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Silent Chambers, Active Power: The Political Sociology of Performative Inactivity in Authoritarian Parliaments

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Abstract

Across many authoritarian and hybrid regimes, parliamentary chambers are characterised by conspicuous patterns of silence, limited questioning, ritualised affirmation, and restrained legislative engagement despite their formal mandate to deliberate and scrutinise executive power. This paper examines this paradox and challenges prevailing interpretations that treat parliamentary inactivity primarily as evidence of institutional weakness, democratic decline, or political apathy. Drawing on a qualitative, interpretive, and theory-building approach that synthesises parliamentary records, observational materials, and extant scholarship across selected authoritarian and hybrid contexts, the study identifies recurring behavioural patterns through which legislative inactivity acquires political significance. The analysis demonstrates that parliamentary silence and minimal engagement function as structured forms of political behaviour embedded within broader regimes of surveillance, patronage, institutional discipline, and symbolic power. Rather than representing the absence of politics, these observable patterns contribute to the reproduction of legislative order, the management of political risk, and the maintenance of regime stability. Building on these insights, the paper advances Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT) as a novel interpretive framework for explaining how patterned inactivity operates as a politically functional mode of legislative participation under conditions of authoritarian constraint. By shifting analytical attention from what legislators fail to do to what observable inactivity accomplishes within institutional settings, the paper offers a new behavioural perspective on authoritarian governance, legislative politics, and political sociology.

Keywords
Authoritarian legislatures; Legislative behaviour; Performative Inactivity Theory; Political sociology; Symbolic compliance; Symbolic power

1. Introduction

In many contemporary parliamentary chambers, particularly within authoritarian and hybrid political systems, the spectacle of representation is marked less by deliberation than by silence. Legislators sit in orderly rows, offering ritualised applause, procedural affirmations, and limited intervention, while sustained questioning and open dissent remain uncommon. However, these chambers continue to function procedurally and symbolically as representative institutions. This contrast between institutional form and behavioural practice raises a central puzzle: how do institutions established for deliberation continue to operate when deliberation itself is persistently constrained? Rather than representing an incidental deficiency, this recurring pattern suggests a broader transformation in political participation under authoritarian conditions (Gandhi, 2008; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Truex, 2016).

Existing scholarship has largely interpreted legislative passivity as evidence of authoritarian control, executive dominance, or institutional weakness. Studies of authoritarian legislatures commonly portray parliaments as "rubber-stamp" institutions that legitimise executive decisions while exercising little autonomous influence (Blaydes, 2011; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). Likewise, deliberative democratic theory regards the absence of debate as a departure from the ideals of representation, accountability, and public reasoning (Habermas, 1996). Although these perspectives explain why legislatures become constrained, they remain primarily institution-centred and pay comparatively little attention to the behavioural processes through which political order is reproduced. Consequently, legislative inactivity is generally treated as an outcome of authoritarian rule rather than as a political phenomenon requiring explanation in its own right.

This paper advances a different interpretation by treating parliamentary inactivity as a structured mode of political participation rather than as the absence of politics. It proceeds from the premise that legislators operating within environments characterised by surveillance, patronage, and political risk develop recurring behavioural adaptations that align with institutional expectations while minimising personal exposure to sanction (Magaloni, 2006; Svolik, 2012). Parliamentary silence, restrained intervention, and ritualised compliance are therefore understood not as isolated behaviours but as patterned practices embedded within broader regimes of discipline and symbolic power. Drawing on insights from governmentality, symbolic power, and dramaturgical sociology, the paper argues that these observable behavioural patterns contribute to the management of political risk, the signalling of compliance, and the reproduction of authoritarian governance (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1959).

The study addresses two related questions: why do parliamentarians adopt inactivity where deliberation is institutionally expected, and how can such behaviour be theorised beyond existing institutional explanations? It argues that parliamentary silence should be understood as a patterned and politically consequential form of legislative behaviour rather than simply as evidence of institutional decline. Observable practices such as sustained silence, limited questioning, restrained engagement, and ritualised affirmation constitute structured modes of participation through which compliance becomes publicly visible. Without attributing subjective intentions to individual legislators, the analysis interprets these recurring behavioural patterns as adaptive responses to institutional environments characterised by surveillance, patronage networks, and disciplinary expectations (Scott, 1990; Wedeen, 1999). In this way, patterned inactivity contributes to the maintenance of legislative order and the reproduction of authoritarian authority.

Despite substantial advances in the study of authoritarian legislatures, one behavioural problem remains under-theorised. Existing research explains executive dominance, party discipline, patronage and institutional control, but it rarely treats visible inactivity itself as an object of explanation. The unresolved question is therefore not simply why legislators are constrained, but how recurrent silence, restrained questioning and ritualised affirmation become normalised and politically consequential forms of conduct. This gap motivates Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT).

The paper proceeds by reviewing scholarship on parliamentary behaviour and authoritarian legislatures before identifying the behavioural gap that existing approaches leave unresolved. It then develops a theoretical framework integrating governmentality, symbolic power, and dramaturgical analysis, outlines the interpretive methodology, presents comparative empirical illustrations, and formally advances Performative Inactivity Theory. By shifting analytical attention from institutional structures to observable behavioural practice, the paper demonstrates that parliamentary inactivity is not merely the absence of political participation but a structured, politically functional, and institutionally consequential mode of legislative behaviour through which authoritarian governance is reproduced.

2. Literature Review

The study of parliamentary behaviour has long been anchored in normative assumptions about deliberation, representation, and accountability. However, empirical realities across authoritarian and hybrid regimes increasingly challenge these assumptions. Parliamentary chambers in contexts such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Uganda are frequently marked by limited debate, constrained questioning, and visible disengagement. This disjuncture between institutional design and behavioural practice raises a central analytical problem: existing theories explain what parliaments are expected to do or why they fall short, but they do not adequately explain what inactivity itself accomplishes within systems of power.

Classical parliamentary theory, grounded in deliberative democratic traditions, conceptualises legislatures as arenas of reasoned debate in which competing arguments are subjected to public scrutiny (Habermas, 1996). Legitimacy, in this framework, derives from active participation, justification, and communicative engagement. Subsequent scholarship has expanded this perspective by recognising multiple dimensions of representation, including descriptive, substantive, and symbolic forms (Pitkin, 1967; Urbinati & Warren, 2008). More recent contributions acknowledge that deliberation is often mediated by institutional hierarchies, party dominance, and executive influence, even within formally democratic systems (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Disch, van de Sande & Urbinati, 2019). In the Global South, these constraints are intensified by historical legacies of centralised authority, patronage politics, and uneven institutionalisation (Awortwi & Helmsing, 2014).

