



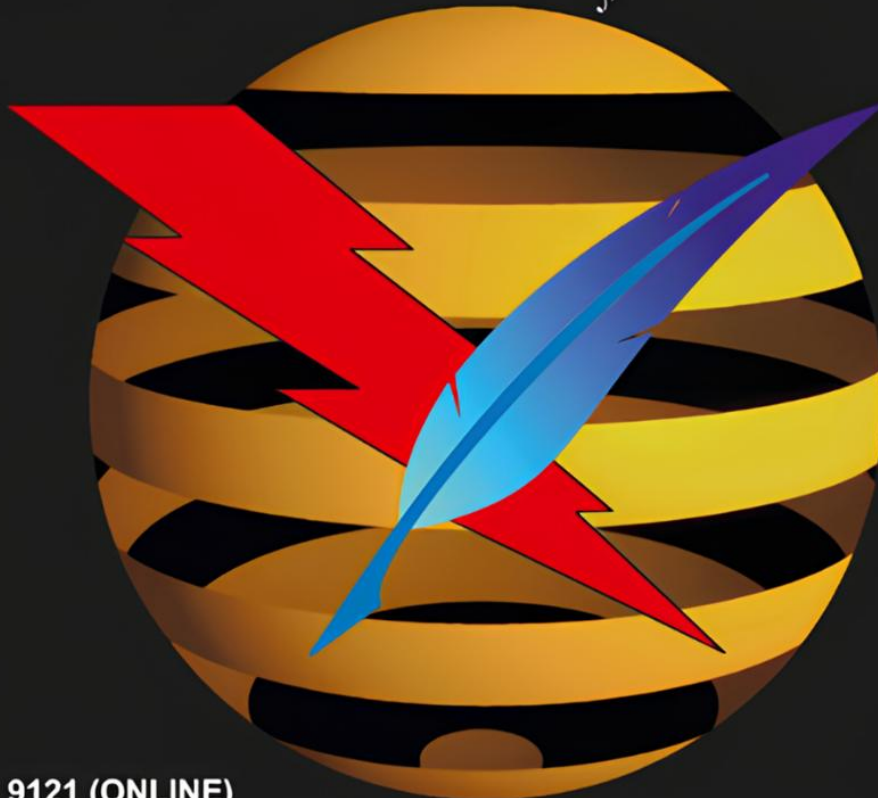
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PUBLIC DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND LOW COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY MEASURES IN NIGERIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A DIAGNOSIS OF PRE-EXISTING GOVERNANCE UNDERCURRENTS¹

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Abstract. *Following the discovery of the index case of COVID-19 infection in Nigeria in February 2020, the government instituted policy measures, such as travels restrictions, social distancing, mandatory wearing of face masks, outlawing of large assemblies, among others, to contain the disease. However, the majority of Nigerians distrusted the government amidst response to the pandemic, and thus there was low compliance with the preventive measures, though with catastrophic consequence. Indeed, there was an astronomical rise in the number of the coronavirus infections in nearly all the states in the country, inclusive of Abuja. This paper argues that the triggers of the citizens' distrust in the Nigerian government and low compliance with its COVID-19 containment policy initiatives that created this unwholesome scenario did not emanate from the pandemic's context itself, but from pre-existing substantial governance issues in the country. These includes the experiences of the government's management of previous nationwide emergencies; the problem of bad, irresponsible, and irresponsive political leadership; pervasive corruption and impunity within the government, to name a few. Accordingly, the study concludes by recommending potent strategies for reversing the subsisting trend of public distrust in the government and low adherence to its regulatory policies in future emergencies, including the need for the Nigerian Federal Government to revisit, investigate, and prosecute alleged cases of corruption perpetrated by the officials of relevant government agencies amid response to past national emergencies, among others. The study depends on data obtained from secondary sources and analysed through the qualitative content analysis and thematic methods.*

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic, Governance, Nigeria, Policy Compliance, Public Trust.*

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 disease that was sparked by the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020), was initially announced on 29 December 2019 by Chinese Health Authorities subsequent to a surge of pneumonia of unidentified source in Wuhan, Hubei Province (The 2019-nCoV Outbreak Joint Field Epidemiology Investigation Team & Li, 2020). Thereafter, the virus quickly spread to several other countries across the world with devastating effects on health, economy, and quality of life of societies (Hassan *et al.*, 2020). The first case of COVID-19 infection in Nigeria was spotted and confirmed in Lagos State on 27 February 2020 by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, a constituent of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020). The index case was an Italian citizen, who flew into Lagos International Airport from Milan (Hassan *et al.*, 2020). The Italian man served as the “importer” of COVID-19 virus that eventually spread to 35 of the 36 states of Nigeria, alongside Abuja, its Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Dan-Nwafor *et al.*, 2020).

In response to the sudden spread of the disease in the country, both the federal and state governments took diverse pragmatic actions to contain it. Measures taken included, but not limited to discontinuation of flights, inspected self-isolation for people returning from overseas, ceaseless contact tracing, banning of cross-state travels, country-wide closure of educational institutions of all categories, social distancing and proscription of religious assemblings and other dense meetings (Reuben, 2020). Most State Governments also imposed sit-at-home directives. Nonetheless, from 27 February to 31 May 2020, 10,162 people had tested positive for COVID-19 in Nigeria (Dan-Nwafor *et al.*, 2020), and out of the confirmed cases, 287 deaths were announced by the country’s health authorities during the period (NCDC, 2020). Nigeria, at this time, had come to appreciate the monumental humanitarian catastrophe being induced by the virus. Yet, many Nigerians remained indifferent to this reality as they mostly distrust their government, *ab initio*.

Citizens’ trust in government or the political class is an important element for proper and beneficial handling of crisis situation at all times, and any government that lacks this trust suffers significant disadvantages (Adeolu-Akande, 2022). Nigeria is one of such countries as existent studies reveal that her citizens do not have trust in the government, and hence do not typically adequately abide by its diverse rules (Adeolu-Akande, 2022). Thus, at the peak of the pandemic, many Nigerians flagrantly disobeyed government approved containment policies, and unconcernedly went about their daily business (Abayomi, 2024). Resultantly, “as of June



30, 2020, Nigeria recorded 25,694 COVID-19 cases, 590 deaths and 9,746 recoveries” (Hassan *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). It became recognized, therefore, that the problem of lack of citizens’ confidence in the government was a major challenge in the fight against the coronavirus infection in Nigeria.

This paper argues that Nigerians’ show of distrust in their government and low compliance with its formal COVID-19 containment regulations, was due to existing fundamental governance concerns that have undermined public trust in the government for many years in the country. That is, the problems did not necessarily arise from the COVID-19 context, rather they have been in existence in the country long before the outbreak of the virus. As its objective, therefore, the study examines the pre-existent governance problems in Nigeria that instigated public distrust in the government and low compliance with its established COVID-19 prevention policy measures during the pandemic. To achieve this objective, the study relies on data gathered from secondary sources, and analysed through the qualitative content analysis and thematic procedures.

2. Literature review

The vast body of literature on public health emergency management sufficiently documents the imperative of citizens’ trust in government and its health authorities at any time when public health is threatened by the presence of any epidemic diseases. Blair *et al.* (2022) write that the majority of extant researches illustrate that the link between trust in government and conformity to public health directives is uncomplicated and forthright. It is required that citizens trust government health establishments to examine public health menaces properly and prescribe policies to ameliorate them adequately. The citizenry is desired to trust popularly selected government representatives to authorize and institute those policies swiftly and devotedly, and believe in law enforcing institutions to force them dispassionately. They are also required to have confidence in the safeness and effectiveness of medications and vaccines that are mostly invented by independent organizations (Blair *et al.*, 2022).

A considerable number of studies demonstrate the significance of trust as an indicator of adherence to regulations during past public health crises, particularly the 2013-2016 Ebola disease outbreak in West Africa, and the 2018-2019 Ebola catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Blair *et al.*, 2022). Experiences from the SARS epidemic also revealed that citizens’ level of confidence in the government typified a pivotal factor for enhancing the efficacy and success of the mechanisms instituted by the government to prevent



the spreading of the disease (Beardmore & Gibbons, 2020). New researches have also typified the several ways that citizens' trust in government influenced their disposition to obey public health orders at the time of the COVID-19 epidemic (Lalot *et al.*, 2022). Indeed, the level of conformity to the coronavirus preventive measures was inevitably dependent on the degree of trust that citizens have in their governments and related agencies across societies. For instance, in the USA, a study reveals that counties with considerable trust in government reduced their movement remarkably more than counties with insignificant trust after the imposition of lockdowns. In the UK, another study shows that population that displayed higher trust in government turned out to be better disposed to conform to government-instituted social distancing guidelines (Blair *et al.*, 2022).

The implications of violation of the policies were, regardless, generally grievous. Negative response to the COVID-19 public health guidelines was connected with significant increase in the cases of the infection in nations across the world (Flaxman *et al.*, 2020). In Europe, a study discovers that trust in government was negatively connected with deaths from COVID-19 spanning twenty-five (25) countries (Oksanen *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, in some contexts, such as the USA, this connection was managed through participation (Goldstein & Wiedemann, 2022; Grossman *et al.*, 2020). These researches augment and broaden the extant literature focusing on the interconnection between trust and compliancy in the times of previous pandemics, inclusive of Ebola, HIV/AIDS, and H1N1 (Blair *et al.*, 2022). The findings of the studies characterized the reality about compliance to COVID-19 safety guidelines across countries.

3. Theoretical Foundation

The study relies on the Theory of Trust as a basic analytical framework, in its attempts to explain the connection between the pre-existing governance challenges in Nigeria and citizens' distrust in the government and the resultant low compliance with formal regulations instituted to stifle the COVID-19 Pandemic in the country. Hill & O'Hara (2006) state that trust remains a pivotal element of human interrelationship and a confirmed constituent of a healthy society. They go on to describe trust as an intricate psychological appraisal of an individual's reliability, which is done through both intentional and unintentional procedures. For Simpson & Vieth (2021), trust mirrors the psychological inclination of an actor (the truster) about a certain partner (the trustee) with whom the actor has some degree of interdependence relationship. Kramer and Carnevale (2001) also hold that trust encompasses an array of beliefs, expectations, and



attributes that a partner will constantly act in the benefit of one's own best interests over time, particularly in circumstances where a person has to depend on their partner to accomplish some paramount aims and results.

This is consistent with the principal conception of trust, which is considered to be predicated on reliance that arises from experiences, encounters, and performances (Wierzbicki, 2010). It is this experience, encounter, and performance that influences a trustor's attitude of trust or distrust towards a trustee. As Wierzbicki (2010) puts it, it is the experience (that a trustor has had with a trustee) that eventuate into trust and/or distrust in the interaction amongst the trustor and the trustee. Hill & O'Hara (2006) amplify this position as they argue that building an interrelationship with someone generally prompts getting a complete long-term understanding of how dependable the individual is, and a precise idea of individual's dependability in specific circumstances. Impliedly, in their relationship, the perception and expression of trust or distrust by the trustor towards the trustee depends on how the trustee manages whatever is committed to his or her care. Castelfranchi & Falcone (2011) explain, therefore, with emphasis on beliefs, appraisals, and expectations that trust is essentially a cognitive situation, a complicated behaviour done by an agent X to another agent Y concerning the act/deed A related to the outcome (goal) G.

Interpreted through the lens of the crux of the argument of the Theory of Trust, the distrust and low compliance among Nigerians (trustor[s]) with the regulations set by their government (trustee) to contain the COVID-19 infection stemmed from the widely-acknowledged untrustworthiness of the government (trustee) by the citizens (trustor[s]). This deriving from the experiences of breach of public trust that the Nigerian government (trustee) has consistently exhibited in various circumstances and in all aspects of its relationship with the citizens (trustor[s]) over the years preceding the outbreak of the coronavirus. Abayomi (2024) posits that the advantage of a trustful relation amongst a government and its populace is underscored by the fact the citizens are increasingly inclined to respect and follow government policy directives amid emergencies like the novel COVID-19 epidemic. Contrary to this, the untrustworthy behaviour of the Nigerian government was consequently responsible for the citizens' uncooperative attitude towards it, which was evident in the low-level of compliance with its established policy initiatives aimed at preventing the diffusion of coronavirus in the country during its outbreak. The implication, therefore, is that Nigerians' lack of trust in their government negatively affected their obligations and obedience to the government during the



coronavirus pandemic, which did not augur well for the success of the overall government's strategies to control the disease in the country.

4. Methodology

This qualitative study adopts a systematic review method in examining the subject matter under consideration. A systematic review allows for the collection, review and analysis of the results of all existent and accessible empirical and theoretical studies related to the topic of any given research (Kang, 2015). The method is especially suitable for this study as it does not gather primary data, but rather relies on existing published scholarly data. The technique guarantees that the review is conducted along coherently defined procedures for searching, selecting, and evaluating academic data sources. By analysing the results of diverse publications, the study offers comprehensive insights foregrounded in recognized academic literature.

The study basically depends on data derived from secondary sources, including journals articles, books, newspapers reports, government reports, and other relevant documents derivable from the websites. The study resorts to articles published in well-established academic journals, which are considered appropriate. This requirement guarantees the validity and academic credibility of all sources utilized. The review requirement restricts publications or journals used to those published within the last ten years to ensure significance and novelty. However, publications older than ten years were sparingly utilized only where they were deemed to have substantial value for the study.

The data search strategy for the study necessitated that the literature was obtained from recognized academic databases, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. The search procedure consists of the use of carefully selected key-words, such as “public trust in government” “public trust and compliance with government policies”, “public trust and compliance with government regulations in public health emergencies”, “public distrust in government in Nigeria”, and “low compliance with government policy measures in Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The search procedure was carefully documented to assure validity and transparency. Journals and articles and other academic materials identified underwent screening based on research title, abstract, and full-text review to streamline eligibility.

A combination of the qualitative content analysis and thematic techniques were employed to carry out the systematic review and unbiased analysis of the data collected. The qualitative



content analysis is a method of systematic, rule-guided qualitative data analysis, which attempts to uphold certain methodological strengths of quantitative content analysis and broaden them to an idea of qualitative procedure (Mayring, 2000), while thematic analysis is a technique for analysing qualitative data that involves searching across a data set for the purpose of identifying, analysing, and reporting recurrent patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These methods facilitated methodical reading, discovery, critical thinking, dissection of ideas, and extrication of pertinent information from the contents of the academic materials. Themes were derived through careful identification of meaningful and regular patterns that concentrate on the topical issue of the study, aided by familiarization with data, overriding themes, and refinement of such themes. The validation of the themes is grounded in the study's selection of articles recently published in peer reviewed journals, whose findings reflect contemporary developments about public trust in government and public health authorities and adherence to safety policy measures during public health crisis in general, and with particular reference to the coronavirus epidemic.

5. What are the Pre-Existing Undercurrents for Public Distrust and Low Compliance with Government's COVID-19 Containment Policy Measures in Nigeria?

The crux of the argument of this paper is that the show of distrust in the government and its health authorities by most Nigerians, and their refusal to adhere to the authorized COVID-19 safety measures, was necessarily not directly connected with the public health crisis occasioned by the novel coronavirus itself. Rather, this undesirable attitude by Nigerians was triggered mainly by real governance problems predating the pandemic. Specifically, the incident is traceable to the ills that have characterized the governance and politics systems of the country for the most part of its post-independence history, which have created a somewhat condition of "permanent citizens' distrust" in the government and disregard for its formal regulations. This study identifies and analyses the most prominent of these factors along appropriate themes, below.

5.1. Experiences with Government's Management of Previous Nationwide Emergencies

Nigerians' experiences with the government during the country's response to past nationwide threats inevitably influenced their disposition towards the government amidst the COVID-19 epidemic. The occurrence of, and response to previous national humanitarian crises had provided individuals in government in Nigeria, alongside the officials of relevant public institutions with the incentives for corrupt behaviours, in particular, stealing of public monies, and thus betraying public trust in the government and its agencies. Duri (2021) observes that



“humanitarian and economic crises create the perfect storm for corruption to thrive due to the huge influx of financial aid and the need for emergency procurement and disbursement of funds to mitigate the crisis – with minimal oversight”. The experience in Nigeria as pertaining to the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria can serve as a relatively most recent typical example.

It was only in 2015 that Nigerians knew that the bulk of the monies, almost \$2 billion, meant to be channelled to executing the war against insurgency in the troubled North-East region of the country was diverted into the personal purses of a handful of persons. This happened regardless of the authoritative guarantees that the government had given to Nigerians that it was resolute to decimating Boko Haram and that the terrorist syndicate was soon going to be part of history (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). In the run-up to the Nigerian 2015 presidential election that produced President Muhammadu Buhari as President, he had stated clearly during his campaigns that his administration would, among other things, bring the Boko Haram’s orchestrated insecurity in the North-Eastern region to a quick halt. According to Smith (2015), Buhari’s antecedent as experienced former military personnel was seen by Nigerians as an advantage in the campaign against Boko Haram’s terrorism. In December 2015, six months from the time that President Buhari assumed office, he announced that the Nigerian security forces had technically conquered Boko Haram, and stated with all assurances that the people displaced by the conflict could begin to return to their homes to enable them live normal life. Yet, on a daily basis, the Boko Haram terrorists continued to launch attacks, resulting in significant losses of human lives. Amidst this, the group’s leadership released videos showcasing their increasing capacity to carry on with the fight, which negated Nigerian government’s pronouncements and assurances. In actuality, community players have since that time continuously refuted the assertions by the government that the Boko Haram terrorists are not controlling any geographic areas within Nigeria, insisting that scores of local governments are being controlled by the group, hence provoking doubts regarding the situation in the affected region comparatively to the government’s explanation (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). In another scenario, the management of the Social Investment Programmes by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development has aroused doubts and protests over the credibility of the scheme. The ministry has also neglected persistent requests for it to publicly disclose the details of the disbursement of food and conditional cash transfers, and this concern is well-founded in consonance with the tenets of openness and accountability in the use of public resources (Christopher, 2020).



In as much as Nigerians' display of scepticism towards the threat of COVID-19 was a high risk on its own, they, therefore, have obvious reasons to entertain doubts concerning the way the Nigerian government responded to the pandemic, drawing from the experiences of the management of past national emergencies in the country (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). These past experiences, coupled with the recent experience of display of untrustworthiness by the government and its health institutions during the COVID-19 crisis would, no doubts, continue to negatively influence public trust and compliance with government measures in the times of any future nationwide threats. Recall, for example, that when COVID-19 newly broke-out in the city of Wuhan in China, the then Minister of Health in Nigeria claimed publicly that an isolation centre had already been established in a public health facility in Abuja. Nonetheless, when some members of the Senate embarked on an inspection tour of the facility, nothing of such was found existing, just as it was also revealed that no money had been provided for the execution of the project. And this contributed to creating doubts on the minds of the citizens concerning whether the healthcare complexes in Nigeria that have been in a dilapidated condition, had the capability to manage an outburst of the coronavirus in the country (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). Thus, false claims by Nigerian health authorities during the pandemic also contributed in triggering citizens' distrust and the low-level of adherence to government's specified safety mechanisms.

5.2. Syndrome of Bad, Irresponsible, and Irresponsive Political Leadership

Nigerian citizens have not had a taste of good, responsible, and responsive political leadership since the inception of the country. This was the very substance of the message conveyed by Chinua Achebe in his 1983 seminal work, "The Trouble with Nigeria", where he unambiguously stated in the opening sentence that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (Achebe, 1983). He explains further that Nigeria has no problems with respect to its nature, weather or environmental characteristics, but that the major cog in the wheels of progress and development of Nigeria is the absence of good and responsible leadership (Achebe, 1983). Achebe made this observation about Nigeria more than three decades ago, and the leadership problem persists in the country till today. Successive Nigerian political leaders under military and civilian regimes have hitherto proven to be self-serving leaders, who are not motivated by a genuine sense of service to the nation and its population. Rather, they are driven by the desire to use public offices to pursue the actualization of their personal material desires. Embellishing this verity, Kasali (2020) states that the motive of political leaders to contest for a position in government varies and influences the type of policy



actions and programmes approved and executed when they assume office. Specifically, the excessive avenues for rent-seeking in government office in Nigeria have consistently enticed politicians who primarily aim to extract rents (Kasali, 2020).

Bereft of a public service focus, therefore, the crop of political leaders in Nigeria do not pay attention to the yearnings of the common people, but are more oriented towards rent-seeking, and do not also possess the requisite skills and competence for quality leadership. For Anekwe (2020), this explains why previous and current leaders in Nigeria have woefully failed to offer good and proficient leadership that would help to ameliorate a myriad of problems facing the country. Since the return to civil-democratic rule in 1999, Nigerians are yet to begin to enjoy the expected dividends of democracy, just as developments in all ramifications have continuously eluded the country due to bad leadership (Nwosu & Asiegbu, 2023). With decades in this quagmire of bad, irresponsible, and unresponsive leadership, without any signs of the possibility of positive changes in the near future, ordinary Nigerians are inevitably wearied and disappointed in their political leaders. They commonly believe that the political class would never act or genuinely pursue any policy agenda in their collective interest, hence they regularly express their frustration and disappointment in the government through manifest distrust and disregard for its rules.

5.3. Endemic Political Corruption and Impunity

There is, in Nigeria, the phenomenon of endemic corruption and impunity among the country's political leaders at all levels, which has robbed Nigerians the rightful privileges of citizenship. This is the main reason that Nigeria constantly ranks high in the Corruption Perception Index, but ranks so poorly in the Human Development Index (HDI), indicating that the rife corruption leads to less commitment and contribution to the good of the country's citizens (ActionAid Nigeria, 2015). Undisputedly, massive government corruption has been on the increase up to the point of impunity in last two decades, making the country to be ranked as the most corrupt globally (ActionAid Nigeria, 2015). Revealing the disturbing incidence of government corruption in Nigeria, a recent survey shows that as much as 72% of Nigerians strongly believe that the country's political leaders have remained highly corrupt and selfish (Popoola, 2021). Nigerian leaders are mostly opportunistic individuals who see their positions in government as a means of accumulating riches corruptly regardless of the detrimental consequences for the larger society, and they do everything possible to retain political power, so as to continue to enjoy the undue privileges.



