

•**Lack of economic dividends:** When citizens see little economic improvement, their faith in democratic processes erodes. This can make them more tolerant of military intervention or support for strongman rule.

•**Foreign influence:** External donors have historically promoted elections without adequately addressing the deeper structural and economic issues that allow incumbents to manipulate the system.

Impact and long-term consequences

The limitations of Africa's multiparty wave have created several long-term issues:

•**Legitimacy crisis:** Flawed elections erode citizen trust in both the electoral process and the government itself, undermining the legitimacy of democratic rule.

•**Stagnant democracy:** The limited turnover of power leads to a stagnation of democratic governance, with little incentive for incumbents to improve accountability or policy

outcomes. In some cases, countries have experienced democratic backsliding, with democratic quality reverting to levels seen decades ago.

•**Resurgence of instability:** When elections are seen as a farce, violence can erupt between rival factions, particularly in "hybrid" regimes that mix democratic and autocratic features. Disenchanted citizens have shown a growing tolerance for military intervention, leading to a resurgence of coups in recent years.

•**Military intervention:** The failure of electoral democracy to deliver on its promises has, since 2020, led to a surge of successful military coups across the continent, particularly in the Sahel region. In these cases, elections are seen as inadequate for addressing misgovernance and corruption.

Notable exceptions and recent developments

While the overall trend shows challenges, some countries have seen genuine progress:

•**Successful alternance:** Countries like Senegal and Zambia have experienced peaceful and meaningful transfers of power, demonstrating that alternance is possible even after long periods of dominant-party rule.

•**Malawi's judicial intervention:** A 2020 court-ordered rerun of a fraudulent election led to a landmark peaceful transfer of power, highlighting the importance of an independent judiciary.

•**Recent reversals:** In late 2024, Botswana experienced its first change of government since 1966, an event hailed as a sign of democratic resilience. However, this occurred against a backdrop of military takeovers in other parts of the continent.

Civil society's crucial but varied role

Against this backdrop, civil society has emerged as a crucial, though diverse, force. Civil society is generally understood to include organizations, associations, and movements that operate independently of the state and the market.

The varied nature of civil society's role

•**Countervailing force against authoritarianism:** In many instances, civil society organizations (CSOs) have provided a check on state power, exposing corruption, advocating for human rights, and monitoring elections. During the "Third Wave," they were at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement.

•**Gap-filler for governance failure:** Where the state has been unable or unwilling to provide essential services, CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) have stepped in to provide healthcare, education, and other forms of social welfare.

•**Agents of grassroots mobilization:** Social movements, from anti-colonial struggles to modern protests, have mobilized communities around shared grievances and have been instrumental in pushing for democratic reforms and holding governments accountable.

•**Co-opted or constrained actor:** The state has not always welcomed civil society. In many contexts, authoritarian governments have used legal and regulatory frameworks to harass, intimidate, or outright prohibit CSOs that challenge their power. Some CSOs, particularly those dependent on external funding, have been accused of being disconnected from grassroots concerns.

•**Embedded in complex state-society relations:** The relationship between civil society and the state is often complex and reflects historical and political realities. In some cases, CSOs may work collaboratively with the state to achieve development goals, while in others they may be in direct opposition.

The historical context of post-colonial Africa presents a paradoxical narrative of immense potential marred by persistent systemic challenges. The colonial legacy of state-building and economic dependency laid the foundation for decades of authoritarianism and instability. However, within this challenging environment, a vibrant and dynamic civil society has consistently pushed for progress, sometimes through direct confrontation and sometimes by filling the voids left by state failure. The story of post-colonial recovery is therefore not simply one of state successes or failures but also of the ongoing, multifaceted, and often contentious interplay between the state and a diverse landscape of civil society actors.

Post-colonial state structures and legacies significantly influence the strategies and effectiveness of civil society mobilization in Southern Africa. The legacies of authoritarian governance, economic dependence, and racialized social structures continue to shape the political environment in which civil society organizations (CSOs) operate. This context often forces CSOs to adopt specific, and sometimes restrictive, strategies to either co-opt, circumvent, or directly challenge the existing power structures.