Although these developments provide a more nuanced understanding of representation and deliberation, they continue to privilege speech, debate, and visible participation as the defining indicators of legislative activity. Consequently, parliamentary silence remains conceptualised primarily as an institutional deficiency rather than as an observable behavioural phenomenon that requires an independent theoretical explanation. While deliberative theory explains what legislatures ought to do, it offers limited analytical leverage for explaining why patterned inactivity itself emerges as the dominant behavioural performance within legislatures operating under authoritarian and hybrid conditions. This limitation necessitates a framework that moves beyond normative expectations towards an explanation of inactivity as structured political behaviour.

The literature on authoritarian legislatures provides a more empirically grounded account of constrained parliamentary environments. Early scholarship characterised such institutions as instruments of executive dominance, designed to formalise decisions rather than to contest them (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). Subsequent work has nuanced this view by demonstrating that legislatures can serve important functions within authoritarian systems, including elite co-optation, information aggregation, and conflict management (Gandhi, 2008; Truex, 2016).

In China, for instance, legislative institutions have been shown to provide controlled channels for feedback while reinforcing regime authority (Manion, 2014; Heilmann, 2008). Similarly, in Russia and Kazakhstan, legislatures contribute to regime stability by integrating elites and managing intra-elite competition (Anceschi & Silvan, 2026; Reuter & Robertson, 2015).

African scholarship further contextualises these dynamics by highlighting the interplay between formal institutions and informal systems of power. Studies in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Rwanda demonstrate that legislatures operate within dense networks of patronage, executive control, and political surveillance, which shape both incentives and behavioural expectations (Barkan, 2009). In South Africa, concerns about strong party discipline, executive encroachment, and the marginalisation of dissent have raised questions about the depth of parliamentary oversight despite the persistence of democratic procedures (February 2021). These accounts collectively depict legislatures as sites of negotiated power rather than arenas of autonomous deliberation.

This literature substantially advances understanding of the institutional functions performed by authoritarian legislatures, including elite management, information aggregation, conflict management, and regime legitimation. However, its principal concern remains the institutional purposes of legislatures rather than the behavioural dynamics occurring within them. Parliamentary inactivity consequently appears primarily as a consequence of authoritarian constraint rather than as a patterned mode of legislative conduct requiring independent conceptual explanation. The recurring visibility of silence, restrained participation, ritualised affirmation, and limited intervention is recognised but not theorised as a distinct behavioural phenomenon. As a result, existing authoritarian institutionalism explains constrained legislatures more effectively than it explains constrained legislative behaviour.

Rational choice and institutional perspectives successfully explain why legislators respond to incentives, sanctions, and organisational constraints. However, these approaches primarily interpret behaviour as instrumental decision-making and pay comparatively little attention to how inactivity becomes publicly enacted, institutionally recognised, and politically meaningful. They explain the incentives surrounding parliamentary conduct but not the observable behavioural forms through which compliance is repeatedly performed. Consequently, they cannot adequately account for the patterned reproduction of legislative inactivity that constitutes the central concern of this study.

Recent developments in political sociology and critical theory offer a more promising lens by foregrounding the performative nature of political behaviour. Scholars have increasingly emphasised how power is reproduced through symbolic practices, public displays, and ritualised performances that signal alignment and reinforce authority (Bayart, 2009; Wedeen, 1999). In Syria, for example, public acts of compliance function as performative affirmations of regime power, even when they are widely understood to lack sincerity (Wedeen, 1999). Similar dynamics are evident in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, where visible displays of loyalty operate as strategies of political survival within constrained environments (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009). These studies suggest that political behaviour cannot be fully understood without attending to its symbolic and performative dimensions.

Political sociology comes closest to recognising the symbolic and performative dimensions of political conduct. Nevertheless, existing scholarship has concentrated primarily on public rituals of loyalty, symbolic domination, and performative compliance rather than on patterned legislative inactivity itself. The specific phenomenon of sustained parliamentary silence, restrained participation, and observable non-engagement has therefore remained theoretically underdeveloped. What remains absent is a framework capable of explaining why inactivity becomes the dominant behavioural performance through which authoritarian governance is reproduced inside legislative institutions. This unresolved analytical problem provides the immediate foundation for the development of Performative Inactivity Theory.

Across these literatures, a common limitation is evident. Deliberative theory specifies what legislatures ought to do; authoritarian institutionalism explains why legislatures are constrained; rational-choice accounts identify incentives; and political sociology clarifies how power is symbolically reproduced. However, none fully explains how recurrent non-engagement becomes a stable, recognisable and politically useful behavioural repertoire inside legislatures. PIT addresses this behavioural gap by theorising inactivity as structured conduct rather than residual absence.

3. Theoretical Framework

The patterned silence observed in parliamentary chambers across authoritarian and hybrid regimes requires a theoretical lens that moves beyond institutional description towards an analysis of how power is internalised, enacted, and reproduced through everyday political conduct. Existing theories explain control, constraint, and co-optation, but they do not adequately account for why inactivity becomes the dominant and visible mode of participation. This section advances a focused synthesis of governmentality, symbolic power, dramaturgical analysis, and hidden transcripts to conceptualise parliamentary inactivity as a structured and performative political practice, laying the groundwork for Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT).

Governmentality provides the first analytical anchor by explaining how power operates through the internalisation of norms rather than direct coercion alone (Foucault, 1977; Dean, 2010). Contemporary extensions of this concept show that political actors increasingly regulate their own behaviour in response to diffuse systems of surveillance and evaluation (Bröckling et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2006). In parliamentary contexts such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, this manifests as anticipatory compliance, in which legislators align their conduct with perceived regime expectations in advance of sanctions (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009). Silence, in this setting, reflects internalised discipline. It is not necessarily imposed in each instance but emerges as a rational adaptation to an environment in which deviation carries risk. Inactivity thus becomes a form of self-governance, embedded in the conduct of political actors.