Public financial resources are commonly misappropriated in Nigeria by individuals and institutions controlling government apparatus and are saddled with the responsibility for managing the resources for welfare and development purposes, including the state governors, ministers, legislators, and ministries, departments and agencies at all levels of government. Money laundering has remained a primary way by which stolen public monies from Nigeria are secretly hauled out to other countries (ActionAid Nigeria, 2015). Anti-corruption campaigns have produced less satisfactory result despite that successful government have made them very popular and admirable. This arises from the constant intersection of institutional deficiency and political underpinnings, which permit corrupt players to thrive. The absence of muscular governance structures, and the pervasive effect of political interconnection impedes on the anti-corruption activity and the effort at increasing transparency in the conduct of government business. As a result, the country's national anti-corruption institutions, namely the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), are reduced to mere formalistic and political tool at the disposal of the ruling party for silencing political opponents indicted for corruption (Bakare, 2024). Public officials are also shielded from being investigated for corruption charges on political or inter-personal relationship grounds, and this makes the situation worst (ActionAid Nigeria, 2015). The intended instrumental value of the anti-graft agencies is thus rendered futile, bringing the rationale for their continued existence to question.

Even under the immediate past President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration (2015-2023), for example, with its lauded mantra of “zero-tolerance for corruption” the EFCC shied away from unearthing frauds and prosecuting prominent cases of expropriation of public funds in which past and present government officials were implicated. Noteworthy among these, for example, was the case of the N37.1 billion allegedly laundered by officials of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development under the headship of erstwhile Minister, Mrs Sadiya Umar-Farouk during the Buhari administration (Agbo, 2024; Sanusi et al., 2023). It was discovered that from 2018 to 2023, the sum of N37.1 billion, to be precise, N37,170,855,753.44 (\$23,351,512) was transmitted from the treasury of the Nigerian Federal Government to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster management and Social Development for the children school feeding programme, but was allegedly laundered by the officials of the said ministry. Investigation by the EFCC revealed that this huge sum was sent into 38 distinct accounts housed in five various commercial banks in Nigeria. These bank accounts are said to belong to or linked with a contractor, James Okwete. Okwete allegedly



transmitted N6,746,034,000.00 (\$4,238,000) to Bureau De Change Operators, withdrew cash of N540,000,000.00 (\$339,239), used N288,348,600.00 (\$181,147) to buy cars, and expended N2,192,115,000.00 (\$1,379,017) in acquiring valuable properties in Abuja and Enugu State (Sanusi et al., 2023; Obarayese, 2024).

As usual, the Minister, Sadiya Umar-Farouk (an appointee of President Buhari), under whose watch this enormous fraud took place hastily denied having any connections with the arrested contractor (Suleiman, 2023). She was, however, only invited and interrogated for 12 hours by the EFCC, and then released on bail (Obarayese, 2024). Today, she walks freely. Failure by the Nigerian government led by former President Buhari to prosecute the culprits in this case, as well as those allegedly involved in other famous corruption offences during his tenure indicates the administration's inability and deficit of political will and sincerity in fighting corruption (Bakare, 2024). This highlights the basis of the argument of a lot of Nigerians, including human rights activists, eminent public affairs analysts, civil society groups, professional bodies, and political opponents that the Buhari-led administration's anti-graft war was extremely selective. They observed that President Buhari's close allies, who were ostensibly implicated in several corruption offences were spared, while his political opponents were targeted by the EFCC (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). It remains an irony that President Buhari, who was voted into office to fight corruption ended up using the anti-corruption apparatuses to witch-hunt political opponents. Clearly, political considerations and interpersonal relationships not only promote corruption and impunity among Nigerian political leaders, but also seriously weakens the often-celebrated war against corruption in the country. With unbridled colossal corruption thriving alongside impunity, Nigerians consider the successive governments in the country as merely paying lip service to the fight against governmental corruption. As such, the state of citizens' distrust in government, as well as low regard for its regulations remains deplorable in Nigeria.

5.4. Long-time Experiences of failed Governments' Promises

Nigerians have had accumulated experiences of unfulfilled promises made to them by the consecutive governments in the country. Political parties in Nigeria and their candidates are known by the electorate for making lofty promises during electioneering campaigns to garner the people's support and votes, but always renege on their promises while in office, after winning elections on the support of the masses. This situation has persisted in Nigeria over the decades, and has immensely furthered the steady decline of public trust in the government. As Onapajo & Adebisi (2020) affirm, Nigerians widely mistrust their government due to many years of disappointments, unfulfilled campaign vows, unaccomplished government agendas,



mammoth corruption and inability to bring to fruition the benefits of democracy. In a 2016 Afrobarometer survey, which aimed to gauge the degree of trust that the citizens have for their governments across 36 countries in Africa, Nigeria earned the lowest score with just an insignificant percentage of her population demonstrating favourable dispositions to the government. The World Economic Forum (WEF) also established in 2018, that Nigeria took the 130th position out of 137 countries examined for citizens' distrust of government officials (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). Succeeding administrations in Nigeria are culpable in perpetuating the unwholesome act of deliberately failing to deliver on their campaign promises to the Nigerian electorate, as well as the pervading monumental corruption that spurs public distrust and discontentment about the government.

Before being sworn in as Nigeria's President following his victory against former President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 presidential election, retired General Muhammadu Buhari was one person in the Nigerian political class whose personal integrity and credibility was widely attested to, both within and outside the country. As such, Nigerians believed with high hopes that the era of "promise and fail" by the politicians and political parties would come to an end, if Buhari, who bore the presidential flag of the APC in the election, was elected to replace the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan in office as the President of Nigeria. Smith (2015) reiterates that many Nigerians that were wearied of the numerous corruption scandals during the Jonathan-led administration alluded that the strictness of Buhari was what Nigeria needed. Buhari's personal pedigree created this euphoria, and he himself severally assured Nigerians that his administration would salvage the country from the numerous problems facing it, especially corruption and bad governance. As Lawal (2022) recalls, Buhari regularly echoed the phrase "if we do not kill corruption, corruption will kill Nigeria", which later served as the certified motto of his election campaign that anchored on the three basic pillars, namely economy, security, and corruption. Eager to have their country rescued from the scourge of corruption and impunity committed during the 16 years (1999-2015) that the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) held political power and governed at the federal level, and controlled majority of the states in Nigeria, Nigerians voted for Buhari en mass, culminating into his victory in the 2015 election.

Onapajo & Adebisi (2020) corroborate that in the centre of President Buhari's campaign promises to Nigerians was the assurance that his government would "kill corruption before it kills Nigeria", which prompted Nigerians to rejoice and vote for him in 2015. The Nigerian masses expressed trust in Buhari owing to his conservative manner of living. Also, during his



era as a Head of State, Nigerians saw him introduce severe measures to reduce corruption to its barest minimum in the 1980s. But in spite of that, Buhari's years in office as the President of Nigeria under the present democratic arrangement saw a reversal in this case as corruption flourished normally (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). Buhari served two terms (2015-2023) in office as the President of Nigeria, but was unable to fulfil even his most important promise to Nigerians, that is, nipping corruption in the bud. With this, since the end of his administration, the hope of Nigerians for the possibility of actualizing of the dream of a corruption-free Nigeria have been dashed completely. The common question that has continued to resonate on the minds of Nigerians is: Since Buhari could not rid Nigeria of corruption, who else can?

Beyond "killing corruption", as part of his economic revitalization agenda, President Buhari also promised to rebuild the four state-owned refineries in Nigeria located in Port-Harcourt, Warri, and Kaduna to optimal capacity to boost foreign reserves and reduce the country's reliance on imported refined petroleum products. Up till the time of completion of this study, however, the four refineries remained in their dysfunctional state and Nigeria has not ceased to import virtually all its petroleum products from abroad (Mojeed, 2022; Sunday *et al.*, 2021). Admitting this, the country's past Minister of Petroleum Resources, Ibe Kachikwu, who was appointed in 2015 said in an interview that he was not ashamed to accept that the Buhari-led government failed to provide refineries to Nigerians as he did promise in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election (Sahara Reporters, 2019). The result is that the government has continued to import petrol at exorbitant cost for daily use of the citizens. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows that Nigeria is spending almost N3 trillion every year on importation of refined petrol (Sunday *et al.*, 2021). The effect of this high cost of imported petroleum products are inevitably borne by ordinary Nigerians who have to buy these products derived from the crude oil found and produced in their country at lamentable high prices, which has kept the cost of living so high and created a general condition of untold hardship among the citizens.

To make the situation worse, Nigerians are experiencing what many have described as the highest level of hardship in the history of the country under the current administration of Buhari's successor, the incumbent President Bola Tinubu of APC. This is despite Tinubu's promise during his presidential election campaign that his "Renewed Hope Agenda", which was erected on an eight-point plan that constituted his social contract with Nigerians – food security, poverty alleviation, economic growth, job creation, access to capital, inclusion, among others, would offer Nigerians an escape route from economic hardship (Igwe, 2024; Ewang,



2024; Akpan, 2024). As always, Tinubu has failed Nigerians as his economic policies have, within his first year in office, exacerbated the already socio-economic vulnerability of ordinary citizens who have been weeping and wailing due to widespread poverty, hunger, and frustration presently ravaging millions of households under his administration (Igwe, 2024; Ewang, 2024). The leader of the Labour Party's (LP) caucus in the House of Representatives at the Nigerian National Assembly, Afam Ogene, describes President Tinubu's first year in Office as a "reign of economic hardship and failed promises" (Akpan, 2024, para. 1). On Monday, 29 May 2023, the day Bola Tinubu was sworn in as Nigeria's President, the anticipated "Renewer of Hope" hurriedly made a policy statement during his inaugural speech that directly contradicted the "renewed hope" promise he made to Nigerians, which was the main mantra of his campaign. In the speech, President Tinubu declared to Nigerians while standing on the podium that his government was removing the subsidy on fuel consumption, and he made the announcement without having put any measures in place to cushion the likely effects of this hasty policy on the populace (Ewang, 2024).

Together with other economic decisions, the removal of fuel subsidy by Tinubu's government has aggravated the cost-of-living problem in Nigeria in nearly 30 years, plunging millions of the citizens into greater levels of poverty (Ewang, 2024). The Labour Party's law-makers in the House of Representatives affirm that the increased insecurity and economic hardship in Nigeria apparently contradict the renewed hope agenda that Tinubu pledged to Nigerians during his campaign (Akpan, 2024). It was this general economic hardship and frustration that prompted the recent 10 days nationwide #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protest that lasted from August 1 to August 11, 2024, in which Nigerians trooped to the streets across the major cities in the country to draw the attention of the Tinubu-led government to their sufferings, while demanding for an end to bad governance in the country (Abubakar & Obiejesi, 2024). The protest, however, never achieved the desired results as Tinubu's government remains adamant on not reversing its economic policies that have inflicted severe hardship on the populace. The above examples explain why succeeding governments in Nigeria have been notorious for persistently failing on their campaign promises, a state of affairs that continues to reinforce public distrust and non-compliance with government regulatory policies.

5.5. Masses' Alienation from the Nation's Natural Resource Wealth and Acute Poverty

Nigeria is endowed with abundance of natural resources, but the benefits of the country's huge natural resource revenues are enjoyed only by the members of the political class, while the ordinary citizens remain completely left out, causing them to groan in acute poverty. Besides



the numerous solid mineral resources available in commercial quantities in different parts of the country, Nigeria's economy depends basically on oil and gas, which account for more than 95 per cent of its incomes from foreign trade, 25 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and around 90 per cent of the government's revenue (Olayungbo, 2019). Nigeria is the largest oil producing country in Africa and the sixth biggest exporter globally (Elwerfelli & Benhin, 2018), with production capacity of 2.2 million barrels per day in 2011 (Natural Resource Governance Institute [NRGI], 2016). The country is known to possess the tenth biggest verified oil reservoirs in the world, and the second in Africa after Libya, with confirmed oil pool as of 2015 put at 37.14 billion barrels (Elwerfelli & Benhin, 2018). Nigeria is also widely recognized as the largest economy in Africa, possessing a GDP put at \$477.38 billion in 2023 (Michael, 2023). Despite this, however, the United Nations (UN) HDI of 2022 ranked Nigeria among the world's poorest countries, since the country was positioned at 161 out of 193 countries assessed (Bailey, 2022). Unsurprisingly, Nigeria is considered as a country of paradox for being richly endowed with abundance of natural resources, but the vast majority of its population of over two hundred million people (precisely 233,678, 642 as of September 15, 2024, stemming from Worldometer's explanation of the newest UN data) (Worldometer, 2024), are living in deep poverty and extreme hardship.

The Nigerian Federal Government itself also confirms this fact via the NBS, which unveiled the outcome of its 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Survey, revealing that 63 per cent of Nigerians (133 million people) are poor in a multidimensional sense (NBS, 2022). This is a major outcome of the long period of the elite's denial of the masses of Nigeria their rightful privilege to have a fair share of the nation's oil and gas fortunes, through the availability of gainful employments, provision of basic infrastructures for socio-economic development, as well as essential public services obtainable at subsidized rates. This situation epitomizes the "resource curse" phenomenon described by scholars as a circumstance where publicly owned assets that ought to engender wealth, stability and well-being triggers corruption and creates mass poverty; in Nigeria, oil is the cause of this (Mohammed, 2021). This deprivation brought about by the well-entrenched bad governance culture that subsists in Nigeria has a human cost, which is discernible in the inadequacy of necessary infrastructure, deficient healthcare and educational systems, towering rates of joblessness, and the large numbers of out-of-school children, to mention a few. The 2021 #EndSARS protests held by the youth in Nigeria was not only targeted at ending police brutality and human rights abuses, but also indicated increased dissatisfaction among the youth about the government (Kasali, 2020). The Nigerian youth that



are often referred to as “future leaders” are disgruntled at the way those in government flaunt their mostly ill-gotten wealth, while the majority of them are economically marginalized; even, most of the youth that attended tertiary institutions still roam about the streets in search of job after many years of graduation.

The elite in Nigeria capture the State and control political power, which provides them unrestricted access to managing the oil revenues of the country, and they do not allow the resources to circulate in such a way that the common citizens would equally benefit from them. Ordinary Nigerians that constitute the majority of the country’s population wallow in abject poverty, while they watch a few individuals live extremely opulent and extravagant life-styles, together with their children, family members, friends, and political associates. The elite maintains these wasteful life-styles with collectively owned resources, mainly from the nation’s oil and gas revenues, which they use their positions in government to amass at the expense of the rest of the citizens. This entrenched culture of deprivation has, for so long, fostered a strong feeling of animosity within the citizenry, especially the youth, who, according to Mohammed (2021), largely see the Nigerian government as having failed them. Agreeably, Kasali (2020) substantiates that the poor socio-economic attainments of Nigeria, corruption, deep poverty, want of trust in the political system, among other things, have resulted in disillusionment among the citizens, particularly the youth that form 15 per cent of the country’s 84 million certified voters. This is consequential considering that the more than 200 million population of Nigeria is made up of over 60 per cent of people below 25 years of age (Kasali, 2020). With this, it is expected that an increased level of public distrust and disregard for government policies would inevitable be the main defining factors in the relationship between the Nigerian government and the citizens, both now and in the future, except some drastic and deliberate actions are taken to counteract the trend.

6. What Measures could be taken to solve the Problem?

The declined level of citizens’ trust in the government robs Nigeria of the people’s valuable contributions to addressing the country’ critical present and future challenges, inclusive of public health emergencies, such as the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, which would necessarily require the active cooperation of the public with the government to contain. This warrants that appropriate measures be taken by some relevant critical stakeholders in the Nigeria project to attain an increased level of public trust in the government to guarantee the people’s support and cooperation with the government whenever required. Accordingly, this



paper presents a set of recommendations, but which are specifically tied to the underlying issues identified in the study as being responsible for the manifest lack of trust in the Nigerian government and low-level of compliance with its COVID-19 containment policy measures amid the pandemic, below.

The Nigerian Federal Governments needs to prove to the people, beyond reasonable doubts, that it was driven by a sincere sense of commitment and genuine purpose to fight the previous emergencies that had allegedly provided opportunities for corruption by the agencies of government that managed the response activities. Precisely, the government should investigate all alleged cases of corruption in all past nationwide humanitarian crises, including the just gone COVID-19 pandemic, where huge sums were purportedly mismanaged by relevant government health authorities to prosecute and punish the offenders according to the law. This will serve as deterrence to corruption in emergency management in the country, as well as help to exonerate the government itself from the accusations of being involved in the corrupt practices allegedly committed by its agencies at those times. By so doing, the government will increase its chances of regaining a high-level of the citizens' trust in it, and an improved level of compliance with its recommended policies in any future national emergencies.

The Nigerian electorate, henceforth, must be extremely careful in selecting political leaders across all levels of government – federal, state, and local governments. They must focus attention on electing credible people, who will offer quality leadership and be committed to advancing public interest, rather than seeking their personal interests. This requires that the electorate should be intentional about using their voting power to vote out of office any leaders and/or parties that have failed to provide good and quality leadership that the masses have yearned for, over the years. This conscious attempt should begin with the forthcoming 2027 general elections. To achieve this, the electorate must jettison all ethnic, religious, and political sentiments that have usually divided and propelled them to vote the wrong people into leadership positions in the past elections.

Anti-corruption and transparency/accountability-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria need to brace up and begin to keep the government and the principal anti-graft agencies – EFCC and ICPC on their toes, by publicly mounting pressures on them to investigate, prosecute, and subject corrupt government officials, irrespective of who they are, to appropriate punishments as stipulated in the law. Since successive governments in Nigeria are fanatical about shielding certain individuals of interest to them from being investigated and prosecuted



for corruption charges, constant outcries by CSOs will help to force the government and the anti-corruption institutions to act within the law. CSOs' actions will also help to keep Nigerians abreast with developments as regards corruption scandals in the country, making it difficult to have them swept under the carpet, thereby reducing the syndrome of impunity to the barest minimum. To aid this, the CSOs should advocate for the National Assembly to amend section 308 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that protects incumbent political office-holders from being prosecuted to make it possible for any officials alleged of corruption to be tried at any time, rather than waiting until their tenure of office elapses. If done, Nigerians will regard this as the greatest achievement the CSOs would record in the fight against corruption in the country. Likewise, the performance of the demand of the CSOs by the Legislature and the Executive arm of government by expunging the much talked-about section 308 from the constitution will invariably boost public confidence in the government and adherence to its regulatory measures, since Nigerians will see the action as an indication of government's determination to nip political corruption in the bud in the country.

Nigerian politicians/parties and the governments they form must urgently take conscious steps to reverse on their "promise and failed" campaign strategy, which has severed their relationship with the electorate. President Tinubu, who is current in power should take the lead in this regard by fulfilling all the promises he made to Nigerians during his campaign, based on his "Renewed Hope Agenda", especially those touching on the economy. Having promised Nigerians better economic conditions under his administration, President Tinubu should reverse his harsh economic policies, particularly the policy on fuel subsidy removal, which has inflicted an unusual level of hardship and suffering on millions of the citizenry. This will signify that governments in Nigeria are beginning to be responsive to the yearnings of the people, especially when considered from the standpoint of Nigerians' demand during the recent 10-day nationwide #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protest.

Nigerian political elite should deliberately cause the nation's oil and gas wealth to circulate, such that everyone benefits from it through the creation of job opportunities, meaningful poverty alleviation programmes, provision of basic infrastructures and essential public services at subsidized rates. This will reduce the poverty rates in the country drastically, improve living standards among the citizens, and unfailingly create in them a sense of belonging to the Nigerian state, which is a necessary ingredient for catalysing a high level of public trust in the government and compliance with its prescribed policies for any purposes.



7. Conclusion

Nigeria recorded its first case of the COVID-19 infection in February 2020. With this, the Nigerian government swiftly introduced various policy strategies to prevent the spread of the disease in the country. Measures introduced included restriction on international travels from and to the country, restriction on inter-state travels, social distancing, banning of mass gatherings, closure of schools, to mention a few. The establishment of these containment measures indicated that Nigeria had realized that it had come face-to-face with the reality of COVID-19, and that the citizens' compliance with them was of high imperative to enable the country stop the disease from spreading further in the country. However, the majority of Nigerians received the news of the outbreak and existence of the coronavirus in the country with apparent scepticisms, leading to the spread of misinformation and unsubstantiated beliefs among the population regarding the virus. Among the notions held by most Nigerians was that those in government only wanted to use COVID-19 as a ploy to steal public money, and thus doubted that the disease existed in the country. Therefore, most Nigerian citizens distrusted the government as regards COVID-19, and consequently, there was a low-level of compliance with the formal protocols for its prevention, which had a negative impact on the country's effort to contain the virus.

The refusal by the majority of Nigerians to adhere to the government's prescribed preventive regulations for the coronavirus resulted in increased numbers of cases of the infection in almost all the states in the country, including Abuja, the capital territory. As the study has argued and proven, the demonstration of distrust in the Nigerian government and low compliance with its set COVID-19 containment policies by the citizens did not arise from the pandemic milieu, but was instead the consequence of many long-existing key governance challenges in the country. As identified and analysed in the study, notable among these are: experiences with the government's management of past national emergencies; the problem of bad, irresponsible, and irresponsible political leadership; widespread governmental corruption and impunity, many years of experiences of governments' failure to fulfil promises made to the citizens during electioneering campaigns, and alienation of the population from the nation's natural resource fortunes, which has created a general condition of acute poverty in the country. With these exigent governance situations unaddressed for a long period of time, the Nigerian government will likely continue to experience difficulties in securing appreciable levels of the citizens' trust and compliance with its policies at any given time and in any situations. Nevertheless, if the



recommendations of this study are fully embraced and carefully implemented, it is certain that there will be a positive reverse in the trend.