Authoritarian and centralized governance

Colonial rule established authoritarian, centralized institutions to control populations and exploit resources, a model that many post-colonial states retained.

•**Centralized power:** Leaders of newly independent states often used these centralized institutions to consolidate power, reduce political pluralism, and suppress dissent. Civil societies that emerged in opposition to state authority were often harassed or banned, as seen in many African nations in the decades following independence.

•**Impact on CSO strategy:** This history of state control forces CSOs to adopt cautious strategies. Many operate as service-delivery organizations rather than political advocates to avoid state harassment. Those that engage in advocacy often must navigate a restrictive legal environment or operate with limited visibility to remain effective.

•**Example from Zimbabwe:** The Zimbabwean government under ZANU-PF has historically viewed civil society with suspicion, especially after 2000, when CSOs began challenging the party's dominance. This has forced CSOs to develop strategies focused on resilience and survival within a hostile political environment.

Neopatrimonialism and clientelism

Many Southern African states inherited and intensified systems of governance where personal relationships and patronage networks, rather than formal laws, dictate state function.

•**Elite capture:** The state is often captured by a small, politically connected elite who use their positions for personal enrichment. This patronage system co-opts or neutralizes opposition from civil society by controlling access to state resources.

•**Influence on mobilization:** CSOs must navigate this landscape of patronage, where official channels for advocacy may be ineffective. Strategies often focus on either:

•**Direct engagement with power-holders:** Building personal relationships with influential individuals to advance their agendas, a tactic that risks co-optation.

•**External pressure:** Seeking support from international donors and human rights bodies to increase pressure on governments, a strategy that can be framed by the state as foreign interference.

Economic legacies and dependency

Colonialism structured Southern African economies around resource extraction and dependency on global markets, a legacy that continues to affect the state's capacity and CSOs' focus.

- Lack of state resources:** The resulting weak economic performance and uneven development often mean states lack the resources to deliver basic services, creating a gap that CSOs attempt to fill.
- Donor dependency:** CSOs frequently rely on external funding from international donors to operate, which can impact their strategies and effectiveness. Donors may influence CSOs' agendas, sometimes prioritizing issues that align with their own interests over the needs of local communities.
- Focus on social issues:** This creates a dynamic where CSOs are more effective at addressing socioeconomic problems, like poverty and service delivery, than they are at mobilizing for structural political change.

Racialized and ethnic divisions

Colonial policies often cemented existing or created new racial and ethnic divisions, which continue to shape the political and social landscape.

- Impact on organization:** These divisions can influence how civil society is organized, sometimes leading to fragmentation along racial or ethnic lines.
- Challenges to unified action:** In countries like South Africa, the legacy of apartheid means that CSOs must navigate deep-seated inequalities and mistrust based on race. This can complicate efforts to form unified, cross-racial social movements and require strategies that address historical grievances and structural inequalities.

The nature of "civil society" itself

Professor Talent Rusere Phd Thesis - The Politics of Post-Colonial Recovery in Africa – University of Oxford

Doctor of Political Science & Public Administration – St Peter's Collage – 1457/1492 – University of Oxford

2024

The concept of civil society in Southern Africa is also shaped by colonial history, which often marginalized or delegitimized local forms of communal organization in favor of Western-style NGOs.

•**Diverse actors:** This has led to a dualistic civil society, with some organizations being highly formalized, professionalized, and dependent on foreign funding, while others are informal, grassroots, and community-based.

•**Varying strategies:** The strategies and effectiveness of these groups differ significantly. Formal CSOs may focus on lobbying and policy advocacy, while informal groups rely on direct action, community mobilization, and protests to make their voices heard. For example, in Mozambique, the formal Human Rights League (LDH) and the informal Mozambican Peasants' Union (UNAC) both mobilize for change but through different mechanisms.

The variations in state–civil society relations across different countries in Southern Africa during periods of political and economic transition

Across Southern Africa, variations in state-civil society relations during political and economic transitions are influenced by several factors, including the specific history of each country's liberation movement, the degree of economic dependency, the nature of political leadership, and the role of international actors. While many states inherited similar authoritarian legacies, the paths taken during and after transition diverged significantly, leading to distinct patterns of engagement, cooperation, or confrontation.