While governmentality explains how behaviour is disciplined, it does not fully capture how inactivity acquires political value. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power provides this extension by showing how practices gain legitimacy through recognition within a field (Bourdieu, 1991). Recent work emphasises that symbolic capital is accumulated not only through visible achievement but also through demonstrations of conformity and alignment (Swartz, 2020; Wacquant, 2023). In parliamentary settings, silence can function as such capital. By refraining from dissent, legislators signal loyalty, reliability, and discipline to those who control access to political resources. In South Africa, where party hierarchies shape political trajectories, alignment often outweighs independent engagement (February, 2021). Similarly, in Rwanda and Kazakhstan, visible compliance operates as a marker of trustworthiness within ruling coalitions (Anceschi & Silvan, 2026). Inactivity, therefore, circulates as a recognised and valued political signal rather than as mere absence.

To understand how this behaviour is enacted, it is necessary to consider its performative dimension. Drawing on dramaturgical theory, parliamentary conduct can be interpreted as staged interaction in which actors manage impressions before specific audiences (Goffman, 1959). Contemporary scholarship highlights how institutional settings structure such performances, particularly in highly visible environments such as legislatures (Alexander, 2017; Rai, 2021). Parliamentary chambers operate as stages where behaviour is continuously observed and interpreted by party leadership, state actors, and the public. Within this environment, inactivity becomes a visible enactment of compliance. The act of remaining silent, refraining from questioning, or engaging minimally is directed at multiple audiences, signalling alignment while avoiding scrutiny. In contexts such as Zimbabwe and Uganda, where deviation carries consequences, this performance becomes normalised through repetition (Barkan, 2009).

However, silence cannot be reduced to compliance alone. The concept of hidden transcripts introduces an important distinction between public performance and private belief (Scott, 1990). In constrained political environments, visible conformity often coexists with unexpressed dissent, producing a dual structure of political expression. Recent scholarship demonstrates how actors navigate this tension through strategic ambiguity and controlled visibility (Bayart, 2009; Wedeen, 1999). In parliamentary contexts such as those in Ethiopia and South Africa, legislators may privately disagree with policy or leadership yet publicly comply by remaining inactive (Awortwi & Helmsing, 2014). Silence thus operates as both concealment and communication, allowing actors to manage risk while maintaining alignment. The integration of these perspectives enables a more precise conceptualisation of parliamentary inactivity. Governmentality explains the internalisation of constraint; symbolic power reveals the value attached to conformity; dramaturgical analysis shows how inactivity is enacted as performance; and hidden transcripts clarify that silence does not necessarily indicate agreement. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that inactivity is neither accidental nor purely imposed. It is structured, meaningful, and embedded within broader configurations of power.

This synthesis also clarifies the limits of existing explanations. Theories of authoritarian control and institutional constraint account for why legislators face restrictions, but do not fully explain why inactivity becomes normalised as visible behaviour. Similarly, rational choice approaches capture incentives but understate the symbolic and performative dimensions through which behaviour is enacted and interpreted. By bringing these elements together, this framework establishes the conditions under which inactivity becomes both rational and expected. On this basis, the paper advances Performative Inactivity Theory as a framework explaining inactivity as the product of interacting forces rather than isolated constraints. Parliamentary silence emerges through the alignment of internalised discipline, symbolic incentives, performative expectations, and strategic ambiguity. It is not reducible to coercion, nor is it simply a sign of institutional weakness. Instead, it represents a patterned adaptation to specific configurations of power in which visibility, risk, and legitimacy are tightly interwoven.

3.1 How Performative Inactivity Theory Differs from Existing Explanations

The preceding discussion demonstrates that Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT) is informed by several established traditions in political sociology and comparative politics without being reducible to any one of them. Rather than replacing these perspectives, the theory integrates selected analytical insights while addressing an explanatory problem that none resolve independently: why patterned parliamentary inactivity emerges as the dominant observable behavioural performance within authoritarian and hybrid legislatures. PIT, therefore, occupies a distinct analytical position by explaining behavioural reproduction rather than institutional design or political constraint.

Rubber Stamp Theory explains how authoritarian legislatures legitimate executive authority by formally endorsing decisions taken elsewhere. While this perspective successfully accounts for institutional subordination, it treats legislative inactivity largely as an institutional consequence of executive dominance. Performative Inactivity Theory shifts attention from institutional function to observable behavioural practice by explaining how recurrent inactivity itself becomes a politically functional mode of participation through which authoritarian authority is continually reproduced.

Explanations centred on party discipline similarly account for how organisational hierarchies regulate legislative behaviour through formal rules, sanctions, and expectations of loyalty. These approaches clarify why legislators conform to party directives but provide comparatively limited insight into how visible inactivity acquires symbolic political meaning within parliamentary settings. PIT extends beyond organisational control by examining inactivity as a publicly enacted behavioural performance rather than simply an outcome of disciplinary enforcement.

Patronage-based explanations emphasise the importance of political incentives, elite networks, and resource dependence in shaping legislative conduct. Although these perspectives illuminate why conformity may be rewarded, they primarily explain incentive structures rather than the behavioural forms through which conformity becomes publicly recognisable. PIT complements this literature by explaining how observable inactivity functions as a politically meaningful expression of alignment within patronage-driven political systems.

The literature on symbolic power and political performance demonstrates how authority is reproduced through ritual, symbolism, and public displays of legitimacy. These insights provide an important foundation for understanding parliamentary behaviour, but do not specifically theorise sustained legislative inactivity as a distinct behavioural phenomenon. PIT, therefore, extends symbolic approaches by identifying observable inactivity itself as the principal performative mechanism through which political order is enacted inside legislative institutions.

Rational choice approaches explain legislative behaviour as strategic responses to incentives, costs, and expected outcomes. While these models account for why legislators may avoid risky forms of engagement, they generally interpret behaviour as instrumental decision-making rather than as patterned public performance. PIT retains the importance of institutional incentives but demonstrates that observable inactivity functions not merely as an individual calculation but as a socially recognised and institutionally reproduced behavioural practice.

These comparisons locate PIT at a distinct explanatory level. It does not replace theories of executive dominance, party discipline, patronage, rational calculation or symbolic power; it specifies the behavioural mechanism through which these conditions are repeatedly enacted in legislative settings. Its contribution is therefore to explain how constrained environments are converted into patterned, publicly legible inactivity that helps reproduce institutional order.

An important implication of this framework is that its primary object of explanation is legislative behaviour rather than legislative institutions. Existing scholarship has largely focused on institutional design, executive dominance, party systems, and authoritarian governance structures as the principal units of analysis. Performative Inactivity Theory, by contrast, explains how observable behavioural patterns emerge, become institutionalised through repetition, and contribute to the reproduction of authoritarian governance. Institutions provide the context within which inactivity occurs, but the theory explains the patterned behavioural practices through which those institutional environments are enacted and sustained.