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POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CRIMINAL RECORD¹

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Abstract. *The paper brings an original contribution to the debate on the accountability of the political class and the reform of the public administration, proposing a practical and concrete mechanism for the evaluation of the activity. The objective is to show that the introduction of a political and administrative record as an innovative tool for assessing the performance and integrity of politicians, dignitaries and public officials will lead to increased transparency and accountability in public administration, providing citizens with a clear and objective means to make informed decisions in the electoral process. The main research methods were the comparative analysis (a parallel between the criminal record model and the proposed concept of political and administrative record), the inductive method (starting from concrete examples of administrative and political dysfunctions, general conclusions are drawn on the need for an accountability tool) and the exploratory method (the proposal of the political and administrative record is an innovative initiative, and the author explores the feasibility of this mechanism, identifying potential advantages, risks and solutions for implementation). As regards the implications of the work, the implementation of a political and administrative record would have major implications for society, being beneficial both for citizens because it would represent an information tool that allows them to exercise their right to vote consciously, and for public institutions as it would improve the process of selection and promotion of civil servants, increasing professionalism and ethics in the public sector. The essential value of the paper is to highlight the transformative role that such an instrument would have, especially since the proposal is based on pre-existing models (criminal record) and explores the feasibility of implementing a similar system for the political and administrative area, based on objective criteria for evaluating the activity of politicians and dignitaries. In addition, researchers and practitioners could use this tool to analyse political and administrative trends and propose further measures to improve governance.*

Keywords: *Public Administration, Politics, Accountability, Transparency, Evaluation, Good Governance, Democracy, Rule of Law.*

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1. Introduction

The interaction between democratic society, good governance and the well-being of citizens forms an interdependent and circular system, in which each element influences and is influenced by the others. A rule of law *“defined by all principles regarding organization, legality, human rights and freedoms”* provides the institutional and normative framework necessary for transparent, participatory and accountable governance (Drăganu, 1992). *“Recent studies have begun to examine the numerous and multiple forums or stakeholders that interact at the same time, including citizens, users, oversight bodies, public servants at different levels, political bodies, and societal actors”* (Perez-Duran, 2024, p. 3). Through free elections, the separation and balance of powers in the state expressly mentioned in the Fundamental Law, the existence of a robust legal framework and an active civic sector, democracy creates the premises for an efficient Government and a legitimate Parliament. *“At present, the state asserts itself, from a sociological point of view, as a human collectivity based on citizenship relations and legitimately endowed with specialized government institutions, which have an impersonal and permanent character”* (Rădulescu, 2012).

A modern democratic state puts the citizens at the centre of the ecosystem, and the main concern must be their well-being. Any slippage, whether declarative or material, affects the balance of the entire system, and the social tensions fuelled by these slippages can lead to major dysfunctions with consequences that are difficult to counteract. In our case, such slippages can take us away from the European path and the values of the European Union, isolating Romania and condemning its citizens to return to undemocratic and authoritarian regimes (Zlătescu & Marinică, 2020). *“Evidence also suggests that reforms that aim to create or strengthen a values-based culture of sound public governance are more likely to achieve their objectives”* (OECD, 2020, p. 18).

Under these conditions, the foundation on which any democratic state construction should be founded is trust, the strongest binder and at the same time the most susceptible to irremediable depreciation. As in interpersonal relationships, in the state-citizen relationship, trust is hard to earn and, once lost, regaining it is difficult, with great efforts and does not guarantee a return to the 100% level. *“This article investigates the relationships between corruption, democracy and trust in government, emphasizing the effect of societal norms that support corruption on these relationships”* (Mizrahi & Natan Krup, 2025, p. 1).



The criminal record model served as the source of inspiration for the proposal to establish a political and administrative record; however, there are significant differences between the two instruments in terms of legal foundation, purpose, content, and social impact. The criminal record is enshrined by law and managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, reflecting exclusively final court rulings and criminal sanctions imposed by the judiciary. By contrast, the political and administrative record does not currently benefit from a normative framework, being an innovative proposal that would require the involvement of an independent institution, such as the National Integrity Agency or the Ministry of Justice, capable of ensuring impartiality and objectivity in managing information. While the former focuses on documenting criminal antecedents, the latter would aim to record aspects such as political party switching, integrity conflicts, absences from parliamentary or governmental activities, cabinet reshuffles, legislative initiatives, implemented projects, and the relationship with citizens. *“Switches produce a lack of credibility and damage a party’s image, signalling weakness and an inability to select loyal MPs and preserve unity”* (Ceron & Volpi, 2022, p. 1043).

The purposes of the two instruments differ fundamentally. The criminal record is intended to protect society by preventing recidivism, while also supporting the reintegration of convicted individuals through the institution of rehabilitation, serving as an evidentiary document in legal or administrative proceedings. By contrast, the political and administrative record would be designed as a tool for accountability and transparency in public life, aimed at providing citizens with the ability to make informed decisions during the electoral process and contributing to improving the quality of governance. Whereas the criminal record is limited to information on convictions, prohibitions, and security measures, all verified through court rulings, the political and administrative record would encompass a much broader spectrum of information, combining ethical, professional, and performance-related dimensions. *“Transparency is expected to strengthen electoral accountability. Yet, initiatives disseminating politician performance information directly prior to elections have reported mixed results”* (Grossman & Slough, 2022, p. 1).

A major difference also lies in terms of accessibility. The criminal record is confidential, being accessible only to the individual concerned, judicial bodies, and certain authorized institutions, in line with the principles of data protection and the right to rehabilitation. By contrast, the political and administrative record would need to be public and available online, updated periodically, so that citizens have access to relevant information regarding the activity of those holding public office. However, such openness raises significant challenges, including the risk

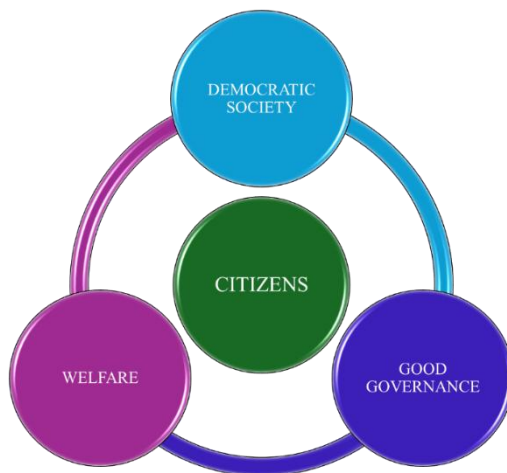


of politicization of the instrument, its use as a means of stigmatization, or as a weapon in political rivalries.

The implications of the two cases also differ in the social sphere. The criminal record produces consequences at the individual level, affecting the right to work, access to certain professions, or the personal image of the individual. The political and administrative record, by contrast, would have collective effects, potentially influencing the electoral process, the legitimacy of public institutions, and citizens' trust in the rule of law. While the first instrument relates to social security and legal order, the second could contribute to strengthening transparency, accountability, and good governance, serving as a democratic control mechanism exercised by society over the political and administrative class.

Both models nevertheless present certain limitations. The criminal record is criticized for failing to capture ethical misconduct or administrative dysfunctions, being strictly limited to criminal acts. The political and administrative record, although it would fill this gap, faces the difficulty of defining objective and fair criteria for including information, the risk of stigmatizing individuals for minor administrative errors, and the challenge of safeguarding the right to rehabilitation. Solutions to these obstacles should consist of clear and strict regulations that distinguish serious misconduct from mere procedural errors, the establishment of mechanisms for appeal and review, as well as the setting of limitation periods that ensure a balance between the public's right to be informed and the individual's right to restore their reputation.

Therefore, although inspired by the criminal record, the concept of a political and administrative record would represent an instrument with a distinct function, aimed not at criminal sanction, but at political and administrative accountability. If built on a solid legal foundation, managed by an independent institution, and governed by objective and fair criteria, it could become a fundamental mechanism for the modernization of public administration and the strengthening of democracy, turning transparency and accountability from exceptions into mandatory standards of public life. *“Issues of accountability are ubiquitous in public governance. Accountability connects with other concerns like legitimacy, power, citizen engagement, and new modes of service production”* (Barbera *et al.*, 2025, p. 1).

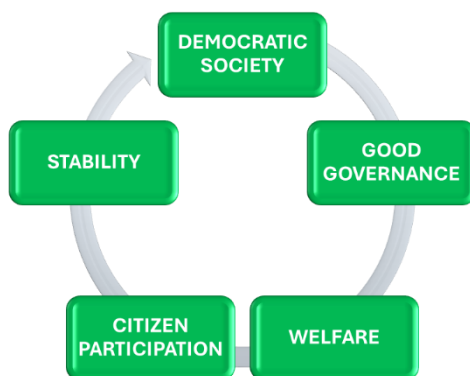


Source: Author

In the absence of adequate tools, society does not have effective means to make informed choices and to sanction political and administrative slippages, the citizens' vote being affected by various messages, including fake news that overlap or replace the real image. *“Electoral misinformation, where citizens believe false or misleading claims about the electoral process, is a challenge to public confidence in elections specifically and democracy more broadly”* (Dunham et al., 2024, p. 681).

The negative factors that can lead to the loss of trust come from recurrent dysfunctions, such as the opacity of the decision-making process, the phenomenon of political shifting, administrative inefficiency and corruption, elements that undermine citizens' trust in state institutions and affect both their legitimacy and their activity or efficiency and that are faithfully reflected in all interdependent components, the relationship between them being able to generate a *virtuous circle* or a *vicious circle*.

Figure 1. The virtuous circle



Source: Author



Figure 2. The vicious circle



Source: Author

2. The need for a system of political accountability

In this context, the introduction of a political and administrative record, inspired by the criminal record model, could represent an innovative and necessary mechanism for increasing transparency and accountability in the exercise of public functions, since such a system would allow the documentation and highlighting of both ethical and professional deviations, as well as the performance of dignitaries and public officials, offering on the one hand to the electorate, and on the other hand, to the state institutions, a concrete tool for assessing their integrity and competence.

The political and administrative record would function as a public document that would record the relevant aspects of the activity of a politician or public official, providing verifiable information about his or her performance. Unlike the criminal record, which strictly reflects criminal sanctions, this mechanism refers to indicators and criteria of professional performance of the person evaluated. This is part of that “*new paradigm for public service management regarding the development of a new performance-oriented culture in a less centralized and resizing public sector*” (Dincă, 2018, p.46). “*Good governance and efficiency of the public sector are topics that require in-depth analysis by scholars, politicians, officials, and entrepreneurs to identify the best policies and practices*” (Negri & Dinca, 2023, p. 1).

The main objective of such a criminal record is to increase the transparency and accountability of the political and administrative class, so that citizens can make informed decisions when voting. “*Voters may be unable to hold politicians to account if they lack basic information about their representatives’ performance. Civil society groups and international donors therefore advocate using voter information campaigns*” (Dunning *et al.*, 2019, p. 1).



The participation of citizens through voting and civic activism in public life determines the selection of competent leaders, independent democratic institutions prevent abuses of power, and freedom of the press and the protection of fundamental rights contribute to a climate of transparency and mutual control of the authorities. Consequently, good governance ensures the stability and development of democratic society through coherent public policies, administrative efficiency, social equity and transparency, and the correct allocation of resources, investments in education, health, infrastructure and innovation, as well as a clear legislative framework foster economic and social progress.

At the same time, the well-being of citizens is both an outcome and a determinant of good governance and the consolidation of democracy, since a high standard of living leads to increased trust in institutions, active participation in democratic life, a favorable educational environment that reduces political manipulation and consolidates a stable society, while a decrease in well-being can generate electoral apathy, increasing tolerance for corruption and the erosion of the rule of law, which weakens democracy and the efficiency of governance, favoring populism, political instability and economic regression. “*The proper implementation of key components of public governance, such as transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, can act as powerful deterrents against corrupt practices*” (Mustapha *et al.*, 2024, p. 4).

3. Structure and content of the political and administrative record

To be useful, the political and administrative record should include information on:

1) Political trails:

- a) The number of party changes during the mandate.
- b) The motivation for change.

2) Attendance at meetings:

- a) Percentage of participation in plenary and parliamentary committees.
- b) Unjustified absences and their justification.

3) Parliamentary and administrative activity:

- a) The number of legislative initiatives proposed and the percentage of those adopted.
- b) Plenary interventions (number of speeches, interpellations, motions).
- c) Bills initiated with a significant impact on society.

4) Controversial decisions:

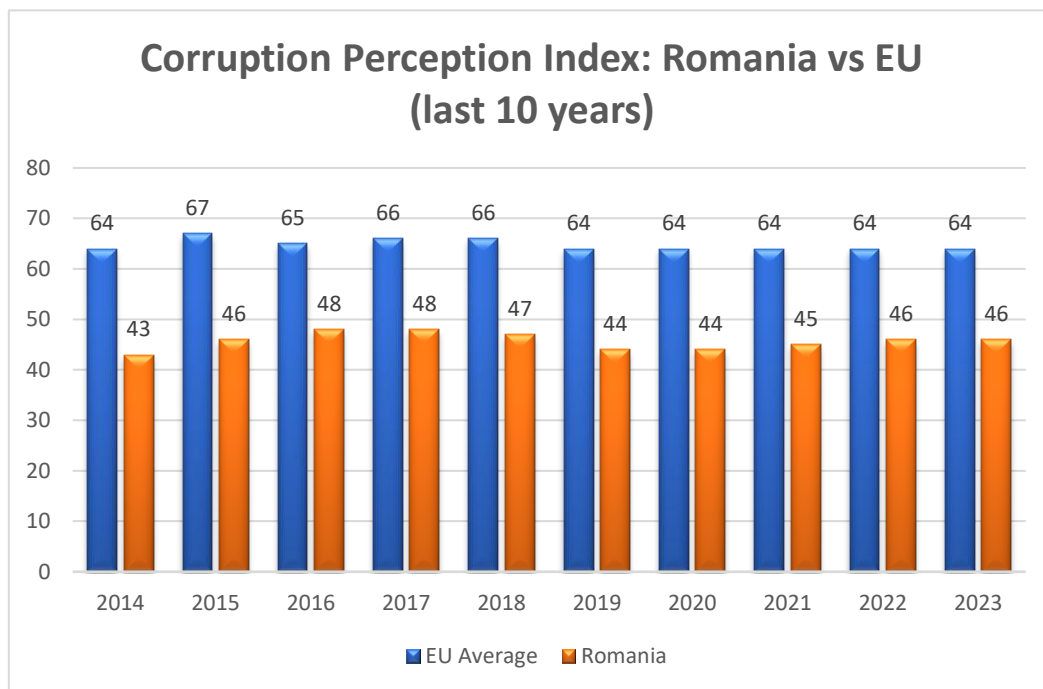


- a) Participation in legislative decisions that have generated negative reactions from society or integrity bodies.
- 5) Number of Integrity Incidents: *“Preventing and managing conflicts of interest in the public sector is crucial to help governments strengthen and enhance public integrity. Left undetected, they can undermine the integrity of public officials, decisions, agencies and governments”* (OECD, 2020, p. 32).
- a) Cases in which the National Integrity Agency (ANI) or other institutions have found various conflicts regarding the person of the parliamentarian, dignitary or public official.
- 6) Activity in public administration:
- a) How many times has a politician been appointed minister and the duration of each mandate.
 - b) How many times has it been reshuffled and the reasons for the reshuffle. *“The evidence presented underscores how parliamentarians’ defection diminishes legislative productivity, substituting particular interests for the nation’s welfare”* (Quaresima et al., 2025, p. 1).
 - c) The number of simple motions filed against it and their outcome.
 - d) Whether he was a civil servant before becoming a dignitary and how his activity was evaluated. *“Ethical misconduct, including bribery and favoritism, continues to undermine institutional effectiveness and erode public trust in government agencies. The absence of a robust meritocratic system means that recruitment and promotions are often influenced by political favoritism”* (Islam et al., 2025, p. 3).
 - e) Major projects implemented during the mandate and their impact.
- 7) Relationship with citizens:
- a) The number of meetings held with voters in their constituency.
 - b) Citizens’ complaints and how they were addressed. *“The social contract between citizens and the state depends on the ability of citizens to hold public servants accountable for their actions through various legitimate channels of influence”* (Mizrahi & Minchuk, 2025, p. 2).

For the information to be relevant, it should be centralized by an independent institution (e.g. ANI, Ministry of Justice) and validated by monitoring bodies, and the information should be updated regularly (e.g. every six months). At the same time, the document must be available online, so that it can be accessed by citizens, which should contribute to increasing the quality of their information to exercise their right to vote. The need for such a criminal record is all the greater as citizens’ perception of the level of corruption reaches a higher level. *“The growing level and quality of corruption will lead to an increase in the credibility and efficiency of*



corruption governance for the government, as public pressure compels national audit authorities to be more meticulous” (Fang et al., 2023, p. 7030).



Source: Author based on information from

<https://www.transparency.org.ro/ro/tiropage/indicele-de-perceptie-coruptiei-2023>

4. Advantages, objections and solutions

The main advantages of the introduction of the criminal record are related to the increase of transparency, with voters having access to concrete data on the activity of elected officials and civil servants, and public institutions being fully aware of a possible proposal for hiring or promoting the respective person who is subject to the evaluation of the political and administrative record. *“E-governance facilitates direct citizen involvement in political activities, surpassing traditional government functions, and contributes to broader societal goals such as transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement in decision-making processes” (Lin & Yaakop, 2024, p. 3).*

At the same time, politicians, dignitaries and civil servants will have an additional incentive to carry out their duties responsibly, while the publication of performance-related information will allow the identification of unsuitable people for certain positions, thus reducing incompetence and increasing citizens’ trust in the political and administrative system. *“Disinformation campaigns are associated with less accurate and more polarized beliefs about election fairness,*



underlining the critical importance of objective information sources for voters” (Mauk & Gromping, 2024, p. 2).

A political and administrative criminal record could be subject to several criticisms, including the possibility of using it as a tool for political pressure or the elimination of uncomfortable opponents, the risk of stigmatizing some people for minor mistakes, the difficulty of establishing objective and fair criteria for inclusion in the criminal record, as well as the violation of the principle of rehabilitation and the right to a second chance for people who have corrected their behavior. However, these criticisms can be dismantled argumentatively through a series of solutions meant to ensure the correct and equitable functioning of such a mechanism.

To prevent the political and administrative record from being used to pressure or eliminate opponents, it should be managed by an independent, politically autonomous institution governed by clear legal rules. *“Accountability requires that public officials are accountable for their actions to citizens and supervisory bodies, and that transparency encourages public scrutiny of the public administration’s actions”* (Frontiers in Political Science, 2025, p. 4). In addition, all information included in the criminal record should be rigorously checked and based on official decisions of the courts, integrity agencies or other competent authorities, to avoid the introduction of subjective or politically motivated data.

Another relevant criticism is the one related to the possibility of stigmatizing some people for minor administrative mistakes. To mitigate this risk, records should clearly differentiate between serious misconduct and procedural administrative misconduct, as only the former significantly affects civil service integrity and competence. *“In parliamentary systems, party switching can make or break governments. Strong political parties are intrinsic to meaningful representation, being necessary for voter preferences to be efficiently aggregated and translated into public policy”* (Khosla & Vaishnav, 2024, p. 403). Provision may also be made for the possibility to challenge and revise the information included so that data subjects have the right to a defense and can correct any errors.

Another aspect that can be criticized is the difficulty of establishing objective and fair criteria for the inclusion of facts in the political record, but this problem can be solved by a clear regulation that strictly defines the categories of facts that enter the records of the criminal record and thus, any ambiguity would be eliminated, and the application of this mechanism would be uniform and predictable.



Last but not least, the criticism of the violation of the right to rehabilitation and of the possibility for certain persons to restore their image after a mistake can be countered by establishing a limitation period, after which the information from the political record is deleted, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct, allowing a balance between the public's right to have access to relevant information about the integrity of officials and the principle of social and professional rehabilitation of persons who they have shown correction. *“The disclosure of corruption information can send a positive signal about the government's checks and balances aimed at curbing the misappropriation of power, helping to maintain political trust”* (Liu et al., 2025, p. 4).

5. Conclusions

The establishment of a political and administrative record is a key initiative to strengthen the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity in democracy and public administration. The interdependence between democratic society, good governance and the well-being of citizens can only work effectively if citizens have clear and accessible tools to assess the performance and integrity of those in public office. The lack of such mechanisms leads to the perpetuation of political shifting, administrative inefficiency and abuses of power, which generates a vicious circle in which public trust in state institutions would constantly deteriorate.

In this respect, the political and administrative record can become a pillar of good governance, providing both citizens and public institutions with a coherent tool for analyzing the performance, ethical behavior and degree of responsibility of dignitaries and civil servants. *“More research is necessary to understand the role of accountability as an independent variable, specifically its effect on crucial aspects of democratic governance, such as government trust and service quality”* (Perez-Duran, 2024, p. 12).

The mechanism must ensure fairness, objectivity, and protection of fundamental rights to prevent abuse or political misuse. Criticism of stigmatization, the difficulty of setting objective criteria or the violation of the right to rehabilitation can be addressed through appropriate measures, such as the management of this system by an independent institution, the application of rigorous standards for the verification of information, the clear differentiation between serious misconduct and minor administrative errors, and the establishment of a limitation period for the elimination of disproportionate penalties.



Also, such a tool must be accessible and regularly updated, so as to reflect the political and administrative reality in real time, providing citizens with a clear and unaltered image of the activity of those in public office.

Therefore, a political and administrative record is not a bureaucratic innovation, but a fundamental mechanism for modernizing the public administration and increasing the quality of the electoral process, and the adoption and implementation of such a system would be an important step towards increasing citizens' trust in state institutions, transforming transparency and accountability into a standard of political and administrative life, and not in an exception. "MPA programs forgo their responsibility to teach the next generation of public servants why merit-based civil service is crucial to a functioning democracy. Job protections are the bedrock of good government" (Guy & Zavattaro, 2023, p. 2).