Political transition paths and legacies

The nature of each country's political transition plays a crucial role in shaping post-transition relations between the state and civil society.

•**Liberation movement legacy:** In countries where the ruling party emerged from a liberation movement (e.g., South Africa and Zimbabwe), the relationship is often complex and fraught. Civil society organizations (CSOs) that were part of the anti-apartheid or

liberation struggle were often expected to align with the new government. When CSOs moved to hold the new regime accountable, they were often viewed with suspicion as traitors or agents of foreign powers.

•**South Africa:** Post-1994, many civil society activists joined the African National Congress (ANC) government, leading to a blurring of lines between state and civil society. CSOs that remained independent have at times been sidelined, though a robust civic space persists.

•**Zimbabwe:** In contrast, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) government quickly became hostile toward CSOs perceived as challenging its authority, leading to aggressive monitoring and harassment, especially after 2000.

•**Pacted vs. contested transitions:** The degree of elite consensus during transition influences the space for civil society.

•**Pacted transitions:** In South Africa, a negotiated transition created a formal, constitutional space for civil society participation. However, it also demobilized some grassroots movements, shifting power to a formal, institutionalized civil society.

•**Contested transitions:** In countries with more contested transitions or delayed liberalization, like Zimbabwe, CSOs operated in a more confrontational, high-risk environment.

Economic factors and foreign aid

Economic structures and dependencies heavily influence state-civil society relations, particularly the reliance on foreign aid for development initiatives.

•**Donor dependency:** In many countries, CSOs rely heavily on funding from international donors. This can create tensions with the state, which may view donor-funded CSOs as pushing a foreign agenda, particularly in politically sensitive areas like human rights and governance.

•**Government-imposed restrictions:** This dynamic has prompted some governments to introduce restrictive laws limiting foreign funding and tightly controlling CSO registration and operations.

•**Economic policies:** The adoption of neo-liberal economic policies, often encouraged by international financial institutions, can lead to state withdrawal from social service provision. In such cases, CSOs often step in to fill the gap, particularly in health and education, leading to a more cooperative, yet often unequal, relationship with the state.

Nature and fragmentation of civil society

The internal dynamics and composition of civil society itself affect its relationship with the state.

•**Fragmentation:** Civil society in Southern Africa is not a monolithic entity. It is often fragmented along ideological, class, or ethnic lines, which can undermine its collective power and coherence. Governments can exploit these divisions to weaken a united front.

•**Professionalization vs. grassroots:** A distinction exists between professional, often donor-funded, NGOs and less-resourced, community-based organizations and social movements.

•**Professional NGOs:** These organizations tend to operate through formal, institutional channels. Their relationship with the state is often characterized by formal consultation and policy engagement, though effectiveness varies.

•**Grassroots movements:** These movements often rely on more informal, confrontational tactics like protests and direct action, especially when formal channels are unresponsive or restrictive. Their relationship with the state is more likely to be adversarial.

Political leadership and governance style

The personal and political style of a country's leadership can dramatically affect state-civil society engagement.

•**Authoritarian tendencies:** Some leaders, often shaped by authoritarian colonial or single-party rule, exhibit a low tolerance for dissent and seek to control political and social life. This leads to a confrontational relationship with civil society, often involving state surveillance, intimidation, and legal restrictions.

•**Co-optation:** In other cases, leaders may prefer to co-opt influential civil society figures by offering them positions within the government or state institutions. This tactic neutralizes potential opposition and blurs the distinction between state and civic interests.

•**Varying commitment to democratic principles:** Across the region, the commitment to democratic norms varies. In countries like Botswana and Namibia, which have historically demonstrated relatively more stable democratic practices, civil society enjoys a more predictable, though not always unproblematic, relationship with the state.

Role of regional and international factors

Regional and international dynamics, including regional bodies and transnational civil society networks, also contribute to variation.

•**Regional bodies:** Regional blocs like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have frameworks for engaging with non-state actors. However, the influence and effectiveness of such engagement depend on the political will of member states.

•**International pressure:** Transnational advocacy networks can bring international pressure to bear on national governments, influencing domestic policies and creating opportunities for local civil society. For example, international human rights campaigns have been crucial for some CSOs in restricted environments.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Recapitulation of the central argument and key findings regarding the varied nature of civil society mobilization ,global technology and its role in post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa.