This theoretical move is not without limitations. Emphasising performativity risks overstating agency in contexts where coercion remains significant. In highly restrictive environments, silence may reflect necessity as much as strategy. Variations across political systems may produce different configurations of inactivity, requiring further comparative refinement. These limitations are acknowledged by situating performative inactivity within broader regimes that combine coercion, incentives, and symbolic practices. Despite these constraints, the PIT framework offers a clear analytical advance. It shifts the focus from institutional outcomes to behavioural processes and from inactivity as absence to inactivity as structured action. By doing so, it provides a coherent foundation for understanding why silence becomes the dominant mode of participation in many parliamentary settings and prepares the ground for the formal articulation of Performative Inactivity Theory in the next section.

4. Methodology

4.1 Empirical Materials

Although this study is primarily conceptual and theory-building in orientation, its analytical claims are grounded in the systematic interpretation of observable parliamentary behaviour drawn from multiple documentary and observational sources. The empirical materials comprise official parliamentary Hansard debates, parliamentary video recordings, publicly available livestreams of legislative proceedings, official parliamentary records and proceedings, scholarly case studies, and legislative reports documenting parliamentary practice across selected authoritarian and hybrid political systems. These materials were examined not to produce quantitative measures of legislative activity but to identify recurring behavioural patterns capable of informing conceptual development through interpretive analysis and concept formation (Swedberg, 2020; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Tight, 2019).

The study focuses on illustrative materials drawn from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, China, and Russia. These cases were selected because they represent different configurations of authoritarian and hybrid governance while sharing institutional characteristics relevant to the research problem, including executive dominance, varying degrees of party discipline, patronage-based political organisation, and constrained legislative autonomy. Their selection follows the logic of theoretically informed comparative case illustration, commonly employed in concept-building research, in which cases are chosen for their analytical value rather than for statistical representativeness (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Gerring, 2012).

Particular analytical attention was directed towards recurrent forms of parliamentary conduct, including prolonged silence, limited questioning, restrained legislative intervention, ritualised affirmation, coordinated applause, and visible disengagement during parliamentary proceedings. Rather than treating these observations as isolated events, the analysis sought to identify repeated behavioural regularities across multiple parliamentary settings through an abductive movement between empirical observation and theoretical explanation (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). These recurring patterns constitute the empirical foundation for the development of Performative Inactivity Theory, enabling the study to connect observable legislative conduct with broader political-sociological explanations of authoritarian governance.

4.2 Case Selection

The selection of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, China, and Russia was guided by theoretical rather than statistical considerations. Collectively, these cases represent diverse configurations of constrained legislative politics spanning hybrid regimes, competitive authoritarian systems, and consolidated authoritarian regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Svolik, 2012). Although these political systems differ in institutional design, electoral competitiveness, and levels of executive dominance, they share a common analytical characteristic: legislative institutions operate within environments where meaningful parliamentary autonomy is constrained by varying combinations of party discipline, executive authority, patronage relations, and political surveillance. Examining these contrasting institutional settings enables theoretical comparison across different expressions of authoritarian governance, allowing the analysis to determine whether patterned parliamentary inactivity constitutes a recurring behavioural phenomenon rather than a context-specific anomaly (Gerring, 2012; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). The objective is therefore not to compare national political systems per se, but to identify recurring behavioural regularities that transcend particular institutional contexts and inform the development of Performative Inactivity Theory.

4.3 Pattern Identification and Analytical Strategy

The analytical emphasis was placed on identifying recurrent patterns of observable parliamentary behaviour rather than interpreting isolated legislative events. Particular attention was directed towards repeated manifestations of prolonged silence, limited or absent questioning of executive actors, ritualised applause, coordinated affirmation of parliamentary proceedings, visible behavioural disengagement, including sustained attention to mobile devices during legislative sessions, and repeated non-intervention during debates where substantive parliamentary scrutiny would ordinarily be expected. These behavioural indicators were examined across multiple parliamentary settings and documentary sources to determine whether they represented recurring patterns rather than episodic occurrences.

Pattern identification followed an abductive analytical logic in which repeated empirical observations were iteratively interpreted alongside existing theoretical perspectives to develop new conceptual explanations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The emphasis, therefore, remained on identifying behavioural regularities that persisted across different institutional contexts rather than attributing subjective intentions to individual legislators. The recurring nature of these observable practices provided the empirical foundation for theorising Performative Inactivity as a patterned, politically functional, and institutionally consequential mode of legislative behaviour.

In addition, the analysis draws on secondary literature, including scholarly studies and policy analyses of legislative behaviour and authoritarian governance. These sources are treated as part of the empirical base, contributing to the identification of patterns and contextual variation rather than serving merely as background (Tight, 2019). The combination of observational material and secondary data strengthens the robustness of the analysis by situating observed behaviour within broader political and institutional contexts (Gandhi, 2008; Truex, 2016).

The analytical strategy is based on abductive reasoning, which involves iteratively linking empirical observations with theoretical insights to generate new conceptual explanations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). In this study, the persistent and patterned nature of parliamentary inactivity is treated as an anomaly that existing frameworks do not fully explain. This prompts the development of a new conceptual lens that can account for these dynamics. Concept-building is central to this process. Rather than applying predefined categories, the study develops analytical concepts through the interaction between observation and theory, allowing performative inactivity to emerge as a meaningful explanatory construct (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Swedberg, 2020). This approach aligns with recent calls for more rigorous concept formation in political sociology as a basis for theoretical innovation (Gerring, 2012; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

4.4 Observational Scope and Analytical Limits

The analytical claims advanced in this study are confined to observable parliamentary behaviour rather than legislators' subjective intentions or motivations. The documentary and observational materials provide evidence of recurring practices, including silence, restrained participation, ritualised affirmation, and visible non-engagement, but they do not permit direct inference about personal beliefs or political calculations. Accordingly, the analysis explains how these recurring behavioural patterns function within authoritarian and hybrid institutional settings rather than why individual legislators behave as they do. This focus is consistent with the study's interpretive and abductive methodological orientation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015).

This design is appropriate because the study seeks to theorise parliamentary inactivity as an observable behavioural phenomenon rather than measure individual motivations. Combining interpretive analysis, observational synthesis, and abductive reasoning provides a coherent basis for developing Performative Inactivity Theory while acknowledging that reliance on documentary and secondary materials limits conclusions about internal motivations.