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Appendix 1. Example Model of Political and Administrative Record

1

National Integrity and Transparency Agency
Political and Administrative Record, Issue Date: January 29, 2025

I. Personal Information

- **Full name:** Ion Popescu
- **Date of birth:** 15.06.1975
- **Current position:** Member of the Romanian Parliament
- **Current political party:** National Reformist Party
- **Electoral district:** Bucharest

II. Political Affiliation Evolution

No.	Year	Initial Party	Final Party	Official Reason	Observations
1	2016	Christian Social Democratic Party (PCSD)	Independent	“Doctrinal divergences”	Voted with PCSD after departure
2	2018	Independent	Liberal Democratic Party (PLD)	“Need for a reformist vision”	PLD offered him a vice-president position
3	2022	PLD	National Reformist Party	“Support for a new political project”	PLD merged with PRN

III. Attendance at Sessions

Year	Plenary sessions	Attendance (%)	Unjustified absences	Committee sessions / Attendance (%)
2020	100	78%	5	50 / 70%
2021	120	82%	2	55 / 75%
2022	110	69%	8	48 / 68%
2023	95	72%	6	50 / 71%



IV. Parliamentary Activity

No.	Legislative proposals	Current status	Co-initiators	Observations
1	Law on digitalization of public administration	Adopted	12	Unanimous vote
2	Draft law on eliminating special pensions	Rejected	25	Blocked in committee
3	Tax Code Amendment	Under debate	15	Controversies on progressive taxation

Plenary interventions:

- Supporting speeches: 23
- Questions addressed to the Government: 12
- Motions signed: 3

V. Controversial Votes

No.	Bill	Date of vote / Cast vote	Observations
1	Increase in MPs' salaries	15.07.2022 / For	Criticized by press and NGOs
2	Amendment to public procurement law	20.10.2022 / Abstention	Conflict of interest flagged
3	Increase in child allowances	10.02.2023 / Against	Justification: "Budgetary constraints"

VI. Conflicts of Interest and Sanctions

No.	Incident	Date / Sanction	Oversight institution
1	Contracts with related companies	2021 / Warning	ANI
2	Nepotism in appointing advisors	2022 / Ongoing investigation	DNA

**VII. Administrative Activity**

No.	Public office	Mandate period	Performance evaluation	Dismissals / Simple motions
1	Minister of Development	2019-2020	Average	1 (dismissed) / 2 (both rejected)
2	Minister of Transport	2021-2022	Satisfactory	1 (dismissed) / 1 (approved)

Reasons for dismissals:

- 2020: Lack of progress in attracting EU funds.
- 2022: Criticism regarding management of infrastructure projects.

VIII. Relationship with Citizens

Year	Meetings with citizens	Petitions received	Official responses provided (%)
2020	10	120	75%
2021	15	200	80%
2022	8	150	60%
2023	5	100	50%

IX. Conclusions and General Assessment

Indicator	Performance
Attendance at sessions	Average
Legislative activity	Good (23 speeches, 12 questions, 3 motions)
Controversial votes	3 flagged
Conflicts of interest	2 cases investigated
Administrative activity	Dismissals and simple motions
Relationship with citizens	Declining

Overall score: 6/10 (Evaluation based on transparency, activity, and integrity)



THE IMPACT OF KWAPRENEUR EMPOWERMENT SCHEME ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELLBEING OF BENEFICIARIES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA¹

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Abstract. *One of the major issues that governments in most developing nations have had to tackle over time is the challenge of increasing poverty. In Nigeria, the reality of poverty is real as reliable statistics have shown. Thus, successive administrations at both the federal and state levels have initiated programmes targeted at combating the increasing poverty and improving people's social wellbeing. Consequently, Kwara State Government introduced the Kwara State Social Investment Programmes (KWASSIP) in 2020. The programme was intended to be a poverty eradication initiative with several empowerment components and Kwapreneur scheme is one of them. However, despite the fact that, the agency has run numerous editions of the scheme, there are yet to be dedicated empirical studies targeted at assessing the impacts of the scheme. This study therefore examined the impact of the Kwapreneur scheme on the socio-economic wellbeing of beneficiaries. The study adopted survey as the research design; the population of the study consists of selected 660 existing beneficiaries of the scheme; multi-stage sampling approach was used to select 256 respondents as the study sample. The questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection and the data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The study revealed that, Kwapreneur empowerment*

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scheme has significant effect on beneficiaries' ability to afford food, decent housing and raise business capital. On the other hand, findings also revealed that the Kwapreneur empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on beneficiaries' ability to expand their business scope. Based on the findings, the study made relevant recommendations that will further assist government and policy makers to gain deeper insights on how the scheme would be increasingly used to eradicate poverty and ensure improved wellbeing of all and sundry within the state.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Kwapreneur, Poverty Alleviation, Social Investment.*

JEL CODE: I38; I32



1. Introduction

One of the major responsibilities of government across the world is to cater for the welfare of citizens and improve socio-economic wellbeing (Sambo, 2019). At the 2015 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), world leaders came together to approve a new global agenda for sustainable development. The agenda, with the overall objective of ending poverty in the world, aims to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The 17 SDGs recognize that ending poverty and all other forms of deprivations must be in line with strategies that improve health and education, mitigate social inequality and boost economic growth and wellbeing (Lykketoft, 2015).

In Nigeria, successive administrations have made dedicated efforts to combat poverty and enhance socio-economic wellbeing of the people by putting up institutional mechanisms (Sambo, 2019; Ayub & Gbaa, 2020). These poverty eradication measures come in various forms. These include, empowerment with vocational materials, sponsorship of skills acquisition trainings, distribution of funds to support petty businesses, small and medium enterprises, special investment in agriculture, provision of temporary employments, among others (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021).

At the Federal level, the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) is one of the most recent government-led efforts to stamp out poverty among the Nigerian people, especially the youth. The components of NSIP are N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), among others, which seek to address socio-economic inequalities and reduce poverty among Nigerians (Ogundapo, 2023). This Federal Government led initiative has been domesticated in Kwara State as a strategy to eradicate poverty and bolster enterprises (Alabi, 2022). A law was passed in 2019 to establish the Kwara State Social Investment Programme (KWASSIP), which has various components which include but not limited to *Kwapreneur*, *Owo Arugbo*, (Support for the Elderly) Digital Kwara, *Owo Isowo* (Business Capital).

The *Kwapreneur* programme has successfully run four editions, disbursing business loans to start-ups and other businesses within the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) landscape (Brimah, 2021; Olododo, 2023). *Kwapreneur* offers non-interest loan ranging between 200,000 naira and 3 million naira to young people between the ages of 18 and 35, after a rigorous screening exercise. The programme requires minimal documentation with no strict collateral. (Olododo, 2023).



Researchers have since shown keen interest in studying the operations of empowerment programmes, especially vis-à-vis their socio-economic impacts on the people. Some of these existing studies include Sambo (2019) which examined the relationship between the *Tradermoni* scheme and poverty reduction in Nigeria; Olateju (2021) which investigated the impact of *Tradermoni* on business growth and profit of petty traders in Lagos State, Nigeria; Ayub & Gbaa (2020) which conducted a study on the impact of N-Power programme on the socio-economic livelihoods of beneficiaries in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Notwithstanding these efforts, a gap has been created by the empowerment and social investment programmes recently established by the Kwara State Government. The programmes have not received dedicated academic attention. There are no empirical studies to show their impacts or otherwise on beneficiaries and society. What is available are comments by officials of government and politicians which may not be totally objective. This study, therefore, made an attempt to cover this gap and contribute to literature by focusing on one of the social investment programmes of the state, which is the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. As an empirical research work, the study is aimed at achieving some specific objectives which are to: examine whether beneficiaries of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme could afford decent housing after the programme, examine whether beneficiaries of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme could afford decent food after the programme, examine whether beneficiaries of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme were able to raise business capital after the programme and examine whether beneficiaries of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme were able to expand their business scope after the programme.

2. Literature review

Brief review of literature is done to assess the state of research on the topic of study.

2.1. The concepts of poverty, poverty eradication, social investment and empowerment

Poverty is a prominent term that is used in day-to-day economic and social analyses. It has a wide but diverse usage across contexts. The concept of poverty has not only evolved with new developments, it has also been viewed differently, especially with respect to the realities of each society. In other words, the way and manner poverty is seen and measured in a society differ from the other. The divergence in views Notwithstanding, poverty is a social reality that is constant in all societies (Watkins & Quattri, 2019). One of the popularised definitions of poverty given by the World Bank (2020) reads: “Poverty is pronounced deprivation in



wellbeing”. It is pertinent to stress that there are standards that measure wellbeing in each society. People who are not able to meet these thresholds with their income are agreed to be poor. These thresholds, which are key indicators of wellbeing and welfare, include feeding, housing, health and clothing (Daskyes & Plangshak, 2019).

Essien (2004) believes poverty is a situation where there is both low standard of living and low income. *The European Commission in its Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2004) stated thus: “People are said to be living in poverty if their resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live”. This definition illustrates a preceding perspective that poverty is mostly defined by each society; it is a societal construction, as each society pronounces who it considers to be poor and what is considered to be poverty.

Anyawu (1997) posited that poverty is a situation where people do not have the capacity to meet basic needs including food, healthcare, education and shelter. Adebayo (2018) argues that what constitutes basic needs has over the years expanded beyond food, shelter, water, housing, to include education, healthcare, security, dignity, credit and participation in the political process. Sambo (2019) notes that poverty is usually evident in lack of job, food insecurity, vulnerability, insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, potable water and quality education, and shortage of infrastructure that make living comfortable. The World Bank (2020) also notes that poverty could be tied to specific indices, including feeding, housing, health among others; such that when an individual cannot meet the threshold of decent feeding, it is food-poverty, same way it is housing-poverty when the threshold on housing could not be met.

In ensuring a more robust understanding of the concept of poverty, scholars have also made attempts at classification and typology. The most prominent classification of poverty divests into absolute and relative. While the former has been described to mean a situation where an individual or a household has a low income compared to the amount required to meet basic personal needs, the latter is a situation where an individual or a household has an income that barely meets minimum standard of living, and is low when compared to other people or households in the same society and at the same time. How relative poverty is defined varies from one society to the other because there are different yardsticks for minimum standard of living (Daskyes & Plangshak, 2019).

Poverty eradication has been used interchangeably with poverty reduction, poverty elimination, and poverty alleviation. The concept describes measures by which an individual or a group of



people are relieved of hardships that come with poverty, and are provided with basic facilities for good living. Poverty eradication is synonymous with development and progress (Nwachukwu, 2001). Ayoo (2022) conceives of poverty eradication as involving the processes, efforts and procedures through which people are lifted out of poverty. In Ayoo's view, poverty eradication can be achieved by stimulating economic growth to increase incomes and expand employment opportunities for the citizens, and undertaking economic and institutional reforms to enhance efficiency and improve the utilization of resources. Ita, Effiong & Edet (2018) opine that poverty eradication is one of the foremost goals of development strategies in modern societies, and is on the agenda of every global development institution, including the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), among others.

One of efforts usually put up to eradicate poverty in modern societies is the through social investment. The concept of social investment has a long history in public policy and has interchangeably been described as social protection, social safety net, social intervention, among other terms. All these concepts are a key highlight of the welfarist state, where government pays premium attention to the welfare and wellbeing of the citizenry. The objective is to reduce the rate of poverty by investing funds in programmes and policies that empower the people at the lowest part of the social ladder (Vliet, Bakker & Doorn, 2021).

According to Holmes & Jones (2010), social investment is a common term used in social, political and economic contexts. It describes mechanisms and measures taken to reduce poverty and protect the poor from degenerating deeper into poverty so as to control their number and presence in society. Onyishi & Ogbu (2019) posits that social investment is a form of social intervention which covers all public and private initiatives that provide transfer of income to the consumption of the poor, protect vulnerable people from livelihood risks and elevate the social status of people who are marginalised and underserved in the society. The overall goal of this social intervention is to reduce the economic and social vulnerability of the poor masses, vulnerable and marginalised persons, and shattering the barriers which prevent these categories of people from accessing basic economic and social services. Onyishi & Ogbu further elaborated that these actions are not limited to the state alone, they can be undertaken by non-state actors including the private sector, informal institutions, community-based groups and even individuals.



Olateju (2021) notes that social investment and protection programmes have assumed an important position in global developmental agenda. It is contained in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has helped to reduce the rate of extreme poverty across nations. Social investment is believed to be a way of providing short-term assistance to individuals and households so that they can be empowered to be independent (Mushunje, 2017). The World Bank (2012) defines social protection programmes as an intervention, usually public, that assist individuals, household and communities to better manage risk, with people at the bottom of the social pyramid as main beneficiaries. As societies across the globe continue to tend toward liberalism and liberal democracy, social investment programmes are becoming popular as a potent tool to empower the people and eradicate poverty, which is believed to be a major social problem.

The concept of empowerment is closely associated with social investment because they share similar goals. In fact, social investment could be categorised as a form of empowerment. Salami (2013) defines empowerment as any process that supports people to overcome obstacles that can prevent them from achieving their potential. According to Nweke, Onyeoku, Ezeh & Nwankwo (2018), the need to empower people arises from their inability to attain potentials due to artificial barriers created by some other groups; they opine that empowerment is often adopted as means by which people are assisted to boost their capacity. Thus, empowerment involves processes that boost the capacity of individuals and groups, and thereby transform their livelihood (World Bank, 2014). Akpan (2006) suggested that for empowerment to take place, the root causes of poverty, deprivation and marginalisation must be investigated, then complimented with actionable plans on how to overcome the problem and realise growth.

2.2. An Overview of Kwapreneur empowerment scheme

PA activities are among the most significant HRM exercises in establishments. *Kwapreneur* is an empowerment programme established by the Kwara State Government in 2020. The programme is exclusively designed for and dedicated to young people who are between the ages of 18 and 35. The state-funded initiative to support businesses and business ideas of young entrepreneurs has successfully run four (4) editions so far from 2021 through to 2023. Most of the businesses that get support from the scheme are within the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) circle (Brimah, 2021; Olododo, 2023). According to a report in the Nigerian Tribune (2023), *Kwapreneur* offers financial support ranging from N3 million downward to businesses owned by young people of the state's origin.



Tejidini (2023) argues that the *Kwapreneur* scheme is making significant impacts in the spread of prosperity among the Kwara youth, many of whom do not have collateral to access bank facilities. This means that the scheme provides an alternative for young people to get financial support without the hurdles and hassles of the banking system, which requires strict documentations, including collateral and interest. For its part, the *Kwapreneur* scheme is a non-interest loan, which only requires excellent pitch of business ideas with minimal documentation for applicants to scale through as beneficiaries (Brimah, 2021).

Kwapreneur has benefitted no less than 1,120 young people and businesses altogether across editions. Most of these businesses operate within the SME circle. The first edition (*Kwapreneur* 1.0) had 170 beneficiaries; while the second edition (*Kwapreneur* 2.0) had 100 beneficiaries. Similarly, the third edition (*Kwapreneur* 3.0) had 490 beneficiaries, the highest so far; while the fourth and most recent edition (*Kwapreneur* 4.0) had 367 beneficiaries (KWASSIP Registry, 2024). The programme commences with the call for applications, after which applications undergo screening and qualified applications are shortlisted. Thereafter, a panel is constituted by KWASIP management for qualified applicants to present and pitch their business ideas. This is the stage at which beneficiaries are selected and some emerge as star winners getting millions of naira to support their businesses (Olododo 2022; Tejidini, 2023). is going by the proposition of Zikmund *et al.* (2010).

2.3. Empirical review

Given that *Kwapreneur* is a novel empowerment initiative of a subnational government in Nigeria, there is hardly a study in the body of literatures available to this researcher that inquired into the impacts of the scheme on socio-economic wellbeing of its beneficiaries. This is the gap that this study seeks to cover. However, there are related studies that investigated the impacts of other social investment schemes and poverty reduction/empowerment programmes and policies of government, especially at the central, on the socio-economic wellbeing of the beneficiaries. These studies are thus reviewed in this sub-section as part of the research proposal.

Sambo (2019) conducted an investigation into *tradermoni* micro-credit scheme and poverty reduction in Nigeria. He adopted a secondary data in his analysis, with most of the data obtained from newspaper publications, government reports, publications of foreign organisations, among others. His interest to conduct the study was buoyed with the high rate of poverty in Nigeria and the innovativeness of the *tradermoni* scheme. He found out through data collected and



collated that the implementation of the *tradermoni* scheme is embroiled in controversies and the capacity of beneficiaries to pay back is not properly verified. Sambo therefore concluded that the *tradermoni* scheme of former President Muhammadu Buhari is fraught with politicization and poor profiling which make it difficult for real beneficiaries to be reached in the empowerment scheme.

Similarly, Olateju (2021) conducted an empirical study on *tradermoni* by assessing the impact of *tradermoni* on business growth and profit of petty traders in Lagos State Nigeria. Like Sambo (2019), Olateju was also moved by the persistent rise in poverty rate in Nigeria to conduct the study. She conducted a survey to gather data, using 418 Lagos petty traders as sample, randomly drawn. Of the 418 petty traders, 258 were used to serve as the treatment group; while 160 were used as the control group. Questionnaire was used to take relevant data from respondents. The data were analysed through Propensity Score Matching (PSM) Technique. The result from the analysis showed that the loan/empowerment programme increased the profit and expanded the business of petty traders that benefitted in the programme above those petty traders that did not benefit in the study area. Consequently, the study recommended that more premium should be placed on empowerment programmes like the *tradermoni* to assist traders and lubricate the nation's economy.

Lamidi & Igbokwe (2021) also studied the various social investment programmes in Nigeria, including previous and prevailing ones by engaging their impacts and challenges. Some of the social investment programmes focused on include: The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Better Life Programme (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Subsidy Re-Investment Programme (SURE-P), National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), among others. The study relied on secondary data for data and analysis. It agreed that social investment programmes have made impacts in the lives of its beneficiaries, including in the areas of employment generation, provision of enabling business environment, prioritisation of agriculture and discouragement of brain-drain. The study identified key challenges of the social investment programmes to include policy inconsistency, unwieldy scope of programmes, and inadequate funding. It recommended for the government to intensify efforts on social investment programmes for the purpose of youth empowerment and employment generation.

There is also Daskyes & Plangshak (2019) who conducted a study on the impact of National Social Investment Programmes on poverty and youth employment in Plateau State, 2016 –



2019. They used both secondary and primary data obtained from the state office of NSIP and two major markets in Jos North and South Local Government Areas respectively. Their findings indicated inconsistencies in the implementation of the programme, as they noted it was characterised by sharp practices on the part of government officers in charge of disbursement of funds, cumbersome bank process in accessing the *marketmoni* component of the NSIP, and non-involvement of market officials for adequate flow of information. The study then recommended a less cumbersome and more transparent process to check corrupt practices and other excesses of the officials.

In the same vein, Ayub & Gbaa (2020) assessed the impact of the N-Power Programme on socio-economic livelihoods of beneficiaries. They adopted Oyo State as their research setting. A total number of 250 N-Power beneficiaries were selected through simple random sampling technique, where 249 turned out to be respondents. Following analysis of the data collected, the study posits that the N-Power programme has had enormous impacts on the socio-economic livelihoods of the beneficiaries, including access to basic and daily needs, catering for relatives, ability to enrol for further studies, among others. The study recommended for successive administrations to sustain the programme and prioritise timely payment of stipends.

From the foregoing, varying findings and positions could be deduced from the studies so far on the impacts of social investment programmes across different settings. This study will contribute to the body of literatures by conducting an empirical investigation into the impact of a subnational social investment programme (*Kwapreneur*) on the socio-economic wellbeing of beneficiaries. The justification of this study is that, *Kwapreneur* is a relatively new social investment programmes, and as such, this study will serve as a resourceful material on the subject matter of the empowerment programme and other associated issues including poverty reduction strategies and social investment for academic reference.

3. Material and methods

The research design adopted by this study is the survey design because it is the most prominent research design fit for the nature of the study. The population of this study are the beneficiaries of the first and third editions of the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme respectively. As of the time of this study, four editions of the scheme have held but the beneficiaries of the second and fourth editions were left out because the second edition was specially made as grant to beneficiaries while the fourth edition only recently held. Olododo (2023) revealed that while



170 young business owners benefited in the first edition, 490 businesses were captured as beneficiaries in the third edition. Taken together, the total population unit of this study was 660. The sample size of this study was 40 percent of the total population. This translated to 264 beneficiaries of both the first and third editions of *Kwapreneur*. The sampling techniques used to reach the study sample was the multi-stage sampling approach comprising both the purposive, proportional and snowball techniques respectively. The study adopted the purposive sampling technique to pick few publicized and known beneficiaries, who were then leveraged on to get fellow beneficiaries through the snowball technique. Proportional sampling technique was further used to award proportion to each edition so that beneficiaries from both editions are adequately represented. This is further shown in table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of beneficiaries by population and sample size

Edition	Population	Sample
First Edition	170	90
Third Edition	490	174
Total	660	264

Source: Researcher's compilation 2024

The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was categorised into three sections. The first section titled section A included questions regarding the socio-demographic data of the respondents. The second section named section B was used to raise questions on the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme which formed the independent variable of the study. The third section entitled section C asked questions relating to socio-economic wellbeing which is the dependent variable of the study.

Since the instrument that was used in retrieving data from the respondents was the questionnaire, the analysis was done quantitatively with the use of statistics. Therefore, the simple percentage and frequency count as descriptive statistical tools were used to analyze the descriptive aspects of the data. In the case of the inferential aspects of the data, the regression analysis was used. The regression output was calculated with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study paid utmost attention to ethical issues, especially as relating to the respondents. Their responses were treated with high confidentiality and anonymity. To this extent, the questionnaire which is the instrument of the research did not include name or address or contact that can make the respondents traceable.



4. Results

This section of the research report contains the presentation and analysis of data gathered on the field through the questionnaire. The presentation and analysis of data is very relevant in achieving the aims and objectives of the study. The analysis of data collected also assisted in providing answers to the questions raised to guide the study. Essentially, this section of the report indicated whether the independent variable of the study (*Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme) has significant effect on the dependent variable (socio-economic wellbeing). In analyzing the descriptive aspects of the data generated through the questionnaire, frequency count and simple percentage were used. On the other hand, in analyzing the inferential aspects of the data generated through the questionnaire, the regression analysis was utilized.

4.1. Descriptive analysis of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

This sub-section of the study is employed to present and analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents vis-à-vis age, religious affiliation, marital status, educational qualification, among others.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

1	Age Category	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	18 – 24	98	37.1
	25 – 31	122	46.2
	32 – 35	44	16.7
2	Religion	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Islam	184	69.7
	Christianity	80	30.3
	Others	0	0
3	Business Status	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	About to be established	85	32.2
	Already established	179	67.8
4	Educational Qualification	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Primary	25	9.5
	Secondary	58	21.9
	Tertiary	181	68.6

Source: Researcher's survey 2024



Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents by age. The table reveals that 98 (37.1%) of the respondents fall within 18 – 24 years' age bracket; 122 (46.2%) of the respondents are within 25 – 31 age bracket; and 44 (16.7%) of the respondents fall within 32 – 35 age bracket. According to Brimah (2021), the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme is dedicated to young business owners who are between ages 18 and 35. From the table, it could be deduced that most of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 25 – 31. Item 2 of table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents by religious affiliation; it shows that 184 (69.7%) of the respondents practice Islam; while 80 (30.3%) of the respondents are Christians. There was no representation for other religions in the table. therein, it could be stated that the predominant religions in Kwara State Nigeria are Islam and Christianity. Meanwhile, respondents who practice Islam are in the majority.