This analysis has explored the complex relationship between varied civil society mobilization, global technology, and post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa, using South Africa and Zimbabwe as comparative case studies.

Recapitulation of the central argument

The central argument is that the outcomes of post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa are not uniform. They are profoundly shaped by the interaction between a country's historical

trajectory—particularly the legacy of its liberation movement—and the political choices made by its ruling elite. These factors create distinct political opportunity structures that, in turn, influence the nature and effectiveness of civil society mobilization and determine how technology's impact is mediated.

Key findings on civil society mobilization

1. Liberation legacies and political choices shape state-civil society relations:

•**South Africa:** The ANC's shift from a liberation movement to a ruling party created an ambivalent political opportunity structure. While the robust constitution, a legacy of the negotiated settlement, provides legal avenues for civil society, the ANC's entrenched power and subsequent institutional decay have led to a more confrontational relationship with CSOs.

•**Zimbabwe:** ZANU-PF's legacy is marked by militarism and intra-elite conflict, which created a political opportunity structure characterized by closure and repression. The party's deliberate choice to consolidate power has systematically narrowed the civic space, pushing civil society into a high-risk, informal mode of operation.

2. Divergent political opportunity structures lead to varied mobilization strategies:

•**South Africa:** Mobilization reflects the contested nature of the political space. Formal NGOs leverage litigation and media to challenge state failures, while grassroots movements confront state-led repression and deep-seated inequalities through direct action.

•**Zimbabwe:** Civil society operates under immense threat and relies on informal networks and digital platforms to sustain a counter-hegemonic narrative. Brute force and legal repression force activists to navigate a climate of fear, limiting formal avenues for political participation.

3. State-civil society relations impact post-colonial recovery differently:

•**South Africa:** Despite its resilience, civil society in South Africa struggles to force accountability from a state struggling with corruption and institutional decay. The result is a slow and uneven recovery, where persistent inequality remains a central challenge.

•**Zimbabwe:** ZANU-PF's suppression of civil society contributes to a cycle of perpetual economic and political crisis. By limiting civil society's ability to demand accountability, the regime effectively limits the potential for meaningful democratic and economic recovery.

Key findings on global technology and post-colonial recovery

1. Technology's impact is context-dependent and mediated by state strategies:

•**South Africa:** In a relatively open environment, technology has accelerated innovation, expanded financial inclusion, and driven economic growth. However, persistent structural inequalities and the digital divide ensure that these benefits are not universally shared.

•**Zimbabwe:** Under ZANU-PF's authoritarian rule, technology's role is complex. While mobile money has provided resilience amidst economic collapse, the state has also weaponized technology for repression and control, especially during and after the 2023 elections.

2. Geopolitical rivalries influence technological development:

•**African vulnerability:** Africa, including South Africa, is caught in the crossfire of US-China tech rivalry. This creates dependency risks and can compromise digital sovereignty as countries navigate competing geopolitical interests.

•**Zimbabwean context:** Zimbabwe is highly vulnerable to this rivalry due to its lack of economic leverage and the ZANU-PF's willingness to align with geopolitical actors that turn a blind eye to its human rights abuses.

3. The digital divide and institutional decay compound tech vulnerabilities:

•**South Africa:** While South Africa has a vibrant tech sector, high data costs and infrastructure gaps exacerbate the digital divide, limiting equitable access to technology's benefits.

•**Zimbabwe:** Zimbabwe's ongoing economic crisis, poor infrastructure, and repressive political climate severely constrain the potential of technology to drive inclusive and sustainable development.

Synthesis and conclusion

In conclusion, the case studies of South Africa and Zimbabwe demonstrate that technology is not a neutral force. Its impact is fundamentally shaped by the political opportunity structures created by post-colonial choices. While South Africa's constitutional democracy provides contested spaces for civil society and tech-driven innovation, Zimbabwe's authoritarian regime constrains civic action and weaponizes technology for control. These divergent trajectories underscore that sustainable post-colonial recovery in Africa hinges not just on technological adoption, but on the parallel development of democratic institutions, the protection of civic space, and the political will to address historical legacies of inequality and oppression.