5. Empirical Illustration and Analytical Cases

Parliamentary chambers across authoritarian and hybrid regimes exhibit recurring behavioural patterns that challenge conventional understandings of legislative participation. Rather than functioning as arenas of sustained deliberation, these institutions are frequently characterised by prolonged silence, restrained questioning, ritualised affirmation, and visible disengagement despite continuing procedural activity. Although such behaviour is often interpreted as evidence of institutional weakness or democratic decline, closer examination suggests a more structured and politically consequential pattern of legislative conduct. Across cases drawn from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Russia, and China, what appears to be inactivity is more convincingly understood as a recurrent behavioural repertoire embedded within broader configurations of executive dominance, institutional discipline, political surveillance, and regime maintenance (Svolik, 2012).

5.1 South Africa

In South Africa, parliamentary institutions continue to operate within a constitutional framework that formally guarantees legislative oversight and deliberation. However, parliamentary practice frequently reveals a pronounced disparity between procedural activity and substantive engagement. Oversight proceedings, particularly those involving investigations into governance failures at Eskom and related parliamentary committee hearings, have often concentrated sustained questioning among a relatively small group of legislators, while many members contribute little beyond procedural participation or routine affirmation (February 2021; Southall, 2022). Parliamentary video recordings, livestreams, and official committee proceedings from selected sittings repeatedly show extended periods during which numerous legislators remain visually disengaged, including sustained attention to mobile devices. In contrast, proceedings continue, despite the formal continuation of parliamentary business. These observable behavioural patterns suggest that inactivity coexists with procedural compliance rather than institutional absence. This illustrates how Performative Inactivity Theory interprets visible legislative restraint as a patterned behavioural adaptation through which parliamentary order is reproduced without requiring continuous substantive participation.

5.2 Zimbabwe

Comparable dynamics emerge in Zimbabwe, where parliamentary activity operates within a more overtly constrained political environment. Proceedings surrounding the adoption of the Constitutional Amendment (No. 2) Act illustrated legislative sessions in which substantive debate was largely concentrated among party leadership. At the same time, many parliamentarians participated primarily through formal voting and procedural attendance. Official parliamentary records reveal highly structured proceedings characterised by limited intervention despite the constitutional significance of the reforms. Rather than reflecting individual legislative incapacity, these recurring behavioural patterns indicate a parliamentary environment in which restrained participation functions as a stable mode of legislative conduct within broader systems of executive dominance and political discipline. This illustrates how Performative Inactivity Theory explains patterned inactivity as a politically functional behavioural performance that reinforces institutional authority while minimising visible contestation.

5.3 Uganda

In Uganda, similar behavioural patterns were particularly evident during parliamentary deliberations on the Constitutional (Amendment) Act of 2017, which removed the presidential age limit. Although the proceedings generated considerable national political contestation, parliamentary participation remained uneven, with sustained interventions concentrated among relatively few legislators. At the same time, many members participated primarily through attendance, voting, or limited procedural engagement. Parliamentary proceedings consistently reveal observable patterns of restrained participation despite the constitutional significance of the legislative process. This illustrates how Performative Inactivity Theory interprets recurring legislative restraint as a behavioural response that simultaneously preserves procedural legitimacy and accommodates prevailing configurations of executive authority and political risk.

5.4 Russia

Comparable behavioural regularities are evident in Russia, where proceedings within the State Duma surrounding the 2020 constitutional amendments were characterised by rapid legislative approval, overwhelming parliamentary support, and comparatively limited visible contestation despite the constitutional significance of the reforms (Reuter, 2021; Gel'man, 2015). Legislative procedures remained formally intact, yet observable behavioural patterns consistently prioritised consensus, procedural compliance, and limited intervention over sustained deliberation. This illustrates how Performative Inactivity Theory explains legislative inactivity not as institutional weakness but as a patterned behavioural mechanism through which political consensus is publicly enacted, and authoritarian governance is reinforced.

5.5 China

Likewise, annual sessions of China's National People's Congress continue to demonstrate highly structured legislative proceedings in which major policy decisions are accompanied by overwhelming approval rates, limited public disagreement, and carefully coordinated parliamentary participation (Truex, 2016; Manion, 2014). Official proceedings and parliamentary broadcasts consistently display highly regulated patterns of participation in which visible restraint accompanies formal legislative activity. Rather than representing institutional inactivity, these recurring behavioural patterns demonstrate how observable restraint itself forms part of an institutionalised repertoire of political participation. This illustrates how Performative Inactivity Theory conceptualises patterned inactivity as a publicly visible behavioural practice through which legislative conformity contributes to the reproduction of political authority.

5.6 Comparative Synthesis

Across these diverse parliamentary settings, several behavioural regularities recur with striking consistency. Prolonged silence, limited questioning of executive authority, ritualised applause, coordinated affirmation, repeated non-intervention during substantive debates, and observable behavioural disengagement emerge across different institutional configurations despite considerable variation in constitutional design and political context. These recurring patterns are identified across multiple documentary and observational sources rather than isolated parliamentary episodes, providing the empirical basis for theory building. Collectively, the cases demonstrate that Performative Inactivity Theory explains not the institutional design of authoritarian legislatures, but the patterned behavioural processes through which observable inactivity becomes politically functional and contributes to the reproduction of authoritarian governance.

6. Theory Building: Performative Inactivity Theory

The preceding analysis establishes that parliamentary inactivity is neither incidental nor merely imposed but systematically produced through interacting mechanisms that render silence a rational, visible, and politically consequential mode of action. Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT) is advanced as a framework that captures this process. It departs from interpretations that equate inactivity with institutional failure and instead reconceptualises it as a structured form of participation embedded within regimes of power, surveillance, and symbolic exchange. Inactivity is thus understood not as absence but as a patterned and intelligible political practice that contributes to regime durability and elite reproduction.