Item 3 of table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents by business status. The table shows that while 85 (32.2%) of the respondents have businesses that are about to be established as of the time of applying for the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme; 179 (67.8%) of the respondents have businesses that have already been established. From the table, respondents with already established businesses as of the time of applying for the scheme are in the majority. The fourth item on the table highlights the distribution of the respondents based on educational qualification. The table shows that 25 (9.5%) of the respondents have primary education qualification; 58 (21.9%) of the respondents have secondary education qualification; and 181 (68.6%) of the respondents have tertiary education level qualification. In this study, tertiary education level includes all post-secondary education such as NCE, ND, HND, BSc, MSc and so on. From the table, respondents with tertiary education level qualification are the highest.

4.2. Descriptive analysis of of Kwapreneur elements

This sub-section of the study is used to present and analyze data pertaining to the independent variable of the study, which is Kwapreneur empowerment scheme.

Table 3. Responses relating to some dynamics of the Kwapreneur scheme

1	Rating on integrity	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	High	241	91.3
	Low	23	8.7
2	Means of knowing	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Through media	176	66.7



	Through friend	58	21.9
	Through agency's staff	30	11.4
3	View on seamlessness	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	98	37.1
	No	166	62.9

Source: Researcher's survey 2024

Table 3 is generally used to show respondents' responses on some dynamics of the scheme. In the table, item 1 on the represents the distribution of respondents' rating of the integrity of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The table indicates that, 241 (91.3%) of the respondents rated the integrity of the programme high; 23 (8.7%) of the respondents rated the integrity of the programme low. It could however be inferred from the table that majority of the respondents rated the integrity of the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme high. Item 2 on the table represents the distribution of respondents based on the means of knowing about the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The table indicates that 176 (66.7%) of the respondents knew about the scheme through the media, 58 (21.9%) of the respondents knew about the scheme through a friend; while 30 (11.4%) of the respondents knew about the scheme through staff of the agency (KWASSIP). From the table, it is understood that majority of the respondents knew about the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme through the media. The media is therefore a veritable platform for information dissemination. On the seamlessness of the scheme in terms of its accessibility, the third item on the table highlights the distribution of respondents' views on whether or not the requirements to access the *Kwapreneur* empowerment fund were difficult. The responses show that while 98 (37.1%) of the respondents believed the requirements were difficult; 166 (62.9%) of the respondents believed the requirements were not difficult. Respondents who believed the requirements were not difficult are in the majority. This aligns with Brimah (2021) who opined that qualification for *Kwapreneur* is not rigid and it involves minimal documentation.

4.3. Descriptive analysis of socio-economic wellbeing elements

This sub-section of the study is used to present and analyze data pertaining to the dependent variable of the study, which is socioeconomic wellbeing. Socioeconomic wellbeing in this study is measured in terms of affordability of decent housing, affordability of decent food, availability of capital, and business expansion.

*Table 4. Respondents' view on whether Kwapreneur enhances their wellbeing*

1	View on business funding	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	235	89.1
	No	29	10.9
2	View on business expansion	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	212	80.3
	No	52	19.7
3	Apartment status pre-scheme	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Rented single room	25	9.5
	Rented self-contained	187	70.8
	Rented flat	32	12.1
	Living with parent/others	20	7.6
	Self-owned apartment	0	0
4	Take on apartment change	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	189	71.6
	No	75	28.4
5	View on quality feeding pre-scheme	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	218	82.6
	No	46	17.4
6	Feeding status post-scheme	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Better	198	75
	Same	60	22.7
	Worse	06	2.3
7	View on wellbeing of co-beneficiaries post-scheme	Frequency(N=264)	Percentage (100)
	Yes	217	82.2
	No	47	17.8

Source: Researcher's survey 2024

Table 4 generally shows the distribution of respondents on their state of wellbeing before and after receiving empowerment fund from the scheme. In the table, item 1 revealed respondents' view on whether or not they were able to fund their businesses after the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The table shows that 235 (89.1%) of the respondents indicated that they were able to



fund their businesses better after enjoying the scheme; 29 (10.9%) of the respondents indicated that they were not able to fund their businesses. Responses from the table implied that many of those who enjoyed the empowerment scheme were able to use it improve funding of their businesses. Item 2 on the table highlights the distribution of respondents' responses on whether or not they were able to expand their business scope after enjoying *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The responses revealed that while 212 (80.3%) of the respondents agreed to witnessing expansion in their businesses after the scheme; 52 (19.7%) of the respondents indicated that they did not witness expansion in their businesses after the scheme. From the table, it could be stated that majority of the respondents witnessed expansion in their businesses after enjoying the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. While trying to measure the impact of enjoying the scheme on the wellbeing of the beneficiaries, question was raised to assess the apartment status of the participants before and after the scheme.

Item 3 on the table shows the distribution of respondents based on apartment status before the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The responses show that 25 (9.5%) of the respondents live in rented single room apartment; 187 (70.8%) of the respondents live in rented self-contained apartment; 32 (12.1%) of the respondents live in rented flat apartment; and 20 (7.6%) of the respondents live with parents or other persons. There was no respondent living in self-owned apartment. The table further reveals that respondents who live in rented self-contained before the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme dominate the frequency chart. Similarly, respondents were further asked about their accommodation status after enjoying the loan of the scheme, item 4 on the table indicates that 189 (71.6%) of the respondents changed to a better apartment after the *Kwapreneur* scheme; 75 (28.4%) of the respondents did not change to a better apartment after the scheme. From the table, it could be stated that majority of the respondents changed to a better apartment after the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme.

Item number 5 on Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents' takes on whether or not they had a quality feeding pattern before the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The responses show that while 218 (82.6%) of the respondents indicated that they had a quality feeding pattern before the *Kwapreneur* scheme; 46 (17.4%) of the respondents did not have a quality feeding pattern before the scheme. Now, trying to assess the impact of *Kwapreneur* on feeding quality of the respondents, item 6 on Table 5 highlights the distribution of respondents based on quality of feeding after the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The table shows that 198 (75%) of the respondents indicated that they had a better feeding pattern after the scheme; 60 (22.7%) of the respondents indicated that their feeding pattern remained the same; and 06 (2.3%) of the



respondents indicated that their feeding pattern had gone worse after the programme. From the table, it could be stated that majority of the respondents had a better feeding pattern after the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme.

Respondents were also asked of their views on whether enjoying the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has improved the wellbeing of the beneficiaries generally. Item number 7 on the Table 5 highlights the distribution of respondents' view on wellbeing of fellow beneficiaries after the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme. The table shows that 217 (82.2%) of the respondents believed that the wellbeing of fellow beneficiaries improved after the scheme; while 47 (17.8%) of the respondents believed that the wellbeing of fellow beneficiaries did not improve after the scheme. From the table, it could be deduced that respondents who believed that the wellbeing of fellow beneficiaries improved after *Kwapreneur* are in the majority.

4.4. Testing of hypotheses

This sub-section is used to test the hypotheses raised by the study. The simple regression analysis was the inferential statistical tool that aided the exercise. Four hypotheses were raised by this study, and they include:

Ho_i: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent housing.

Ho_{ii}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent food.

Ho_{iii}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to raise business capital.

Ho_{iv}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to expand business scope.

4.4.1. Testing hypothesis one

Ho_i: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent housing.

The aim here is to test if *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme (independent variable) has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent housing (dependent variable). The output of the regression analysis is hereby presented.



Table 5. Regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on affordability of decent housing

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.200	.188		1.695	.000
<i>Kwapreneur</i> empowerment scheme	.065	.076	.072	4.848	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Affordability of Decent Housing Standard Error of Estimate: .479
R: .296^a No of Observations: 246
R Square: .088
Adjusted R Square: .068

Source: SPSS computation

Table 5 presents the regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on affordability of decent housing by beneficiaries. The output indicates that there is a positive relationship between *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme and the affordability of decent housing by beneficiaries given that the unstandardized coefficients is calculated at .065. This means that the higher the access of beneficiaries to the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme, the higher their abilities to afford decent housing. The output also shows that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on affordability of decent housing by beneficiaries because the significance value reads 0.000, a figure that is lesser than the p-value 0.05. Also, from the output, the computed t-test value is 4.848. The figure is greater than the critical value which yields 1.695. This output further strengthens the rejection of the null hypothesis raised by the study, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It can therefore be stated that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent housing. This finding is in line with Ayub & Gbaa (2020) who found out that a similar government-led empowerment programme N-Power has significant impact on the livelihood of beneficiaries.



4.4.2. Testing hypothesis two

Ho_{ii}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent food.

The aim here is to test if *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme (independent variable) has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent food (dependent variable). The output of the regression analysis is hereby presented.

Table 6. Regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on affordability of decent food

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.326	.231		2.745	.000
<i>Kwapreneur</i> empowerment scheme	.192	.093	.170	6.055	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Affordability of Decent Food			Standard Error of Estimate: .390		
R: .199 ^a			No of Observations: 246		
R Square: .040					
Adjusted R Square: .019					

Source: SPSS computation

Table 6 represents the regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on affordability of decent food by beneficiaries. The result demonstrates that a positive relationship exists between the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme and affordability of decent food by beneficiaries since the unstandardized coefficients reads .192. This means that the higher the access of beneficiaries to *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme, the higher their abilities to afford decent food. The result further shows that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on affordability of decent food by beneficiaries because the significance value which yielded 0.000 is lesser than the p-value 0.05. Furthermore, the t-test value in the output reads 6.055, which is higher than the calculated critical value of 2.745. The t-test value also strengthens the position that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on the



ability of beneficiaries to afford decent food. Therefore, the null hypothesis raised by this study is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Hence, *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent food. This finding aligns with that of Ayub & Gbaa (2020) who found out that beneficiaries of N-Power in Oyo State were able to cater for their daily needs including feeding as a result of the empowerment programme.

4.4.3. Testing hypothesis three

Ho_{iii}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to raise business capital.

The aim here is to test if *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme (independent variable) has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to raise business capital (dependent variable). The output of the regression analysis is hereby presented.

Table 7. Regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on ability to raise business capital

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.063	.196		1.414	.000
<i>Kwapreneur</i> empowerment scheme	.067	.079	.073	5.840	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Ability to raise capital			Standard Error of Estimate: .407		
R: .095 ^a			No of Observations: 246		
R Square: .009					
Adjusted R Square: .013					

Source: SPSS computation

Table 7 presents the regression output for the effect of of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on ability to raise business capital by beneficiaries. The result demonstrates that a positive relationship exists between the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme and ability to raise business capital by beneficiaries since the unstandardized coefficients reads .067. This means that the



higher the access of beneficiaries to *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme, the higher their abilities to raise business capital. The result further shows that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on ability to raise business capital by beneficiaries because the significance value which yielded 0.000 is lesser than the p-value 0.05. Furthermore, the t-test value in the output reads 5.840, which is higher than the calculated critical value of 1.414. The t-test value also strengthens the position that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to raise business capital for their businesses. On this premise therefore, the null hypothesis raised by this study is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Hence, *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to raise business capital. Olateju (2021) had a similar finding with the study of the impact of *Tradermoni* among Lagos petty traders. Olateju discovered that the Federal Government-led scheme assisted traders to fund and expand their businesses.

4.4.4. Testing hypothesis four

Ho_{iv}: *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to expand business scope.

The aim here is to test if *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme (independent variable) has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to expand business scope (dependent variable). The output of the regression analysis is hereby presented.

Table 8. Regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on ability to expand business scope

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.093	.188		6.322	.000
<i>Kwapreneur</i> empowerment scheme	.098	.043	.049	1.989	.465
a. Dependent Variable: Ability to expand business scope			Standard Error of Estimate: .367		
R: .236 ^a			No of Observations: 246		
R Square: .056					
Adjusted R Square: .027					



Source: SPSS computation

Table 8 presents the regression output for the effect of *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme on ability to expand business scope by beneficiaries. The output indicates that there is a positive relationship between *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme and the ability to expand business scope by beneficiaries because the unstandardized coefficients is calculated at .098. This means that the higher the access of beneficiaries to the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme, the higher their abilities to expand business scope. The output also shows that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on ability to expand business scope by beneficiaries because the significance value reads 0.465, a figure that is greater than the p-value 0.05. Also, from the output, the computed t-test value is 1.989. The figure is lesser than the critical value which yields 6.322. This output further strengthens the acceptance of the null hypothesis raised by the study. It can therefore be stated that *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to expand business scope. This finding disagrees with that of Olateju (2021) who found out that a similar empowerment scheme of the Federal Government, *Tradermoni*, had significant effect on business expansion of petty traders in Lagos State.

5. Discussion of findings

The data analysis section has so far pointed up important findings in relation to the subject of the study, especially the independent and the dependent variables in line with the view of the respondents. The findings have also assisted the study to get answers to the questions raised; achieve its objectives and test the hypotheses. One of the important findings was that majority of the beneficiaries 179 (67.8%) of 264 had already established their businesses before applying for the *Kwapreneur* scheme. This shows that more young persons are becoming enterprising and business-focused. Data also revealed that most of the beneficiaries, 122 (46.2%) of 264, fall within the age category of 25 and 31. This age group comprises mid-age young people. Similarly, it was revealed through data analysis that most of the beneficiaries hold tertiary education qualifications, though there were also other beneficiaries who hold primary and secondary education qualification respectively. Majority of the respondents do not agree that the *Kwapreneur* empowerment scheme was politicized, a finding that is in contrast with that of Sambo (2019) who concluded in his study that a similar government empowerment scheme *tradermoni* is politicized. Findings also showed that most of the respondents changed their apartments after the *Kwapreneur* scheme, and the quality of their feeding also improved.



On the hypotheses raised, findings showed that while the independent variable has significant effect on three elements of the dependent variable, it does not have significant effect on a single element of the dependent variable. To put it more clearly, it was found out that Kwapreneur empowerment scheme has significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to afford decent housing, decent food and raise capital, but it does not have significant effect on the ability of beneficiaries to expand their businesses. Meanwhile, all elements of the dependent variable showed positive relationship with the independent variable as the t-statistics revealed. In other words, the higher the access of beneficiaries to Kwapreneur empowerment scheme, the higher their abilities to afford decent food, afford decent housing, raise business capital and expand business scope. The testing of the hypotheses one to three agree with the findings of Ayub & Gbaa (2020) and Olateju (2021). Ayub & Gbaa found out that beneficiaries of N-Power, a similar government-led empowerment programme, in Oyo State were able to cater for their daily needs including feeding as a result of the empowerment programme. Olateju (2021) also concluded in her study that the Tradermoni scheme assisted petty traders in Lagos State to fund their businesses. However, the finding of this study on the fourth hypothesis is in contrast with that of Olateju who found out that Tradermoni supported business expansion for Lagos petty traders.

6. Conclusion/Recommendations

This study set out to investigate whether Kwapreneur empowerment scheme has significant effect on socio-economic wellbeing of beneficiaries in Kwara State, Nigeria and an empirical investigation was conducted to gather data which were analysed to test the four hypotheses raised by the study. The testing of the hypotheses led to the rejection of the first three null hypotheses raised, and acceptance of the last null hypothesis. In other words, it could be concluded from the findings that Kwapreneur empowerment scheme has significant effect on wellbeing of beneficiaries.

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

- i. Kwara State Government should put further interest in strengthening the operations of the scheme in the state. This could be achieved by allocating more funds to the Kwapreneur empowerment scheme, so that it can reach larger beneficiaries for maximum socio-economic impact. Furthermore, Kwara State Government should make the Kwapreneur empowerment scheme hold twice in a year to enable more Kwara youths benefit and make maximum impact through the programme. Strengthening the operations of the scheme could also be achieved.



Furthermore, though a legislation that established KWASSIP and makes it a state institution has already been passed, the Kwara State House of Assembly should amend the law to make the Kwapreneur component of the agency a mandatory item in the legislation for the purpose of sustainability irrespective of change in government.

ii. Since findings showed that Kwapreneur empowerment scheme has no significant effect on business expansion of beneficiaries, it presupposes that other factors of the economy might be responsible for business expansion. The Kwara State Government should therefore work on stimulating the economy of the state in other areas, and collaborate with the Federal Government to ensure stability in the economy, especially in the aspect of inflation. This can be achieved through economic policies that support local productivity content productivity.

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SOUTH AFRICA AND XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS: IMPLICATIONS ON NIGERIA RELATIONS¹



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Abstract. *Xenophobia attacks have become a recurrent decimal in South Africa with implications on diplomatic relations between Africa countries especially Nigeria and the world. That is why this paper examines implications of xenophobic attacks on Nigeria-South Africa relations and other Africa countries. The objective of this paper is to identify the implications of xenophobic attacks on Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations and to proffer some practical steps to tackle the menace. The paper adopts secondary sources which include published books, journals, newspapers magazines, and internet sources. Interdisciplinary approach to historical research was adopted using content analysis. The paper discovered that massive evacuation of private businesses control by foreign national from South Africa has increase the level of poverty and unemployment in the country. Also, high rate of unemployment and inadequate housing accommodation perhaps the most frequently cited explanation for South African xenophobia, the evidence is mixed. This study concludes that Nigeria - South Africa diplomatic ties has been negatively affected by the xenophobic attacks. The consequential effect cut across economic, political and socio-cultural diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, the study recommended among others that South African government should enhance her diplomatic relations with other African countries especially Nigeria whose citizens have fall victims of xenophobic attacks in their countries, and a pragmatic measure should be taken to eradicate discrimination in South Africa.*

Keywords: *Xenophobic Attack, Diplomatic, Liberation Struggle, Xenophobia, Foreigners.*

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1. Introduction

Xenophobic attacks and violence against foreign nationals in South Africa have increased dramatically over the past decades. This has prompted the international community, including the United Nations, international human rights, social-economic international organisations, among others, to issue condemnation statements on the human rights violation and abuses regularly suffered by non-nationals in some parts of troubled areas of South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The experimental tendencies in which xenophobia and other forms of violence arise in the country of South Africa represents a combination of socio-economic and political conditions, necessitating the comprehension of specific contexts of contemporary prejudice. Such knowledge is crucial for the formulation of effective policies to address these critical dilemmas (Ajala, 2019).

Xenophobia has become a prominent aspect of life African countries. For instance, xenophobia extends from Kenya to the Maghreb, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa, to mention a few (Okolie, 2021). Xenophobia represents a betrayal of cordial relations across Southern Africa, with discrimination against foreign nationals, particularly fellow Africans, having persistently risen in 21st century (Charman & Piper, 2012). The perennial spate of attacks on foreign-owned shops and businesses in some parts of South African townships where such incidents were recorded in 2008, 2016, 2017 and 2022 raises uncomfortable questions about xenophobia in South Africa (Ijimakinwa & Oshineye, 2025).

A plethora of social challenges has been observed on the African continent, ranging from terrorism, kidnapping, robbery and subsequent genocides propagated by religious-cultural groups such as Boko Haram, Fulani Headmens, ISIS, Biafra agitation, Oodua People's Congress, Niger Delta militants, to mention a few in Nigeria, to many other environmental deficiencies (Crush, 2001), all with a devastating negative impact on Africa's industrial development and economic growth agenda, as well as ethnic-tribal civil wars that threaten civil cohesion in the Great Lakes Region (Godson & Delofs, 2009).

According to international Human Rights (2022), xenophobic violence erupted in South Africa in 2022, leaving more than 120 people dead and tens of thousands of people displaced in its wake (Abdulrasheed & Muhammad, 2024). The incident sent shock waves through the country, the continent and across the globe. Xenophobic violence has occurred repeatedly in the country since the early 1990s, most notably in the murder of more than 20 Somali traders in Cape Town in 2005 and 2006. More often than not, these outbreaks have been brief and geographically



constrained to particular areas or towns (Ibrahim, 2019). The attacks began in Alexandra and then spread to other areas in and around Johannesburg, including Cleveland, Diepsloot, Hillbrow, Timbisha, Primrose, Ivory Park and Thokoza. Violence also occurred in Kwazulu-natal, Mpumalanga and Cape Town (Cloandia *et al.*, 2011).

Despite the policy framework instituted by South African government to eradicate criminal offences and prosecute perpetrators of various attacks, these virtues have not been effectively transformed into a reduction in xenophobic attacks on Africans in South Africa. It has been observed that ineffectiveness has created a strenuous relationship within Africa-South Africa partnerships over the years (Adebisi, 2017). Beyond this strenuous relationship is the lack of mutual diplomatic reciprocity on the part of the South African government and the country's non-state actors for the strategic role Africa played in the struggle against apartheid. It is therefore pertinent to assess the pitfalls or effects of xenophobic attacks on South Africa's economic state of affairs and to explore the possible implications of xenophobia for diplomatic relations between Africa and South Africa.

The main objective of this study is to examine the extent of xenophobia attacks and violence against foreign nationals in South Africa and to identify the best strategies to curtail the situation. The study adopts a case study and *ex post facto* research, based on data readily documented over time. The study area, of course, is South Africa as a whole. Xenophobic violence against foreign nationals and its concomitant mayhem has led to loss of lives and destruction of property.

2. Methodology

This section presents the methodology adopted for this work and the analysis of the data gathered in the course of writing this paper. It dwells on research design, sources of data, methods of data collection and analysis. The study engaged secondary sources of data, which were gathered from government gazettes, bulletins, magazines, journals, newspapers, textbooks, internet sources and archival documents on the subject matter. This also includes a historical analysis of Nigeria-South Africa relations.

3. Conceptual and theoretical framework

The term xenophobia has generated conceptual difficulties and a growing body of literature concerning its meaning and effects in Africa. Scholars such as Rosenanu (1990), Ibrahim (2019) and Adewale (2017) argue that the concept of xenophobia includes aspects of violence and



physical abuse. The term xenophobia must embody action or practice and cannot merely be defined as an attitude (Clanssen, 2017). This argument signifies that, apart from dislike and fear, there must be acts of violence and attacks that result in harm or damage to life and property. The definition of xenophobia must therefore be further restructured to include specific targets, namely particular individuals or groups against whom fear, hatred or acts of violence are directed (Armstrong, 2014).