Contribution to academic debates

This thesis, by comparing the contrasting trajectories of post-apartheid South Africa and Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF rule, refines and contributes to several key academic debates.

1. Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory

•**Refinement of context:** The study refines the conventional POS theory by demonstrating that "openness" is not a simple, binary variable. South Africa's experience shows that a liberal constitutional framework and judicial independence can provide significant avenues for civil society mobilization, even when those avenues are compromised by systemic corruption and institutional decay.

•**Differential access:** The analysis highlights how different segments of civil society, such as professional NGOs and grassroots movements, experience and exploit the political opportunity structure differently. This challenges a monolithic view of civil society mobilization and emphasizes the importance of analyzing the specific tactics and vulnerabilities of different groups.

•**Technological mediation:** The study introduces technology as a critical mediator of the POS. In South Africa, technology has expanded platforms for advocacy, while in Zimbabwe, it has become a tool for state repression, fundamentally altering how CSOs mobilize and communicate.

2. Post-colonial and Decolonization studies

•**Beyond simple state failure:** The thesis moves beyond simple narratives of "state failure" to analyze how the political choices and legacies of liberation movements shape post-colonial trajectories. It contrasts the ANC's initial commitment to constitutionalism with ZANU-PF's authoritarian consolidation, demonstrating that post-colonial outcomes are not predetermined.

•**Reframing anti-colonial discourse:** The work critically examines how ZANU-PF's "patriotic history" discourse, a legacy of the liberation struggle, has been weaponized to

delegitimize and repress civil society. This reframes anti-colonial rhetoric not just as a tool of liberation but also as a potential instrument of authoritarian control.

3. Democratization theory

•**Beyond elections:** The study reinforces the need to look beyond elections when assessing democratization, highlighting the importance of civil society resilience and activism in sustaining democratic norms. In South Africa, CSOs provide a crucial check on power, even amid institutional decay.

•**The resilience of civil society:** Zimbabwe's case demonstrates the resilience of civil society in the face of sustained authoritarianism. It shows how CSOs can adapt their strategies, leveraging technology and informal networks, to survive and challenge repressive regimes.

Contribution to policy debates

1. Civil society engagement

•**Contextualized engagement:** Policymakers and international donors should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging with civil society in Southern Africa. The study shows that in South Africa, engagement might focus on strengthening institutions and promoting inclusion, while in Zimbabwe, it must prioritize the protection of digital rights and the security of activists.

•**Supporting diverse civil society:** The findings underscore the importance of supporting a diverse range of CSOs, from well-resourced NGOs to informal grassroots movements. This helps ensure that the voices of the most marginalized are not silenced by a "corporate pact" with the state.

2. Digital technology and development

•**Mitigating digital risks:** The study provides a compelling case for implementing policies that mitigate the risks of digital dependency, data colonialism, and state surveillance. This includes promoting robust data protection laws, diversifying technology partners, and investing in local cybersecurity expertise.

•**Promoting inclusive digital access:** Policymakers must move beyond simply providing technology and focus on addressing the structural inequalities and high costs that perpetuate the digital divide. This requires implementing universal access policies, supporting digital literacy, and regulating the market to ensure affordable access.

3. Post-colonial governance

•**Strengthening institutions:** The contrasting experiences of South Africa and Zimbabwe highlight the importance of investing in robust, independent institutions. Policies supporting judicial independence, electoral commissions, and anti-corruption bodies are critical for ensuring state accountability and democratic governance.

•**Challenging authoritarianism:** The study informs policymakers on the sophisticated strategies used by authoritarian regimes to suppress civil society. It argues for a combination of diplomatic pressure, targeted sanctions against human rights abusers, and sustained support for democratic forces to challenge authoritarian consolidation.

Conclusion

By providing a comparative, nuanced, and theoretically grounded analysis, this thesis advances our understanding of the complex interplay between civil society, technology, and post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa. It refines existing academic theories and offers practical policy recommendations that recognize the varied political realities of the region, emphasizing the critical role of civil society in safeguarding democratic values and ensuring inclusive development.