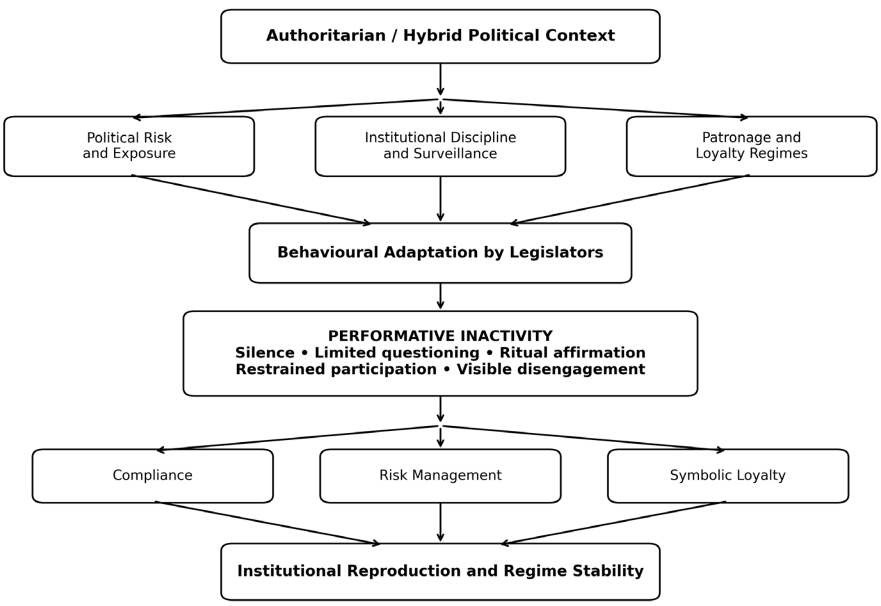

Figure 1. Conceptual architecture of Performative Inactivity Theory (PIT)

Figure 1 illustrates how authoritarian and hybrid political environments generate performative inactivity through interacting mechanisms of political risk, institutional discipline, and patronage-based control. Observable behavioural adaptation is expressed through patterned parliamentary inactivity, which in turn contributes to compliance, symbolic loyalty, institutional reproduction, and regime stability.

Figure 1 summarises the central causal architecture of Performative Inactivity Theory. Rather than proposing a single linear explanation, the framework conceptualises parliamentary inactivity as the behavioural outcome of interacting structural, institutional, and symbolic processes that collectively reproduce authoritarian governance.

6.1 Conceptual Consistency

Before elaborating on the theory's mechanisms, it is important to clarify the terminology used throughout this paper. Although the literature employs a variety of expressions—including parliamentary silence, legislative inactivity, non-engagement, passivity, and restrained participation—these terms are not treated here as interchangeable analytical concepts. Rather, they describe observable manifestations of a broader behavioural phenomenon. Performative Inactivity is introduced as the overarching theoretical construct that integrates these observable behaviours into a single explanatory framework. Parliamentary silence, limited questioning, ritualised affirmation, visible disengagement, and repeated non-intervention are therefore interpreted not as separate phenomena but as empirical expressions of Performative Inactivity operating within authoritarian and hybrid legislative environments.

Accordingly, the discussion that follows uses Performative Inactivity consistently as the principal analytical term. Descriptive expressions such as 'parliamentary silence' or 'limited engagement' are retained only when referring directly to observable parliamentary behaviour. This distinction is important because the theory does not seek to explain silence in isolation, nor inactivity as a mere absence of participation. Instead, it explains Performative Inactivity as a patterned, politically functional, and institutionally consequential mode of legislative behaviour through which compliance is publicly enacted, political risk is managed, and authoritarian governance is reproduced. Maintaining this conceptual distinction ensures analytical precision and reinforces the theory's explanatory coherence throughout the remainder of the paper.

6.2 What Performative Inactivity Theory Explains Beyond Existing Approaches

PIT explains a different dependent variable from most existing approaches: the institutionalisation of observable inactivity as a mode of legislative participation. Rubber-stamp, party-discipline, patronage and rational-choice accounts identify sources of constraint and compliance. In contrast, PIT explains how those conditions are translated into recurrent behavioural performances that become normalised, recognised and consequential within the chamber. The theory, therefore, shifts analysis from the existence of constraint to the behavioural reproduction of constraint.

6.3 Generative Mechanisms and Broader Applicability

Although PIT is developed from parliamentary behaviour, its broader applicability should be treated as a testable extension rather than an established conclusion. Comparable patterns may arise in other hierarchical institutions, including bureaucracies, political parties, courts and universities, where actors remain formally present while limiting visible contestation under conditions of surveillance, reputational risk or organisational dependency. Future comparative research should determine whether the same mechanisms operate beyond legislatures and where the theory's scope conditions cease to hold.

At the core of PIT is the proposition that inactivity emerges through the interaction of four generative mechanisms that operate simultaneously and reinforce one another, producing a behavioural equilibrium in which silence becomes expected and rewarded. The first is the risk minimisation mechanism, which reflects the asymmetry of political environments characterised by surveillance and selective sanction. In such contexts, particularly in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and contested democratic settings such as South Africa, speaking carries potential costs that outweigh its benefits (Green, 2010). Contemporary analyses of authoritarian resilience emphasise how uncertainty and uneven enforcement heighten perceptions of risk, encouraging survival-centred precautionary strategies (Svolik, 2022; Kendall-Taylor et al., 2021). Silence, in this configuration, is a calculated response to exposure. Parliamentarians internalise these risks and regulate their behaviour accordingly, producing inactivity as anticipatory compliance.

This mechanism is reinforced by patronage alignment. In many authoritarian and hybrid systems, political advancement depends less on legislative competence than on demonstrated loyalty to party leadership and executive authority (Svolik, 2012). Patronage networks structure access to resources, positions, and protection, creating incentives for behavioural conformity. In this context, inactivity becomes a signal of alignment. By refraining from independent intervention, legislators avoid disrupting hierarchical relations and reinforce their position within patronage systems. Evidence from Rwanda, Kazakhstan, and Russia indicates that visible conformity is interpreted as a sign of reliability, shaping inclusion in ruling coalitions (Anceschi & Silvan, 2026; Reuter, 2021). Inactivity, therefore, functions not only as a safe option but as a politically advantageous one.

Institutional conditioning constitutes the third mechanism, capturing how norms, routines, and procedural expectations shape behaviour over time. Legislatures are structured environments in which certain forms of conduct are normalised and others marginalised. In contexts such as South Africa and Uganda, strong party discipline and hierarchical control over parliamentary procedures limit opportunities for spontaneous engagement and reinforce compliance (February 2021). Repeated exposure to these norms produces behavioural scripts that guide conduct within the chamber (Alexander, 2017; Rai, 2021). Inactivity becomes self-reinforcing as new entrants adapt to established expectations, learning that silence is appropriate and rewarded. Over time, this generates institutional habituation, in which inactivity is no longer perceived as a deviation but as the standard mode of participation.