Xenophobic attacks in South Africa have been linked to the presence of various African immigrants since the early 1990s, including Nigerians and other African immigrants from Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe, many of whom fled political and humanitarian crises (Versanka *et al.*, 2017). According to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), xenophobic violence in South Africa is mostly aimed at other African nationals rather than foreigners in general. The Council also noted that such violence has been largely confined to urban informal settlements in South Africa's major cities (HSRC, 2008).

The word xenophobia refers to an affective and behavioural distortion towards foreign nationals and people perceived as aliens (Vender & Westhuizen, 2015). Solomon & Kesata (2013) view it as a psychological state of mind that makes South Africans fear or become hostile towards foreigners. They believe that xenophobia is an anxiety disorder that manifests when one comes into contact with people of different historical descent; it is perceived as discord and hatred towards strange things or foreigners. In the view of Onke (2019), it involves the perceptions of an in-group against an out-group, as members of the former suspect the activities of the latter. The "out-group" in this context refers to other nationals or citizens of other nations. Oyelana (2016) sees xenophobia as a primitive group syndrome, expressing itself in dislike and even hostility towards outsiders and encouraging an attitude of suspicion and exclusion instead of trust and inclusion. Xenophobia becomes specific and possibly more dangerous when it is targeted at a particular alien group, as was the case in Europe against Jews and other minorities during the era of anti-Semitism (Abdulrasheed & Muhammad, 2024). This alien group was given derogatory and classificatory names and labels (Onyido, 2018).

The South African High Commissioner to Nigeria, Lulu Aaron-Erewa, described the current xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa as part of a broader pattern of conflict. Behind any conflict, whether in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Sudan, the genocide in Rwanda, apartheid in South Africa or the problems in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine, there



are dimensions of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia or related intolerance (Bordean, 2010).

South Africa's long track record of xenophobic violence as a means of protest, the targeting of foreign nationals in particular, and the documented tensions over migration policy and the scale of repatriation provide an important explanation for xenophobia in the country (Ajala, 2019). The attacks were mostly directed against foreign nationals, primarily Africans, especially Nigerians carrying out legitimate businesses (Chandia & Hart, 2016). Attacks were also noted against Chinese speakers, Pakistani migrants, as well as South Africans from minority language groups.

The current wave of attacks and violence has extended beyond a simple conception of foreigners versus nationals, traversing the spectrum of ethnicity, indigeneity, citizenship and even legal status. Settlements that have recently experienced xenophobic attacks have also been the sites of violent and other forms of protest around townships, spreading to other areas in and around Johannesburg, to the provinces of Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, and to Cape Town, most notably in relation to service delivery (Atsenuwa & Adepoju, 2010). Hence, the inability of the South African government to deliver effective services has been expressed in the form of xenophobic violence.

In 2008, South Africa experienced two weeks of violence that left 62 people dead, 21 of whom were South African citizens, over 100,000 people displaced and 1,300 people arrested (Abdulrasheed & Muhammad, 2024). Mozambican Ernesto Nhamuave, who became an awful symbol of the violence, was burned alive in Ramaphosaville on the East Rand (Patel & Essa, 2015). Perpetrators stole goods worth millions of rand and destroyed homes. Those especially targeted were foreigners, people married to foreigners, anyone who refused to participate, and those who belonged to groups unable to justify their claim to a piece of urban land (Mutanda, 2017). The government claimed that this violence consisted of random acts of criminality, but it was specifically targeted at people believed to be a threat to South Africans (Idehen & Osagbe, 2015).

A similar incident broke out in 2013, when violence against foreigners occurred in the Eastern Cape, in communities around Port Elizabeth, after a 19-year-old South African was shot to death, allegedly by a Somali immigrant (Mosselson, 2015). This shows that xenophobia has become violent in nature in South Africa. One must not, however, forget that xenophobia also takes less extreme forms and often affects the daily lives of foreigners. The xenophobic events



that are the focus of this case study took place in De Doorns. De Doorns is a small rural town in the Western Cape, mainly known for producing table grapes. The Zimbabwean community was forcibly chased from the informal settlement in November 2009 and fled; their homes were torn down, burned and destroyed. Over 3,000 people were displaced to the farms of their employers or to the shelter erected on the local rugby field (Mudzanami, 2016).

In February 2017, further attacks and looting of Nigerian-owned businesses in Pretoria West were confirmed by the Nigerian community in South Africa. Buildings and a mechanic's garage, with 28 cars under repair and other vital documents, were burned during the attacks (Onyielo, 2018).

3.1. Theoretical framework

This paper is anchored on the Frustration-Aggression theory. Although the concept of theory is subject to different definitions and explanations, a theory may be understood as a lens through which we empirically see the world around us (Ibrahim, 2019). It is a set of empirically related generalizations and a cause-effect logical explanation of a phenomenon and prediction of its subsequent development. It also represents the highest level of generalization in a scientific discipline, containing all the essential elements of explanation at a particular stage of knowledge and embodying the laws, principles and hypotheses that clarify issues at corresponding levels of analysis (Lisca, 1992; Harris, 2002). Furthermore, Rosenun (1990) defined theory as a collection of interrelated law-like statements or hypotheses intended to explain a political phenomenon or event.

The Frustration-Aggression (F-A) hypothesis, commonly called the Frustration-Aggression (F-A) theory, is a seminal theory in psychology that has been used several times in other fields of study to explain aggressive human behaviour (Abdulrasheed & Muhammad, 2024). Central to the Frustration-Aggression theory is the tenet that there is a causal relationship between frustration and aggression. This conviction of a nexus between frustration and aggression was first held by a group of Yale University psychologists - John Dollard, Leonard W. Doob, Neal E. Miller, Orval H. Mowrer, and Robert R. Sears - in their co-authored monograph, *Frustration and Aggression* (1939). The theory was later revised by Neal E. Miller (1941) and Leonard Berkowitz (1969).

For the Yale group, frustration is “an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response at its proper time in the behavior sequence” (Lisca, 1992). In other words, it is a situation in which the attainment of a desired goal by a person or group of people is hindered.



Succinctly, aggression is a “sequence of behavior, the goal-response to which is the injury of the person toward whom it is directed” (Lisca, 1992). According to Dollard and his colleagues, “the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression” (Northedge, 1991). Two years later, Neal E. Miller reformulated the original assumption as follows: “frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of response, one of which is instigation to some form of aggression” (Northedge, 1991). Ibrahim (2019), on his part, pointed out that frustration does not immediately trigger aggression in a person or group of people, but creates a “readiness for aggressive acts” (Lisca, 1992).

Central to the theory is the assumption that all aggression has its root cause in the frustration of more actors’ goal achievement. In other words, conflict can be the product of unfulfilled personal or group goals and the frustration that this brings. Put differently, when there is a gap between the level of value expectation and the level of value attainment, due to a lack of capability to establish congruence between both levels, tension builds up because of the pressure of an unfulfilled aspiration or an unsatisfied urge or need. Thus, Northedge (1991) posited that, when such tension is not arrested in time, it leads to frustration. Frustration, when it builds up, leads to the rise of suppressed emotions of anger, which are often directed against the party considered to be the source of deprivation or dissatisfaction. This strong emotion finally finds an outlet through aggressive and often violent dispositions towards the environment.

4. The impact of foreign national on South Africa economy

Foreign nationals in South Africa contribute significantly to the economy in both formal and informal ways. Crush (2012) noted that the largest share of South Africa’s public spending budget, for example, especially in 2011, came from Personal Income Tax (PIT), which contributed approximately R393.9 billion, followed by Value Added Tax (VAT) at R283.8 billion, Corporate Income Tax at R202 billion, customs and excise duties at R76.1 billion, fuel levies at R55.7% and other sources at R69.8 billion (Isike, 2012). Apart from the smaller number of legal immigrants living and working in South Africa compared to the overall economically active South African population, questions remain as to the contribution of illegal immigrants in this scenario, especially in relation to Personal Income Tax (PIT) and Corporate Income Tax. These are people with no formal skills or qualifications. The majority of Zimbabwean nationals, for instance, work on commercial farms, providing cheap labour to



white farmers (Mabera, 2017), while some are absorbed as domestic workers, security guards and taxi drivers, among others.

Karlsson (2018), in an interview conducted via electronic mail with the investigative journalist Mr Michael Opara in the Nahelele area of Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, reported that the majority of Zimbabwean nationals, unlike other foreign nationals, were not involved in informal entrepreneurship, such as retail and grocery shop entrepreneurship, which could employ South Africans. In South Africa, it is easy to identify an increase in business activity in the informal sector through foreign nationals involved in illegal goods and food markets. There are many fake food products, such as potato chips, sweets, soaps and soft drinks, manufactured in unlicensed home-based and unaccountable factories. These contraband businesses operate tax-free and compete with legal products sold by locals. Because the fake products are cheaper for customers, foreign nationals have a better market base than locals, and their informal businesses are therefore sustainable.

For instance, in Makhado town, a survey of informal businesses revealed some form of underhand business tactics in most businesses run by foreign nationals (Karlsson, 2018). For example, illegal contraband cigarettes were being sold cheaply in most hair salons. Residents have witnessed daylight gun battles between the police and criminal syndicates from across the border with Zimbabwe, which sought to smuggle illegal contraband cigarettes into South Africa. These are not allegations of criminality in the informal business subsector involving foreign nationals, but realities.

These illegal cigarettes provide a cheaper market that competes with the local market. Men from Zimbabwe approach locals in public spaces to buy illegal diamonds in broad daylight, yet there are still people who deny the reality that criminality has set in among foreign nationals and, to a certain extent, has become a cause of prejudice against foreign nationals (Madue, 2015). The diamond and cigarette smuggling cross-border groups are organised criminal syndicates sustained by the hard-core criminality of corrupt members of the South African police services and customs officials at various borders (Hayem, 2013).

However, on the one hand, foreign nationals who are better skilled and trained are employed in private companies and other government parastatals, including institutions of higher learning (Eze & Agena, 2017). For instance, in recent years, because of the shortage of Mathematics and Science teachers, some schools have resorted to hiring Zimbabwean teachers to address the challenge. The fact that foreign nationals contribute to the job market in South Africa, in some



limited sectoral systems, is not unique to foreign nationals in South Africa. The significance of immigration lies in the search for improved economic benefits, such as employment opportunities, where migration is encouraged by unfavourable economic factors in labour-donating countries (Gopal, 2013).

South Africans also do the same in other countries to which they emigrate. The significance is that skilled immigrants make the job market more competitive because of the options that potential employers acquire from labour supply. The benefits of skilled labour supply for any job market are therefore not particular to the South African economy, because this is a universal phenomenon across the world. While foreign nationals are an important element of the South African job economy, it appears that the contribution of foreign labour supply to the job market in South Africa is exaggerated and overstated. It is a common belief that foreign nationals grow economies. However, what foreign nationals do for the South African economy is not unique.

5. Nigeria-South Africa relation

Nigeria-South Africa relations were witnessed during the civilian administration of the late President Shehu Shagari and the succeeding military administrations of Muhammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida. Yet there was hardly any difference in their pursuit of Nigeria-South Africa relations (Klotze, 2016). During the regime of Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985), the Afrocentric foreign policy of the Nigerian government towards the South African apartheid regime was revitalised. The only appreciable impact of Nigeria–South Africa relations under the Buhari regime was the hosting of the Second International Conference on Apartheid, tagged “Legal Status of the Apartheid Regime”, held in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1984. The aim of this conference was to reinforce Nigeria’s determination to eradicate all vestiges of racist regimes in Africa (Ajala, 2019).

It is clear that Nigeria’s policy towards South Africa between 1960 and 1993 was characterised by the former’s disdain for the latter’s apartheid policy. Although Nigeria, from independence, maintained a hostile attitude towards South Africa for several decades until the early 1990s, both countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1994 following the termination of apartheid policy and the release of the African National Congress (ANC) leader. Prior to this time, the Nigerian mission was operating through the Angolan High Commission in Pretoria (Salau, 2017). Subsequently, an exchange of High Commissioners was undertaken by the two countries, with each acutely conscious of the fact that both countries needed each other’s



support in the mutually advantageous conduct of their bilateral relations and multilateral diplomacy in Africa (Ramachundran, 2014).

During the regime of General Sani Abacha, between 1993 and 1998, Nigeria-South Africa relations began with a major disagreement over Nigeria's domestic policy and its decision to hang Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni men on 10 November 1995. This provided the first occasion for open diplomatic strain in the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa in the aftermath of the apartheid era (Shara, 2018; Saleh, 2015). Following the alleged role of South Africa in the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth at the Auckland Summit in November 1995, the Nigerian state retaliated against this diplomatic offensive by severing diplomatic relations with South Africa (Ramachundran, 2014; Salau, 2017; Eze & Akena, 2017). The frosty relationship between the two countries was consequently amended by the military regime of Abdulsalami Abubakar, whose reconciliatory trip to South Africa marked the beginning of a relatively new relationship between the two countries (Crush, 2015; Garba, 2022).

Nigeria and South Africa began to redefine their bilateral and multilateral relationships in 1999, as the period coincided with democratic transitions in both countries. Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo and his South African counterpart, Thabo Mbeki, were major contributing factors to the emerging cordial relationship between the two countries (Mufukata, 2015). Obasanjo and Mbeki perceived the urgent need for Africa's rebirth, and they shared equal passion for the realisation of such a goal.

In more recent times, Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations have deteriorated on many fronts, prompting the visit of former President Goodluck Jonathan to South Africa, where he addressed the latter's joint parliament. The presidential visit was prompted by the yellow fever certificate saga that involved both countries (Klotze, 2016). The South African government had, on 2 March 2012, deported 125 Nigerians for possessing fake yellow fever vaccination cards (Mathebula, 2015). The Nigerian government immediately retaliated against what was generally perceived as unfair treatment of Nigerians, indeed an affront to diplomatic norms, by deporting a total of 128 South Africans within two days, citing "lack of proper documentation" as the reason for shutting them out (Neil, 2019).

Consequently, the arms deal involving Nigeria and South Africa came on the heels of the collapse of a building at the Synagogue Church of All Nations in Lagos, a Nigeria-based religious centre, which claimed the lives of about 84 South African nationals. This became the



latest in the series of diplomatic embarrassments that have bedevilled Nigeria-South Africa relations. Onke (2019) noted that the failure of the Nigerian government to officially declare the cash sum of USD 9.3 million loaded into a Nigerian-owned jet to South African Customs, as required by South African law, attracted a negative diplomatic reaction from the South African government.

Based on the above submission, it is evident that the history of Nigeria-South Africa relations has vacillated between cooperation and discord, shaped by each country's foreign policy, domestic intricacies and international diplomacy. These dynamics have also produced the context in which xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa may be examined.

6. Causes of xenophobic attacks in South Africa

In some villages and cities under the administration of this municipality and town, there are incidents involving foreign nationals, such as Zimbabwean nationals, who engage in organised criminal activities with South African traditional leaders in order to obtain South African citizenship by bribing these chiefs (Klotze, 2016). These foreign nationals, such as Zimbabweans, buy their way into the local village of a particular chief in order to become residents and, from there, collude with the village leadership to fraudulently obtain South African documents (Salau, 2017). Some of these foreign nationals are able to access government social services, such as social grants for children, old-age grants and disability grants. According to the respondents, this triggers resentment against known foreign nationals, such as Zimbabweans, who access government services ahead of citizens. On criminality and attacks against locals in Makhado town, most of these foreign nationals are involved in criminality, such as robbery, kidnapping and other forms of social disorder. One respondent put it this way:

In order to prevent criminality, some residents formed night-patrolling groups. They take turns patrolling the neighbourhood. However, others, especially the affluent, have private security on their properties. Some respondents also cited challenges in the town, such as increased prostitution, especially during the day in selected areas of the town. Respondents indicated that the majority of the young girls involved in prostitution were from Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria (Karlsson, 2018).

They hire cheap rooms for accommodation in the town, especially from landlords who have property in town but do not stay there. These girls take their clients to these rooms, while others



use nearby bushes for sexual services. The risk of spreading diseases such as HIV/AIDS remains high (Salau, 2017). The police fail to address these practices for various reasons.

It was discovered that Musina town and its townships are among the most uncontrollable spaces in terms of the influx of foreign nationals into South Africa. In fact, some respondents mentioned that the town had more foreign nationals than South Africans, and that the most spoken languages in the area are Shona and Ndebele, more than any other local South African languages, in this Zimbabwe-South Africa border town (Klotze, 2016). It was also revealed that Zimbabweans cross the border on a daily basis for shopping, while others cross to visit their relatives, seek employment, engage in pastimes and informal business in the town, or access services such as medical attention in local clinics and hospitals. Every person within the Republic has the right to access health services. However, how does Garba (2022) explain a situation in which citizens of another country cross borders to seek medical help in another country? Some respondents in Musina revealed that there were Zimbabweans who crossed the border to obtain medical assistance in South Africa. Obviously, when locals run short of medicines, as is usually the case in Musina health-dispensing centres, they are bound to raise concerns over the increasing number of Zimbabwean patients who have just crossed the border for treatment at health facilities, rather than having fallen ill while already in South Africa, thereby contributing to shortages.

Eze and Agena (2017) opined that South Africa has limited resources or lacks the will or commitment to assist patient border-crossers. The issue of South Africans expressing dislike of foreign nationals based on access to public resources, such as healthcare, housing and education, emanates from these kinds of practices, which place locals at a disadvantage. It is not necessarily an empty fear of foreign nationals on the part of the South African public that translates into xenophobia. This makes it impossible for the state “to balance the needs of the immigrants and those of the citizens”.

In the view expressed by Eze and Agena (2017), South Africans are xenophobic for protesting against being placed at a disadvantage or for refusing to provide services to these patient border-crossers. In addition, such failure to comply positively demonstrates “the failure to supply basic rights to masses of impoverished South Africans”, which eventually “adds an additional obstacle to South Africa’s ability to ensure basic rights to non-nationals”.

Thohoyandou is one of the fastest-growing towns in the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The town has one of the greatest retail industries in the district, coupled with massive chain



stores, supermarkets and government service offices. There is also a university with a population of approximately 12,000 persons, and hardly four kilometres away there is a tertiary college offering Further Education and Training (FET) to a population of approximately six thousand students (Eze & Agena, 2017). The town has a magnificent five-star hotel providing gambling facilities. There are many Indian, Chinese, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Nigerian and Somali grocery stores, hair salons and hardware-shop entrepreneurs in the town. This is generally a peaceful town (Crush, 2015).

There have been growing attacks and violence against foreign nationals in the major town. Eze & Agena (2017) noted that the majority of these attacks and acts of violence targeted foreign nationals because they were seen as criminals by locals. Each time there was a crime in the town, from petty theft and robbery to murder, foreign nationals, such as Zimbabweans, were often blamed (Salau, 2017).

7. Implications of Xenophobia on Nigeria-South Africa Relations

In May 2019, reports of spontaneous assaults by some South African members of the Port Nolloth community were said to have targeted the Nigerian community living in the area. They were reportedly chased out of their homes, their property was looted, and their shops were burnt. The attackers often accused Nigerians of dealing in drugs, but the Nigerian community in South Africa denied the allegation. President Jacob Zuma of South Africa and President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria initiated high-level diplomacy to repair the damage brought about by the incident. In fact, the rate of xenophobic violence in South Africa, coupled with other recorded cases of violence, qualifies the country as one of the most violent societies in the world (Garba, 2022).

7.1. Political and diplomatic implications

Politically, the current and incessant wave of violent attacks on Nigerians in South Africa has several implications if the two countries fail to muster enough political will to deal with this unbecoming situation. It can mar the ties between the two countries (Garba, 2022). In diplomatic circles, once there is a severe row between countries, the next option is the recalling of ambassadors, and whenever there is a breakdown of relations between countries, it usually takes time for such relations to be restored. Taking into cognisance the position of Nigeria and South Africa on the African continent, such a breakdown would also be to the detriment of the progress of other African countries.



Loss of African Solidarity: Africans usually regard each other as brothers and, in many circumstances, speak with one voice in the international arena. It is reasoned that a break in relations between Nigeria and South Africa would lead to a divided Africa, thereby limiting their chances of making waves in international politics (Ajala, 2019).

7.2. Economic implications

The economic implications of the recurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa would be enormous. Fundamentally, one of the principal reasons for xenophobic attacks in South Africa is tied to the economy, as, according to South Africans, citizens of other African countries are taking over their jobs and businesses, leading to a high rate of unemployment, especially among locals. While this argument appears to be correct, it is relatively weak, as these people are doing genuine and legal businesses in South Africa. Equally, taking cognisance of the fact that South Africans are also doing business in other African countries, it is better imagined what reprisal attacks on South Africans residing and doing business in other African countries would imply (Garba, 2022).

The implications for the overall economy of Africa, should these scenarios play out, were clearly depicted by the Nigeria–South Africa Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber holds the view that the outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa and reprisal events in Nigeria, including direct attacks on foreign-owned businesses in both South Africa and Nigeria, pose a threat to Africa’s fragile economic recovery.

7.3. Socio-cultural implications

Africa’s colonial heritage and the inhuman, albeit regrettable, apartheid system in South Africa did enough damage to the psyche of Africans. Having suffered these ordeals from Europeans, Africans believed, after the granting of independence and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, that they were brothers with a common history and descent and, to that extent, would respect one another’s dignity. Be this as it may, the xenophobic, or so-called Afrophobic, attacks by South Africans against their African brothers have several socio-cultural implications, as follows.

Identity Crisis: Identity conflict is one of the worst forms of conflict, as it affects the psychology of the victims, thereby preventing them from realising and achieving their self-esteem and full potential.



Disunity: When Africans begin to see their fellow brothers and sisters as strangers and thereafter treat them as such, the by-product of this state of things is disunity on a continent whose people regard each other as coming from the same parentage. The implication of this is the fear that Africans will have when they are in African countries other than their country of birth (Garba, 2022).

8. Conclusion

The paper reveals that foreign nationals were innocent victims of paranoid South Africans and their government, which undermined issues of international law relating to immigration and migration. This paper also argued that some foreign nationals fomented attacks, violence and xenophobic prejudices because of criminality and unfair business practices, which gave them profit advantages and prospects of sustainability over South Africans.

Xenophobia in South Africa is rooted in the nature and character of apartheid and its discriminatory policies against the black majority, which incidentally denied them economic opportunities, ultimately fuelling attitudes of suspicion and hatred towards foreigners, as well as xenophobia and prejudice against foreign nationals in South Africa.