CHAPTER 11

Limitations and Future Research: Detailed Acknowledgements on the study's limitations and suggest avenues for future research, such as extending the analysis to other Southern African countries or examining the influence of international actors on civil society.

Limitations of the study

1. Scope and generalizability:

•**Country specificity:** The study focused on South Africa and Zimbabwe, offering detailed comparative case studies. However, the findings may not be directly generalizable to all Southern African countries, which have diverse political trajectories, historical legacies, and socioeconomic contexts.

•**Case selection:** South Africa and Zimbabwe represent two distinct political outcomes (contested constitutionalism vs. authoritarian consolidation). Including cases with different liberation movement legacies, such as Mozambique's experience with FRELIMO, could offer a more nuanced understanding of regional variations.

2. Focus on national-level dynamics:

•**Ignoring sub-national variations:** The analysis focused predominantly on national-level political dynamics, potentially underemphasizing significant sub-national variations in political opportunity structures. For example, local governments in both countries may have different relations with civil society and vary in their level of corruption and repression.

•**Sectoral differences:** The study may not have adequately captured how technological impacts and political opportunities vary across different sectors of the economy and civil society (e.g., environmental vs. human rights CSOs).

3. Methodological constraints:

•**Challenges of qualitative data:** Relying on qualitative data, including interviews and document analysis, can be subject to researcher bias and the inherent limitations of small sample sizes.

•**Access to information:** In Zimbabwe, the repressive political climate significantly restricts access to independent information and makes it difficult to conduct open and transparent interviews, potentially limiting the depth of data collected on state surveillance and repression.

4. Evolving political landscapes:

•**Recent events:** The analysis concluded with the aftermath of the 2024 South African elections and the formation of a Government of National Unity. This political landscape is still evolving, and its long-term impact on state-civil society relations remains uncertain.

•**Rapid technological change:** The rapid pace of technological change means that findings regarding the digital landscape can quickly become outdated, highlighting the need for continuous research.

Avenues for future research

1. Extending the comparative analysis:

•**Inclusion of other Southern African countries:** Future research could extend the analysis to include other Southern African countries with different liberation legacies, such as Mozambique (FRELIMO), Angola (MPLA), or Namibia (SWAPO). This would allow for a more robust regional comparison of how different political choices shape post-colonial recovery.

•**Focus on regional dynamics:** Examining how regional organizations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) influence the political opportunity structures and technological development within member states could provide valuable insights.

2. Deepening the analysis of technology's impact:

•**Comparative digital repression:** A comparative study on the specific tactics and effectiveness of digital repression in Southern Africa would be valuable. This could involve examining internet shutdowns, social media control, and surveillance techniques in different countries.

•**Digital inclusion and inequality:** Further research is needed to explore the micro-level dynamics of digital inclusion and inequality, focusing on specific communities, demographics, and sectors. This could involve ethnographic studies on the adoption of technology in rural communities versus urban centers.

•**Innovation ecosystems:** Research into the development and challenges of local innovation ecosystems in the face of dominant global tech giants could provide insights into how African countries can build more sustainable and inclusive digital economies.

3. The role of international actors:

•**Donor influence:** An analysis of how different types of international actors, including Western donors and Chinese state-backed companies, influence the political opportunity structures and civil society's role in Southern African countries is warranted. This could shed light on how aid and investment are used to shape political outcomes.

•**Geopolitical competition:** Further research on how the intensifying US-China rivalry impacts African economies, particularly regarding technology, could provide a deeper understanding of the risks and opportunities facing the continent.

4. The impact of evolving political landscapes:

•**Tracking post-election shifts:** The formation of South Africa's GNU offers a unique opportunity for future research to track changes in state-civil society relations, focusing on how power shifts at the national level impact civil society's mobilization and influence.

•**Youth and technology:** Examining the role of youth-led movements and technology in challenging authoritarian regimes in Southern Africa could provide valuable insights into evolving forms of political participation and resistance.

Conclusion

By acknowledging the study's limitations and outlining these avenues for future research, this work provides a roadmap for deeper and more nuanced analyses. Future studies that broaden the geographical scope, deepen the thematic focus, and engage with evolving political and technological landscapes will be essential for advancing our understanding of post-colonial recovery in Southern Africa.