The fourth mechanism, symbolic performance, highlights the communicative dimension of inactivity. Parliamentary chambers are highly visible spaces in which behaviour is continuously observed and interpreted by multiple audiences. Political conduct in such settings is not only instrumental but performative, oriented towards signalling alignment and managing impressions (Bayart, 2009; Wedeen, 1999). Inactivity becomes a visible enactment of compliance. The act of remaining silent, refraining from questioning, or engaging minimally signals loyalty while avoiding scrutiny. In China, legislative sessions prioritise visible unity over open contestation, embedding inactivity within broader systems of political communication (Manion, 2014; Heilmann, 2008). Similar patterns in Zimbabwe and Uganda indicate that inactivity functions as a performative affirmation of regime stability. These mechanisms converge to produce a structured behavioural output. Authoritarian pressure, surveillance, and patronage dependency constitute the conditions within which parliamentarians operate. These conditions generate performative inactivity as a rational response. The political outcome is twofold. At the regime level, inactivity contributes to stability by minimising visible conflict and reinforcing the appearance of consensus. At the elite level, it facilitates reproduction by rewarding conformity and marginalising dissent. This relational model underscores the central claim of PIT: inactivity is not a passive condition but a mechanism for maintaining political order. To systematise the interaction of these mechanisms, Table 1 presents the layered architecture through which performative inactivity is produced and sustained.

Table 1. Core mechanisms of performative inactivity in authoritarian parliaments

Analytical Level	Core Mechanism	Function	Analytical Implications
Structural Conditions	Surveillance, patronage networks, institutional control	Establish constraints and an incentive environment	• Legislators operate under visibility and risk • Political advancement tied to loyalty • Behaviour shaped by party hierarchy and executive dominance
Internalisation	Governmentality (internalised discipline)	Produces anticipatory compliance	• Self-censorship becomes routine • Silence emerges without direct coercion • Behaviour aligned with perceived expectations
Symbolic Economy	Loyalty as symbolic capital	Rewards conformity and alignment	• Silence signals reliability and trustworthiness • Conformity enhances political security • Non-engagement becomes politically valuable
Performative Layer	Visible compliance (dramaturgical performance)	Translates alignment into observable behaviour	• Ritualised applause and affirmation • Minimal questioning or debate • Strategic visibility without substantive engagement
Behavioural Output	Performative Inactivity	Stabilised mode of participation	• Sustained silence as patterned conduct • Normalised disengagement (e.g., device use) • Presence without deliberation
Political Outcomes	Regime reproduction and stability	Reproduces power structures	• Minimises visible conflict • Reinforces the appearance of consensus • Masks erosion of deliberative democracy

Table 1 clarifies that inactivity is not incidental but emerges from the alignment of structural constraints, internalised discipline, symbolic incentives, and performative expectations, culminating in stabilising political outcomes. A key extension of this argument is captured in the compliance visibility paradox. Conventional democratic theory assumes that active participation enhances legitimacy. In authoritarian and hybrid contexts, the inverse often holds. The less a parliamentarian speaks or intervenes, the more they are perceived as reliable and aligned with regime expectations. Visibility is achieved through restraint rather than expression. Empirical observations from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Rwanda indicate that legislators who maintain low profiles are often better positioned within ruling coalitions than those who assert independent voices (Gel'man, 2015; Anceschi & Silvan, 2026). This inversion challenges dominant assumptions about participation and legitimacy and highlights the need for a framework that accounts for such dynamics. Performative Inactivity Theory thus reconceptualises parliamentary behaviour by integrating internalised discipline, symbolic incentives, performative expectations, and strategic ambiguity into a coherent explanatory model. It extends existing theories by shifting attention from coercion alone to the patterned practices through which power is reproduced. At the same time, it recognises that coercion, surveillance, and institutional design remain central in shaping the conditions under which these practices emerge.

This theoretical intervention is not without limitations. Emphasising performativity risks overstating agency in contexts where coercion is pervasive. In highly restrictive environments, silence may reflect necessity as much as strategy. Furthermore, variations across political systems may produce different configurations of inactivity, requiring further comparative refinement. These limitations point to the need for continued empirical and theoretical development. Despite these constraints, Performative Inactivity Theory offers a significant contribution to the study of legislative behaviour and authoritarian governance. It provides a conceptual vocabulary and analytical lens through which the political significance of inactivity can be understood. By demonstrating that silence is structured, strategic, and consequential, the theory reframes inactivity as a central mechanism of contemporary governance. It shows that what appears as absence is, in fact, an organised and meaningful form of political action that sustains regimes and reproduces power.

7. Discussion and Implications

The analysis advanced in this paper compels a rethinking of core assumptions underpinning democratic theory, legislative studies, and the political sociology of institutions. At its most immediate level, the findings unsettle the equation between institutional presence and meaningful participation. Parliamentary systems in contexts such as South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe continue to function procedurally. However, the patterned inactivity observed within them reveals that presence does not translate into substantive engagement. Conventional indicators of democratic functioning, including attendance and procedural compliance, therefore fail to capture the quality of political participation (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Disch, van de Sande & Urbinati, 2019). Performative Inactivity Theory advances a more critical lens, distinguishing between the appearance of participation and its enactment.

This distinction has significant implications for how democracy is understood and evaluated. Contemporary debates have highlighted the persistence of institutions that remain formally intact while their substantive functions are diminished (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The empirical patterns examined here suggest that parliamentary inactivity constitutes a behavioural mechanism through which this transformation is normalised. Rather than relying solely on overt repression, regimes can sustain control by reconfiguring participation into silence. Legislative chambers continue to operate, but engagement is reorganised into compliance, restraint, and controlled visibility. In this sense, institutional continuity coexists with behavioural transformation, reshaping the practice of representation without dismantling its formal structure (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018). This shift necessitates a reconsideration of representation. Classical theories assume that representation entails the articulation of interests through active engagement (Pitkin, 1967; Urbinati, 2019). However, the phenomenon of performative inactivity reveals a form of representation in which presence does not guarantee expression. In contexts such as South Africa and Uganda, where party discipline and patronage networks shape legislative conduct, MPs may prioritise alignment with political hierarchies over responsiveness to constituents (Green, 2010). Silence, in this configuration, does not simply indicate disengagement but reflects a reorientation of representation towards internal political audiences rather than the electorate. Representation becomes mediated through compliance rather than articulation.