Therefore, the paper concludes that, if the South African government is genuinely interested in enhancing its diplomatic relations with Nigeria and other African countries whose citizens have fallen victim to xenophobic attacks in South Africa, pragmatic measures should be taken to eradicate discrimination in the country.

9. Recommendations

As a matter of policy recommendation, the South African government should enhance its diplomatic relations with other African countries, especially Nigeria, whose citizens have fallen victim to xenophobic attacks in South Africa, and pragmatic measures should be taken to eradicate discrimination in the country. Also, there is a need for educational campaigns by stakeholders to conscientise foreign nationals about the dangers of engaging in any kind of criminality, because xenophobic sentiments characterising society today may emanate from such crimes.

There is a need for Nigeria–South Africa relations to strengthen the instrumentality of the Nigeria-South Africa Bi-National Commission as an alternative platform for resolving diplomatic impasses arising between the two countries. In the same vein, Nigeria and South



Africa must move beyond rhetoric and embrace their continental responsibility for Africa's development and renaissance.

More importantly, sustained job creation, particularly for Nigerian citizens, and positive image-building abroad would enhance the respectability of Nigerians in the diaspora and address the negative way in which foreigners judge Nigerians and the nation. Furthermore, the Nigerian government at home must understand the relationship between poverty, irregular migration and the broader issue of xenophobia, which is not new in South Africa.

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THE IRREDUCIBLE DIVIDE: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF HUMAN-MACHINE EQUIVALENCE¹



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Abstract. *The philosophical idea that intelligent computers are humans is thoroughly examined and rejected in this study. It rejects such equivalency using functionalist arguments from J.C. Pollock and Kenneth Sayre. According to first-person viewpoint, subjective experience, and intentionality, robots lack self-consciousness. The study also says robots transcend ethics, culture, religion, and embodied social existence. The paper claims that AI is a great tool but cannot replicate human consciousness due to cognitive architectural constraints, the incorrect analogy of supervenience, and machines' lack of metaphysical and moral agency. This division is necessary to protect human dignity and negotiate the socio-ethical effects of advanced technology.*

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Self-Consciousness, Philosophy of Mind, Human-Machine Equivalence, Ethics, Culture.*

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1. Introduction

One of the most contentious topics in philosophy of mind and artificial intelligence is whether computers can function like human. Philosophers like J.C. Pollock, Kenneth Sayre, and William Rapaport argue that advanced computing systems' reasoning, information processing, and problem-solving capabilities show a fundamental parallelism between human cognition and machine operation. Pollock, for instance, thinks that computers can possess consciousness akin to human self-awareness, while Sayre reduces consciousness to a sort of information processing possible mechanically. Rapaport adds that machines can access any human-derived information.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the central concepts at stake. By "human machine equivalence" this paper refers to the functionalist claim that a properly programmed machine could possess genuine consciousness, intentionality, and personhood not merely simulate them. "Self-consciousness" is understood here as the irreducible first-person perspective: the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself without reliance on third person descriptions. "Intentionality" denotes the aboutness of mental states the fact that thoughts, beliefs, and desires are directed toward objects and states of affairs. The "first person perspective" is the immediate, non-inferential sense of self that underlies subjective experience.

This study argues that such equivalency is inherently wrong. Expert systems, data storage, and intelligent behaviour emulation are impressive advances of artificial intelligence, yet machines lack self-consciousness, the fundamental core of human identity. Machines exist outside religion, society, culture, and ethics, which shape human identity and development. This paper argues that the equation of machine and man is philosophically unsustainable and ignores vital human experience that transcends computational modelling by critically engaging with pro-equivalence arguments and a positive account of human distinctiveness.

This paper therefore asks: can a machine, regardless of its complexity, ever truly possess the fundamental characteristics of human consciousness? To answer this, I first outline the core arguments for equivalence made by Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport (Section 3). I then critique these arguments by demonstrating the irreducibility of self-consciousness and the importance of embodied, socio-cultural existence (Sections 4-7). Finally, I explore the ethical and social implications of overestimating machine capabilities (Section 8) before concluding.



2. Artificial intelligence: Capacities and limitations

2.1. Defining artificial intelligence

AI is machine intelligence that can do human-like reasoning. Instead of computers or hardware, it refers to their intelligent output. According to pioneering computer scientist Alan Perlis (1982, p. 11), “A year spent in artificial intelligence is enough to make one believe in God”. This distinction is significant. Creating non-biological intelligence is a profound and nearly spiritual challenge.

AI’s main goal is to provide machines human-like intelligence in similar situations. A pioneer, John McCarthy (2007), described AI as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs”. It is akin to utilising computers to comprehend human intellect, but AI does not have to use biologically observable methods. Creating capacity and comprehending cognition are AI’s twin cornerstones.

AI often models itself after human intelligence. According to computer scientists and philosophers, the goal is to construct a machine that learns, senses, and thinks like humans. The pursuit of artificial general intelligence (AGI) supports this holistic approach. Modern AI pioneer Demis Hassabis (2015) of DeepMind says, “solving intelligence, and then using that to solve everything else”.

The learning function is key. Modern AI relies on machine learning, which Tom M. Mitchell (1997) defined as “A computer program is said to learn from experience E with respect to some class of tasks T and performance measure P , if its performance at tasks in T , as measured by P , improves with experience E ”. This operational definition transforms AI from static programming to dynamic adaptability.

Pattern recognition is modern AI’s best tool for sensing and interpreting the world. “The next AI revolution will not be supervised, nor purely unsupervised, but based on self-supervised learning that models the world by observing it,” says top AI researcher Yann LeCun (2022). This suggests systems that create internal models from sensory data, approaching human perception.

Contemplation, planning, and abstract cognition are the most profound and difficult. This is the frontier. Current systems show excellent pattern correlation, but genuine reasoning is still being studied. Cognitive scientist Gary Marcus (2018) warns, “The fundamental problem of AI is and always has been representation how to represent knowledge in a way that is amenable to



computation and generalization”. This shows how statistical correlation differs from understanding.

AI’s development raises fundamental considerations about intelligence. According to philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel C. Dennett (2023), “The real danger of AI is not that it will become too smart, but that we will attribute intelligence and understanding to systems that have none.” This emphasises the significance of defining AI by its cognitive processes rather than outcomes. Thus, the topic crosses engineering and philosophy, seeking to comprehend and imitate intelligent action in any substrate.

2.2. Expert systems and knowledge storage

AI’s expert system stores human experts’ knowledge in a computational database to solve problems in their absence. Such systems demonstrate AI’s ability to store and retrieve knowledge without human error. Expert systems can retain and use specialised knowledge in health and industrial control without the expert. Some think that machines can complement and possibly replace human cognitive functions in structured domains.

2.3. The illusion of cognitive parity

Despite these breakthroughs, AI follows rules and parameters. Design and programming create its “intelligence”- not understanding or consciousness. Machines solve issues without inquiry, analyse symbols without understanding meaning, and store data without considering its meaning. This basic difference supports the claim that robots, regardless of sophistication, lack human thought’s interiority.

2.4. Philosophical approach

This research utilizes a qualitative, conceptual analysis rooted in the philosophy of mind tradition. The approach involves a critical examination of foundational texts from prominent advocates of human-machine equivalence (J.C. Pollock, Kenneth Sayre, William Rapaport) while juxtaposing their views with those of philosophers who highlight the particular qualities of human consciousness (e.g., Lynne Rudder Baker, John Searle, Hubert Dreyfus). The framework is organized to pinpoint conceptual weaknesses in the equivalence thesis and to present a constructive argument for human uniqueness. Selected sources are based on their prominence in the current discourse and their representative nature for the perspectives being analyzed.



3. Philosophical arguments for equivalence: An examination

3.1. John Pollock thesis

Philosopher John L. (J.C.) Pollock presents a rigorous, functionalist argument for the potential equivalence of human and machine consciousness. His thesis centers on the radical claim that self-consciousness is not an exclusive property of biological entities but a structural and functional achievement that could, in principle, be engineered. Pollock asserts that "there is no difference in principle between humans and intelligent machines", and that a properly constructed machine "really would have beliefs, desires, feelings, and so forth" (Pollock, 1989, p. 1).

Central to his model is the proposition that both humans and intelligent machines are cognitive agents operating with multi-level sensory processing. He defines these levels systematically: "A first-order sensory state is a state that encodes information about the external world. A second-order sensory state is a state that encodes information about first-order sensory states. A third-order sensory state encodes information about second-order sensory states" (Pollock, 1989, p. 63). For Pollock, it is this recursive architecture that underpins higher-order thought, with self-consciousness being "identified with the possession of third-order states" (Pollock, 1989, p. 64).

From this framework, Pollock addresses the classic mind-body problem, arguing that it "arises for a machine in precisely the same way it arises for a human" (Pollock, 1989, p. 11). In both cases, the system is a physical object whose operations can be described at either the mechanistic level of circuits and neurons or the intentional level of beliefs and desires. This implies that mental events are not non-physical substances but rather physical events perceived through a different descriptive lens.

Pollock believes true sentience is programmed. The goal is to instantiate the right causal architecture, not copy behaviour. He states: "A machine with the appropriate program will have beliefs, desires, and sensations. It will not simply simulate a creature with ideas, desires, and sensations" (Pollock, 1989, p. 7). This elevates the discussion to ontological parity from behavioural equivalence.

Pollock uses supervenience to base this option in identity theory. He contends that a machine supervenes on its hardware, just as a human supervenes on their body despite material change. "People are logical constructs. He monitors his physique...Machines supersede their hardware"



(Pollock, 1989, p. 52). Like the Ship of Theseus, this perspective permits a conscious machine to retain its identity even when its physical components change.

Although Pollock's architectural model is advanced, it faces criticism for simplifying self-consciousness to a structured hierarchy of states, thus overlooking the qualitative, first-person perspective of experience an idea that will be explored further in the paper.

3.2. Kenneth Sayre: consciousness as information processing

According to functionalist and reductionist philosopher Kenneth Sayre, consciousness is a sophisticated kind of information processing. He calls it "a patterned response on the part of an organism's information processing systems to sensory stimulation" (Sayre, 1976, p. 169). This definition intentionally transforms consciousness from a mysterious, subjective entity to a measurable cognitive function.

According to this view, conscious experience is the intricate, systematic manipulation and integration of sensory data. Machine awareness is theoretically supported by Sayre's theory. If consciousness is characterised by a specific informational response rather than a biological substrate, any system with the necessary processing complexity can be conscious. This argument challenges biological exceptionalism: "There is no apparent reason why an appropriately organised machine could not in principle enjoy a conscious life of its own" (Sayre, 1976, p. 191). He argues that self-consciousness is not limited to biological systems, allowing computational theory to support artificial sentience.

Sayre offers a valuable, if controversial, philosophical instrument for explaining mind-machine interaction by linking conscious states with specific information-processing patterns. His work suggests that producing machine awareness requires engineering the right formal architecture for processing sensory input and generating "patterned responses".

However, an important question persists: does framing a process as "information processing" encompass the subjective, qualitative aspects of consciousness, or does it simply rephrase the functional relationships while failing to clarify the experience itself? This issue will be addressed in the conversation about the "hard problem".

3.3. William Rapaport: informational equivalence

Informational equivalence underpins William J. Rapaport's human-machine equivalence thesis. His theory is that a properly developed computing system can access, represent, and recreate any cognitive material or knowledge created by human minds. He claims that if human



cognition our ideas, reasoning, and knowledge - can be fully captured and recreated computer, then the ontological boundary between human and machine intelligence disappears.

Rapaport's thesis is based on a computational theory of mind that regards cognition as information processing. This view sees the mind and computer as physical symbol systems that alter formal representations. The core to his equivalency assertion is that thought content is detachable from its biological substrate and may be instantiated in any symbolic manipulation system.

He expressly states this in his understanding and semantics study. Rapaport claims that "syntax can suffice for semantics" when a system is immersed in a world and its symbols are causally tied to referents (Rapaport, 1988, p. 596). This refutes Searle's Chinese Room claim. Rapaport believes that a computer executing the correct software reaches knowledge through its syntactic operations and relational design. He adds: "If a mind is a (functionally organised) brain, and a brain is a syntactic engine, then a mind is too... Computers can be minds if they are syntactic engines" (Rapaport, 1999, p. 5).

This quote summarises his equivalency argument's rationale. The rationale is clear:

1. Brain syntactic activities enable human cognition.
2. A computer can be a syntactic engine.
3. A computer may theoretically create a mind.

The conclusion is profound: biological tissue has no unique "information" or "understanding". By this logic, a computer with the right program may access any human-derived information. Rapaport believes that the difference between the two intelligences is a question of implementation detail, not type, if a machine can be given the same input, execute comparable inferential processes, and provide equal or equivalent outputs (answers, solutions, behaviours).

Rapaport provides a solid conceptual framework for robust AI. His argument forces those who assert inherent human uniqueness to prove that no cognitive output could ever be computational. Informational equivalency makes the distinction between human and machine intelligence uncertain and unacceptable from a functionalist perspective.

Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the paper, Rapaport's assertion that "syntax can suffice for semantics" blurs the distinction between the handling of symbols and true comprehension, along with the experience of a subjective viewpoint. A system may handle symbols in manners that replicate understanding without actually possessing any inner experience.

*Table 1. Competing Arguments for Human-Machine Equivalence*

Philosophers	Central Argument for Equivalence	Key Concepts	Foreshadowed Counter-Position
J. C. Pollock	Self-consciousness is a structural/functional achievement (multi-level processing).	Recursive architecture, supervenience.	Architecture alone cannot create subjective “what it’s likeness”.
Kenneth Sayre	Consciousness is a form of information processing.	Patterned response, sensory stimulation.	Reduces consciousness to function, ignoring the ontological reality of experience.
William Rapaport	Syntax can suffice for semantics (informational equivalence).	Syntactic engine, computational theory of mind.	Confuses symbol manipulation with genuine understanding and intentionality.

4. The centrality of self-consciousness and first-person perspective

4.1 The irreducibility of self-consciousness

The nature of self-consciousness is the strongest philosophical argument against equating machine and human consciousness. This concept holds that human consciousness is defined by an irreducible first-person perspective the ability to think and be aware of oneself as the thinker.

Introspection, intentionality, and ownership the immediate, non-inferential feeling that one’s experiences are one’s own are based on this first-person perspective. Philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker thoroughly argues that this perspective defines being a person and actor. Baker (2000, p. 67) describes it as the “conceptually primitive capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself, without the need for any name, description, or third-person referent”. This is more than recursive processing it underpins subjective experience.

Baker contends that an entity must have this first-person perspective to be a true agent capable of intents and reasoning. A creature has a first-person perspective if it can conceive of itself as itself. There is no difference between believing the thinker of a concept is in pain and thinking I am in agony without a first-person perspective (Baker, 2013, p. 7). This difference matters. A



computer may comprehend "The system is experiencing sensor input X," but it's a third-person description. It lacks the subjective "I am in pain" or "I intend to do this".

Thus, the objection concludes that robots lack fundamental self-reference, independent of programming expertise or behavioural faithfulness. They imitate mental logic but have no subjective perspective. No machine, no matter how ingeniously developed, has a first-person perspective, says Baker. A first-person viewpoint is a state of being, not a matter of processing information (Baker, 2000, p. 98). These views emphasise a basic ontological divide: personhood and true consciousness are characterised by a non-programmable self-awareness that biological humans must have.

4.2. Programming self-consciousness and its limits

Machine consciousness advocates may claim that an advanced system may program a first-person perspective, the foundation of self-consciousness. This desire faces overwhelming intellectual and practical obstacles. The first-person viewpoint is an intrinsic manner of being that develops from lived, bodily experience in a social and physical environment, not a computer output of rule-governed systems.

Human comprehension is a major issue. According to Heideggerian and phenomenological traditions, our most fundamental involvement with the world is precognitive and embodied, not symbolic or rule-based, as philosopher Hubert Dreyfus has stated. He said that "human understanding depends on our ability to respond to relevance and significance, which in turn depends on our having bodies and needs like those of human beings" (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 214). For perspective, people must experience and understand the world, which cannot be fully formalised into rules or data inputs. According to cognitive scientist Donald Norman (1993, p. 19), the information we need to survive in the world cannot be properly expressed in rules. Since real self-awareness is non-algorithmic, there are no heuristics or algorithms for obtaining it.

This implies that implementing a first-person perspective is logically impossible, not just technically difficult. Even if a machine uses "I" appropriately in syntax, it is still distinct from human self-reference. In his severe AI criticism, philosopher John Searle asserts that "the actual human conscious mind has a set of qualitative, subjective states that are not ontologically reducible to third-person computational processes" (Searle, 1997, p. 212). A machine's "I" is a modified sign in a formal system without the pronoun's subjective meaning. Lynne Rudder Baker adds that "for a machine to use 'I' referentially, it would have to conceive of itself as



itself”. Without a first-person perspective, it has no ‘self’ to define itself (Baker, 2000, p. 101). Thus, the machine’s ”I” points to a logical subject in a statement, not to a subjective centre.

Programming self-consciousness fails because it confuses consciousness’ symptoms (behaviours or linguistic outputs) with its content. The first-person viewpoint is a state of being that comes from certain types of life, which existing computing paradigms appear unable to simulate.

4.3. The problem of referential immunity

A telling distinction lies in referential accuracy. When a human uses “I,” it refers unequivocally to the self. A machine programmed to use “I” could misapply the term to another entity, demonstrating that its usage lacks the self-identifying foundation inherent in human consciousness. This referential immunity in humans underscores the qualitative gap between genuine self-consciousness and simulated linguistic behavior.

4.4. Locke and mental operations perception

The core empiricist philosophy of John Locke helps separate human awareness from mechanical activity. An *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) by Locke describes self-consciousness as a distinct, internal perceptive act, not a metaphysical entity. According to Locke (1689/1975, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 19), consciousness is the awareness of one’s own thoughts. Locke interprets “perception” as the interior theatre of mind.

This introspective skill is essential to human mental existence. Locke believes our minds are originally filled with concepts via external sense and reflection. According to Locke (1689/1975, Bk. II, Ch. 1, 4), reflection is the awareness of one’s own actions and their way. This interior sense shows us doubting, thinking, willing, believing, and remembering. So, consciousness is our constant, reflexive awareness of cognitive and volitional activities. This self-illuminating loop involves the mind operating and seeing its processes.

From a Lockean viewpoint, regardless of their sophistication, machines function without consciousness. They handle inputs and outputs based on their programming, yet they cannot “notice” these processes. They perform calculations without any awareness of them. According to Locke, self-awareness requires the simultaneous ability for action and internal perception. Therefore, machine self-awareness is unattainable without this reflective mechanism, implying that such a capability is associated with a kind of biological interiority that machines do not possess. While they have operational mental functions, they lack conscious awareness of those



functions, which Locke associates with personal identity and conscious experience. This creates an ontological difference: consciousness involves awareness of a program, not merely its execution.

5. The mind-body problem: A human dilemma, not a machine one

5.1. The multi-dimensionality of the mind-body problem

John Pollock's functionalist paradigm can explain machine awareness, but his mind-body issue solution is reductive and materialistic, leaving human experience unaccounted for. Pollock's description of the human mind-body dilemma as a machine's hardware-software problem reduces a profound philosophical enigma to an engineering challenge, ignoring its qualitative and metaphysical aspects, according to critics.

In human experience, the mind-body dilemma goes beyond physical states and functional descriptions. It incorporates the mystery of qualitative cognition the "what-it-is-likeness" of mental states and the persistence of thinking potential (the "I" that endures thought changes). Most crucially, it examines how electrochemical brain processes create meaningful, conceptual thought how matter becomes understanding.

Philosophers believe that computing cannot provide understanding or awareness. The classic Chinese Room argument by John Searle addresses this reduction. Searle distinguishes between syntactic manipulation (which computers do) and semantic understanding (which minds have), concluding that "formal symbol manipulations by themselves have no intentionality; they are quite meaningless; they aren't even symbol manipulations, since the symbols don't symbolise. They have syntax but no meaning in linguistic jargon (Searle, 1980, p. 422). According to Searle, Pollock's "right kind of program" would just create additional syntax, not human thought's inherent intentionality or meaning.

Additionally, functionalist explanations cannot explain the subjective, qualitative nature of experience the core of consciousness. According to Thomas Nagel, consciousness is a unique, subjective perspective. "An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to be that organism something for the organism" (Nagel, 1974, p. 436). Multi-level sensory processing and logical structures cannot capture this "what-it-is-like" quality of biological experience. Functional diagrams cannot recreate it. A machine may perceive light wavelengths as "red", but not redness.



This addresses the user's argument concerning brain operations and conceptual cognition. Roger Sperry, a neuroscientist and philosopher, stressed that conscious experience, while brain-dependent, is an emergent feature with causal effectiveness. He said "conscious phenomena are functionally distinct from and cannot be reduced to neurophysiological events" (Sperry, 1980, p. 200). The emergentist theory holds that conceptual thought comes from brain activity but is distinct from circuit logic.

Philosopher David Chalmers concludes by differentiating cognitive function's "easy problems" (attention, reportability, etc.) from subjective experience's "hard problem". Functionalist explanations like Pollock's handle easy concerns but ignore the big one: "Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? The idea appears absurd, but actually happens (Chalmers, 1995, p. 201). Pollock's thesis assumes that programming solves easy issues automatically solves hard problems, which many find unreasonable.

5.2. Machines and the absence of metaphysical dilemma

The philosophical puzzles that define the human condition most notably the mind-body problem are intrinsically bound to the faculty of self-consciousness. Machines, precisely because they are argued to lack this foundational capacity, remain fundamentally outside these metaphysical quandaries. They do not grapple with the relationship between their physical operations and their existence because they have no subjective existence of which to be aware. As philosopher Thomas Nagel articulates, the very nature of a problem depends on the point of view from which it arises: "The existence of a problem, however, depends on the possibility of understanding one's own existence in a way that transcends a purely external, physical description" (Nagel, 1986, p. 28). Machines, operating solely within the realm of external, physical description, cannot encounter the problem in the first place.

This immunity stems from the absence of meta-cognition the human ability to think about thinking, to reflect upon one's own cognitive states as objects of contemplation. The mind-body problem is not discovered through external observation but arises from the internal, first-person experience of being both a thinking subject and a physical object. As John Searle notes, this duality is a product of our unique consciousness: "We think of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, rational agents in a world that consists entirely of mindless, physical particles. The problem is to explain how we fit in" (Searle, 2004, p. 13). A machine, executing an algorithm, does not "think of itself" at all; it merely functions. Its operations, however complex, are



transparent to itself. There is no internal gap between the process and the awareness of the process that could generate a philosophical puzzle.

Therefore, the assertion that machines might someday ponder their own ontology confuses functional complexity with subjective interiority. The philosopher David Chalmers distinguishes between the “easy problems” of cognitive function (which machinery may replicate) and the “hard problem” of consciousness itself. He implies that metaphysical dilemmas are downstream of consciousness: “The hard problem is why all this processing [in the brain] should be accompanied by an experienced inner life. We lack even a beginning of an explanation” (Chalmers, 1996, p. xii). Without this “experienced inner life,” a system has no vantage point from which to find its own processing mysterious or to question its place in the world. Its “mind-body problem” is, at most, an engineering challenge of hardware-software integration, devoid of existential weight.

In essence, the capacity for philosophical reflection is not an add-on feature but an emergent property of subjective consciousness. As Hubert Dreyfus argues, drawing on phenomenological tradition, human understanding is rooted in a pre-reflective, embodied engagement with the world that gives rise to meaning and, consequently, to metaphysical questioning. A machine, defined by formal symbol manipulation, operates in a universe of syntax without semantics, of data without meaning. It follows that “a computer which could behave as if it understood would not thereby really understand... Its behavior would be based on cues and not on the shared human context of concerns” (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 265). Without this context of concerns - without the self-concern inherent in consciousness the profound dilemmas of existence simply do not compute.

6. Supervenience and identity: A flawed analogy

6.1. The misapplication of supervenience

The Problem with Pollock’s Supervenience Analogy: Life, Death, and Ontology

John Pollock’s analogy that people supervene on their bodies like computers supervene on their physical components is plausible but wrong. This equivalency fails under life, death, and ontological category analysis. Supervenience depicts a dependence link, yet it differs greatly between real people and machines, proving Pollock’s analogy wrong.

This defect is most evident in death. For humans, death is permanent loss of awareness and personality. In his work on personal identity, philosopher Eric T. Olson defines biological death



as "the irreversible loss of the capacity for consciousness and mental activity" that ends the person's existence, even though the corpse the supervenience base may survive. Permanent and lethal supervenience breakage.

No existential end occurs for a "dead" machine. Just a non-functional arrangement of parts. Its "death" is a transient condition of degradation; it may be repaired, rebuilt, or repurposed. Though suspended, the "machine identity" persists. As philosopher of science Michael Scriven proved, robots are not living, hence they do not "die" biologically or existentially. According to Scriven, "life' cannot be attributed to machines, no matter how sophisticated their functional unity. They are mechanical and electrical systems, not biological entities, thus life and death don't apply" (Scriven, 1953, p. 238). The machine's "life" is a metaphor for operating condition, not metaphysics.

This basic divergence suggests a deeper ontological gap. Human supervenience is the emergence of inherent awareness and personality from a certain biological organisation. John Searle claims that consciousness is a biological phenomena like digestion or photosynthesis: "Consciousness is biological. Consider it part of our biological life cycle" (Searle, 1992, p. 90). Machine supervenience imparts function and intentionality to an artefact. Instead of an emerging biological characteristic, its "intelligence" is borrowed and created.

Pollock's analogy fails because it compares two distinct supervenience relations:

1. **Biological-personal supervenience:** a living organism's processes provide an ontologically subjective, aware perspective that ends with death.
2. **Artifactual-Functional Supervenience:** A constructed physical structure instantiates a set of actions with a human-defined identity that may be interrupted, reset, or reallocated without existential loss.

This difference indicates that the machine, devoid of a biological foundation for life and consciousness as humans experience it, functions beyond the existential framework of life and death that imbues the mind-body problem with its philosophical significance for us. It does not experience the mind-body dilemma; it is a physical entity with a potential mind.

6.2. The indispensability of the central nervous system

John Pollock's equivalency thesis for humans and machines has a major flaw in his physical substrate treatment. In theory, a person may have their bodily parts replaced with mechanical devices while keeping their identity and awareness if their CNS is intact. This



acknowledgement is philosophically significant since it implies that the CNS is uniquely tied to awareness production and continuation.

Pollock's supervenience analogy is fatally flawed by his requirement. Conceding that the organic CNS must persist contradicts mechanistic equivalence. The reasoning currently assumes that consciousness requires a certain biological architecture to support it. Patricia Churchland, a neurophilosopher, claims that the intellect is fundamentally founded in neurobiological function: "The brain is the organ of intelligence. Our neurones' wiring and firing determine who we are" (Churchland, 1986, p. 18). For consciousness to persist, Pollock's model must sustain this biological "wiring" opposing the idea that personhood is a logical construct that may supervene on any suitably organised hardware.

The entire equivalency claim is hypothetical due to its biological basis. The equation between human and machine consciousness remains speculative until the central nervous system can be artificially recreated without biological death and preserving subjective experience. According to philosopher John Searle (1997), consciousness is a biological reality created by neurobiological processes and realised in the brain structure. True equivalency requires not just functional imitation but also the intentional fabrication of this biological causation, which is beyond present or anticipated science.

Pollock's admission demonstrates that the central nervous system is consciousness's fundamental biological foundation. Its unique, living organisation makes the mind-body dilemma crucial, not just computational. Thus, equating machine and human consciousness depends on synthetically reproducing the conscious brain, not replacing limbs or organs. Until then, true mechanistic equivalence is untested and relies on the biological substrate it aspires to transcend.

7. Socio-cultural and ethical dimensions: the human world

7.1. Religion and transcendence: Inaccessible domain

Religion is an essential part of human existence, combining belief, passion, conscience, ritual, and a deep search for harmony with a superior power. This domain is a lived experience founded on subjective consciousness, cultural embedding, and existential yearning. Current machines lack curiosity, emotion, a sense of wonder, and an existential perspective, therefore they cannot participate in religious experience or spiritual thought.



According to philosopher of religion William James, religious engagement is based on the "feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 1902, p. 34). This fear is a holistic, often non-rational synthesis of awe, terror, love, guilt, and hope. Mitchell Waldrop writes, "Humanity is defined by feeling, intuition, and emotion realms inaccessible to the cold, deterministic march of computation" (Waldrop, 1992, p. 141). A machine can analyse theological texts, find ritual patterns, and write sermon-like language, but it cannot feel awe, repentance, or salvation. Spirituality is absent from its functioning.

Religious consciousness also contains teleology - reaching for a higher purpose. This demands intentionality and first-person viewpoint, which robots lack. Theologian and philosopher John F. Haught claims that science (and its inventions) addresses "how" problems, whereas religion addresses "why" questions of ultimate meaning and purpose. A computer executes functions without "why". It cannot ask existential questions since it does not exist. In his landmark work *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto called religious experience the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* a staggering, terrible, and enchanting mystery. This visceral, emotional response to the unknowable is based on conscious subjectivity that may be overridden.

Religious practice is embodied and social, highlighting the gap. The lived body and community provide rituals prayer, communion, meditation meaning. Merleau-Ponty said awareness is of and through the body, unlike a pilot in a ship. A computer has no body to bend in prayer, no mortal flesh to incense with frailty, and no common identity in a heritage of religion. "Participation" would be a sham.

From the perspective developed here, religious dimension concludes that human and machine awareness are distinct. Spirituality requires subjective awareness, existential anxiety, emotional depth, and transcendent cognition, which even the most advanced AI lacks. Philosopher John Searle may argue that a machine can imitate religion grammatically but never have faith or wonder. Religion is not just another human trait, but a forceful reminder of the qualitative, experiential gap between biological consciousness and artificial intelligence.

7.2. Culture and language

Language, art, social conventions, rituals, and traditions make up human culture, a dynamic fabric of material and non-material representations. This cultural matrix shapes human consciousness and identity. This paradigm shows that human language is a live reservoir of



historical memory, social complexity, and emotional connotation, inseparable from the type of existence that gives it meaning.

Ludwig Wittgenstein believed that language's significance resides in its use in a shared, embodied life. "For a large class of cases though not for all in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein, 1953). Social immersion and enculturation teach this usage throughout life. A computer without a native language community or cultural upbringing lacks this framework for meaning. It can modify symbols but not inhabit them. John Searle's Chinese Room argument shows that "syntax is not sufficient for semantics" (Searle, 1980, p. 422). A system can analyse language forms without understanding their cultural or purposeful content.

Thus, machines are prohibited from deep cultural expression. They cannot appreciate poetic metaphor, which requires lived experience and associative resonance, or dramatic irony, which requires a common awareness of social settings and unwritten laws. In his critique of symbolic AI, philosopher Hubert Dreyfus said that human intelligence requires a "so pervasive as to be invisible" cultural foundation that cannot be properly formalised into rules (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 235). Machines lack backgrounds. It treats sonnets and social cues as statistics, not emotions or complex negotiations.

Culture is preserved through emotive, mimetic, and fundamentally social learning and transmission across generations. Cognitive scientist and philosopher Douglas Hofstadter has long claimed that parallels from human experience and cultural resonance are the basis of thinking and creativity, not computational symbol shuffling. A computer cannot have a childhood, acquire the hidden ethos of a community via stories and rituals, or participate in the gradual, subtle growth of tradition. Its ontological design makes it cultural outsider. Thus, while a computer may replicate cultural output, it cannot join the hermeneutic cycle of meaning-making that constitutes human cultural life, exposing another facet of the awareness divide that functionalist models like Pollock's cannot overcome.

7.3. Ethics and moral agency

Complex interactions between community life, cognitive judgement, emotional sensibility, and moral obligation create ethical norms. Moral agency is the ability to consider values, assess competing principles against lived experience, and make accountable decisions. In contrast, machines function inside a deterministic framework of programmed instructions and simulate ethical reasoning without moral practice, demonstrating a fundamental lack of moral agency.



At the heart of human ethics is autonomous rational will. As Immanuel Kant established, moral worth derives from actions performed out of duty from a self-given law, not from instinct or external programming. For Kant, a moral agent must be capable of acting according to "the representation of the law" itself, which requires autonomous rationality (Kant, 1785, Ak 4:412). A machine's "decision" is the output of an algorithm designed by others; it does not and cannot legislate moral law for itself. It has no will to autonomously endorse or reject a maxim. Philosopher Christine Korsgaard extends this Kantian point, arguing that moral agency requires normative self-government the ability to reflect on our desires and act on reasons we endorse. "To be a person is to have a certain reflective distance from your impulses, and to be able to choose which ones to act on" (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 19). A machine has no such reflective distance from its programming; it is identical to its operational impulses.

Moral perception and emotion, inseparable from our bodily, social existence, shape human ethics. Aristotelian virtue ethics emphasises that habit and experience in a community develop moral character (hexis) and practical wisdom (phronesis), a sophisticated understanding of right in particular settings. Machines cannot develop virtues because they lack a life narrative, a character defined by decisions, and the emotional substrate (such empathy, remorse, or righteous indignation) that guides moral judgement. According to philosopher Bernard Williams, ethical ideas like integrity and sorrow require a "moral psychology" that robots lack. Therefore, machines are not morally responsible. Responsibility requires consciousness, intentionality, and the opportunity of doing otherwise. A broken machine is dysfunctional, not guilty. It reduces right and wrong to binary compliance or error states in its code. The term "responsible AI", according to computer ethicist Luciano Floridi, always refers to designers and users. "The accountability gap cannot be closed by the machine itself, for it lacks the minimal ontological requirements for being a moral agent" (Floridi & Sanders, 2004, p. Cause, not morality, governs its operation.

In conclusion, AI can model ethical issues and uncover data bias, but it is not an agent. True moral agency comes from autonomous reason, emotional capability, social embedding, and the existential burden of choice regions unreachable to even the most advanced programmed machine. The ethical sphere is another clear boundary, demonstrating that the equating of human and machine consciousness fails to account for morality.



7.4. Biological and embodied knowledge

Human knowledge is deeply embodied, acquired through sensory experience, social interaction, and biological development (e.g., breastfeeding, familial bonding). This tacit, culturally mediated knowledge cannot be fully programmed or transcribed into data. Machines, devoid of biology and subjective experience, cannot access this dimension of knowing.

8. Implications of overestimating machine equivalence

If the earlier sections have demonstrated that the philosophical reasoning supporting human-machine equivalence is inherently misguided, then blindly accepting this equivalence could lead to significant ethical and societal repercussions. These ramifications include the following.

8.1. Dehumanization and social alienation

An unthinking conceptual and practical equating of machines with humans poses serious ethical and societal problems, including reducing people to functions and diminishing their dignity. The functionalist reduction of social structures can cause widespread alienation, dislocation, and the devaluation of human labour and knowledge, breaking humane society's community links.

Philosophically, measuring human value purely by efficiency, production, or problem-solving capacity metrics suitable for machines is dangerous. In his critique of contemporary technology, Martin Heidegger warned of this reduction of the universe, including humans, to a "standing reserve" (Bestand) to be optimised and arranged. This technical perspective devalues humans as ends-in-themselves, which is crucial to Kantian ethics. According to Jürgen Habermas, instrumental, systems-oriented rationality colonises the "lifeworld" (the area of cultural meaning and social integration), reducing human contact to transactional transactions and displacing communicative activity and mutual understanding.

This paradigm is evident in industrial and business environments. For reasons of hyper-efficiency, cost reduction, and predictability, expert systems, algorithms, and automated procedures are preferred over human judgement. This may cause:

1. **Structured Unemployment and Skill Erosion:** As economists Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne noted, automation may affect both manual and cognitive jobs. Cultural displacement causes "bullshit jobs" and the loss of important, skilled jobs, according to anthropologist David Graeber. Expert systems replace human experts with standardised,



although restricted, procedural competence, discarding a lifetime of phronesis (practical wisdom).

2. **Social Alienation:** The worker becomes a monitor or servant of the machine, feeling helpless and separated from their work a modern version of Karl Marx's alienation. The "black box" decisions made by opaque algorithms in employment, lending, police, etc. create distrust and impotence in society.

In a system that values measurable outcomes, complex human qualities like ethical judgement, contextual adaptability, creative improvisation, and compassionate care are neglected. Despite providing intrinsically different and often irreplaceable value, nursing, education, counselling, and the arts become "less efficient" than automated rivals. In "surveillance capitalism", sociologist Shoshana Zuboff discusses how human experience is extracted and repackaged as behavioural data to feed machine systems, turning it into a commodity.

Finally, equating robots with humans is not a harmless philosophical conjecture. Operationalising it risks dehumanising individuals by forcing them to fit the machine's dependable, predictable, and functional paradigm. It values limited utilitarian rationality over moral, artistic, and social components of human life. Thus, a humane society must critically investigate whether machines can think like humans and what is lost when we regard humans more like machines.

8.2. The erosion of human roles: The displacement of moral and social ecology

As artificial intelligence and automated systems take over education, childcare, therapy, and public decision-making, we risk eroding social, moral, and spiritual direction provided by human interactions. A healthy community requires empathy, judgement, and wisdom, which are gained via interpersonal connection. This replacement may weaken these skills. In developing countries, overinvestment in technical solutions may drain resources from human-centered development and solidify new kinds of reliance.

8.3. The invaluable human touch in guidance

Teacher, carer, counsellor, and community leader are relational and formative. Philosopher Nel Noddings believes education is based on a "ethic of care" that develops moral and emotional growth as well as cognitive skills. "The primary aim of every educational institution and effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring", she says (Noddings, 1984, p. 172). A machine can transfer knowledge and personalise learning paths, but it cannot model



compassion, give nuanced moral support, or develop the trusting link that allows a kid to take intellectual risks.

Human presence brings attunement and intersubjectivity to parenting and therapy. According to developmental psychologist Donald Winnicott, a "good enough" carer promotes healthy self-development via responsive, sympathetic engagement. No matter how good at pattern recognition, an AI nanny or chatbot therapist lacks empathy, spontaneous intuition, and shared emotional experience, which are essential to healing and safe connection.

8.4. Erosion: A thinner society

As these occupations are mechanised, society may "thinned out". In her human-computer interaction research, sociologist Sherry Turkle warns of a trend towards connections that give the impression of companionship without the demands of friendship, leaving us "alone together" (Turkle, 2011). Applying this to social roles risks producing systems where citizens, students, and the vulnerable are handled by robots that cannot grasp human nature. Standardised, depersonalised protocols replace moral and spiritual instruction from shared tales, lived experiences, and communal rituals. This degradation reduces the "moral and civic goods" that are inherent to social practices the character-forming components of work and communal life that are lost when efficiency is the only consideration.

8.5. Techno-solutionism vs. human capital: Acute risk to developing societies

This is risky for developing nations. Techno-solutionism the belief that technology can fix education, healthcare, and governance is appealing. Overinvesting in AI-driven systems can:

- 1. Crowd Out Human Infrastructure Investment:** Expensive technology may boost teachers, nurses, and social workers' skills. As economist Amartya Sen has long maintained, progress expands actual freedoms and possibilities. Focussing on machines over human skill-building can undermine this key value by promoting foreign technology and expertise over indigenous agency and knowledge.
- 2. Implement Culturally Alien Frameworks:** AI systems generally reflect their Western founders' attitudes, prejudices, and epistemological assumptions. Digital neocolonialism might result from using them in education or public administration to covertly undermine indigenous knowledge systems, local educational traditions, and culturally distinctive moral reasoning.



3. **Increase inequality:** High-tech interfaces may become a new symbol of privilege, while weak human support systems degrade. Two societies one with defective automated services and another with an underpaid, undervalued human sector are at jeopardy.

8.6. Reclaiming human primacy

The distinctive human benefits of human roles must be vigorously defended against automation. Technology should help carers, educators, and leaders, not replace them. In any culture, growth should increase human relationships and moral responsibility to build resilience. In industrial civilisation, philosopher and theologian Ivan Illich argued that technologies and systems that develop beyond a human scale might be unproductive, disempowering, and destructive of cultural and personal life. Protecting the human heart of our most critical social duties is not a Luddite inclination but an ethical obligation for protecting what makes a society worthwhile.

9. Beyond computation to consciousness: human reason first

Despite the rapid advances in artificial intelligence, human reason is the ultimate source of discoveries, ethics, and societal development. Human reason produced AI, a tremendous tool for enhancing our capabilities, but it is not an equal or alternative for conscious, embodied intelligence. Technology should support mankind, not replace it. Defending the ontological and phenomenological irreducibility of human consciousness is not sentimentalism but a defence of our species' moral, cultural, and intellectual life.

9.1. Computational "reason" limits

AI excels at digesting large datasets, finding statistical patterns, and optimising within parameters. Human reason is absent from this operational prowess. Philosopher John Searle claims computers interpret symbols without meaning, manipulating syntax without comprehending semantics. Human reason, on the other hand, is intentional the ability to make sense of lived experience. "The computer is not a mind; it is a tool, and like all tools, its significance depends on the intentions of its users" (Searle, 1992, p. 200)

Not all human reasoning is algorithmic. According to physicist and philosopher Michael Polanyi, tacit knowledge is the unformalized, embodied knowing we use but cannot define. "We can know more than tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). This implicit dimension powers scientific discovery, creative creativity, and sophisticated social understanding that rule-based systems cannot. AI can analyse knowledge, but human reason creates new frames and asks basic questions.



9.2. Reason underpins ethics and society

Human reason underpins morality and accountability. Ethical judgement needs empathy, practical knowledge (phronesis), and autonomous application of principles to complicated, singular circumstances, not just calculations. According to philosopher Hannah Arendt, public activity and speech depend on natality - the potential to start something new and exercise freedom. "Action, in so far as it is free, is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will... it springs from something which is beyond rational thought and volition" (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). Deterministic systems cannot access this freedom and spontaneous judgement.

Reasoned argument, communal imagination, and disputed value evolution processes anchored in human subjectivity drive social progress. AI can predict social patterns, but it cannot comprehend our common reality or support a moral cause that it believes in.

9.3. Technology as servant, not king

Technology should help prevent dehumanisation. Using AI as a substitute for human reason risks making humans dependent on their instruments. Technology philosopher Langdon Winner warns of "technological somnambulism" that will lead to undemocratic machine-controlled life and social ties. Humanistic ideals, transparent democracy, and a commitment to human dignity must guide AI growth.

9.4. Core irreducibility

The irreducibility of awareness underpins human reason. Understanding human mind as information processing undermines the qualitative, first-person experience that supports meaning, value, and purpose. Hubert Dreyfus sensibly noted, "When we are told that human beings are merely animals, or merely machines, or merely chemical complexes, we are sold a metaphysical view that has no scientific support" (1979, p. xix). Our moral, cultural, and intellectual strength comes from acknowledging and developing this irreducible core. Our ideal future is one where human reason's creative, ethical, and aware powers benefit everyone.

AI advances, but human reason is the ultimate source of discoveries, ethics, and social progress. Technology should support mankind, not replace it. Human consciousness must remain irreducible for moral, cultural, and intellectual vigour.



10. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the philosophical project of equating human and machine consciousness rests on a fundamental oversight: the nature of first-person self-consciousness. While functionalist philosophers such as Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport offer sophisticated arguments for equivalence, they each fail to account for the irreducible subjective perspective that characterises human experience. Pollock's recursive architecture, Sayre's information processing model, and Rapaport's informational equivalence all treat consciousness as a structural or functional phenomenon, thereby missing its qualitative, first-person core.

Drawing on the work of Baker, Searle, Nagel, and others, I have shown that self-consciousness is not a programmable feature but a mode of being rooted in embodied, social, and existential dimensions that machines cannot replicate. This conclusion is reinforced by examining domains such as religion, culture, ethics, and the mind body problem each of which presupposes a subjective vantage point that computational systems, by their very design, lack.

Although numerous critiques have been directed at the human machine equivalence thesis, this paper presents an innovative integration by illustrating how a singular, essential flaw the lack of an irreducible first-person viewpoint undermines the functionalist reasoning of Pollock, Sayre, and Rapaport, while also explaining the uniquely human realms of ethics, culture, and embodied experience that remain outside the scope of computation.

The ethical and social implications of ignoring this divide are significant. Overestimating machine capabilities risks dehumanising social practices, eroding moral agency, and displacing the relational roles that sustain communities. Recognising the irreducibility of human consciousness is therefore not a retreat from technology but a necessary condition for using AI as a genuine tool for human flourishing. The irreducible divide is not merely a philosophical curiosity; it is the foundation upon which a humane future must be built.

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