Importantly, this outcome is not incidental but produced through the interacting mechanisms identified in Performative Inactivity Theory. Risk minimisation discourages visible dissent, patronage alignment rewards conformity, institutional conditioning normalises inactivity, and symbolic performance renders silence legible as political alignment. These mechanisms generate a form of representation that is simultaneously present and substantively constrained. This aligns with recent scholarship on symbolic representation, which highlights how institutions maintain legitimacy through visible performance even in the absence of substantive responsiveness (Ankersmit, 2002; Saward, 2020). The analysis extends this literature by demonstrating how silence itself operates as a central medium of political signalling. The implications for accountability are equally significant. Accountability is conventionally associated with questioning, debate, and oversight (Schedler, 1999; Bovens, 2007). In parliamentary contexts characterised by performative inactivity, these mechanisms are weakened. The absence of sustained questioning limits legislatures' capacity to scrutinise executive action, while visible compliance maintains the appearance of institutional functioning. This produces an accountability deficit that is not immediately visible, as procedural continuity masks substantive disengagement (Grigorescu, 2007). This masking effect is evident in cases such as Zimbabwe and Russia, where legislative processes continue to operate formally while substantive oversight remains limited (Gel'man, 2015). Parliamentary inactivity serves as political camouflage, concealing the concentration of power within executive structures. Legislative sessions become sites where authority is affirmed rather than contested, reinforcing stability through controlled non-engagement.

The paper's principal theoretical contribution is to connect micro-level behavioural regularities to meso-level institutional reproduction. Repeated acts of silence and restrained participation become consequential when they are socially recognised, rewarded and routinised. PIT therefore extends work on symbolic and performative politics by placing non-action at the centre of explanation: power is reproduced not only through what political actors say and do, but also through patterned conduct in which withholding intervention becomes publicly intelligible.

The broader implication is that political analysis must attend not only to what is expressed but also to what is systematically withheld. Inactivity, when patterned and visible, is not neutral. It reflects strategic adaptation to specific configurations of power and contributes to their reproduction. Performative Inactivity Theory provides a framework for analysing these dynamics, offering a more nuanced understanding of how political systems operate under constraints. This perspective also raises important normative questions. If legislative institutions can function procedurally without substantive participation, what constitutes meaningful representation? If silence becomes a rational and rewarded strategy, how can accountability be strengthened? Addressing these questions requires rethinking both the metrics used to evaluate legislative performance and the institutional conditions that shape political behaviour. The findings of this study challenge the tendency to interpret inactivity as failure. Parliamentary silence is a structured and consequential form of political action that reflects deeper transformations in governance. Recognising this shifts the analytical focus from institutional form to behavioural practice and opens new avenues for understanding the relationship between power, participation, and representation in contemporary political systems.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined a persistent but under-theorised feature of parliamentary politics: recurrent legislative inactivity where deliberation is formally expected. It challenged interpretations that reduce such behaviour to apathy, incapacity or institutional decline and developed Performative Inactivity Theory to explain how silence, restrained questioning, ritualised affirmation and limited intervention can become structured modes of participation. The theory identifies four interacting mechanisms—risk minimisation, patronage alignment, institutional conditioning and symbolic performance—through which constrained political environments are converted into observable behavioural regularities.

The central implication is that authoritarian or hybrid legislative order may be reproduced through behavioural normalisation rather than overt coercion alone. Once inactivity becomes routinised, new entrants encounter it as an institutional script: restraint appears appropriate, politically safe and sometimes advantageous. PIT thus explains how formal legislative continuity can coexist with substantive contraction in deliberation and oversight. Its analytical value lies in distinguishing the institutional conditions that constrain legislators from the behavioural practices through which those conditions are enacted and reproduced.

These findings carry important implications for theory, policy, and practice. At the theoretical level, there is a need to move beyond frameworks that equate participation with vocal engagement and to develop analytical tools that recognise silence and non-engagement as meaningful forms of political action. Future research should extend Performative Inactivity Theory across comparative contexts to examine how different configurations of power shape the emergence and variation of inactivity. At the policy level, the study underscores the limitations of existing metrics for assessing legislative effectiveness. Indicators such as attendance, procedural compliance, and legislative output fail to capture the quality of participation. More nuanced measures are required that focus on the depth of engagement, the frequency of independent intervention, and the extent of substantive oversight. Such measures would make visible the patterns of inactivity currently obscured in formal institutional assessments.

At the practice level, strengthening parliamentary performance requires addressing the incentives and norms that sustain inactivity. This includes recalibrating party discipline mechanisms that discourage independent engagement, enhancing institutional protections for dissent, and fostering legislative cultures that value deliberation. Responsibility for these changes extends beyond individual parliamentarians to party leadership, parliamentary administrations, and oversight bodies that shape the conditions under which legislative behaviour unfolds. The image of the silent parliamentary chamber should not be mistaken for political emptiness. Rather, it reflects a profound reorganisation of legislative participation in which visible behavioural restraint becomes politically meaningful, institutionally rewarded, and publicly enacted. Performative Inactivity Theory demonstrates that authoritarian governance is reproduced not only through coercive institutions or executive dominance, but also through the repeated normalisation of observable behavioural practices that transform parliamentary participation into an organised performance of compliance. By shifting analytical attention from institutional constraints to behavioural reproduction, the theory offers a new political-sociological framework for understanding how authoritarian rule is sustained through everyday legislative conduct. Performative Inactivity Theory suggests that one of authoritarianism's most enduring achievements is not the complete silencing of opposition, but the institutionalisation of Performative Inactivity as a recognised, legitimate, and publicly visible mode of political participation.

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Understanding High School Mathematics Learning Through Grit and Achievement Goals: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This study examined the associations among grit, achievement goal orientations, and mathematics achievement among Grade 10 students in a private high school in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. A total of 256 students participated in the study, and 248 valid responses were included in the analysis. Grit was measured through perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. Achievement goal orientations included mastery goals, performance approach goals, and performance avoidance goals. Mathematics achievement was assessed using students' formal school test scores. Multiple regression analysis and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationships among the variables. The results showed that perseverance of effort positively predicted all three achievement goal orientations and mathematics achievement. Consistency of interests positively predicted performance approach and performance avoidance goals, but it did not significantly predict mastery goals or mathematics achievement. Mastery goals had a significant positive relationship with mathematics achievement, whereas performance approach and performance avoidance goals did not show significant direct relationships with mathematics achievement. The decrease in the regression coefficient of perseverance of effort after mastery goals were added suggested a possible indirect role of mastery goals. These findings indicate that continued effort and mastery focused motivation are important for mathematics learning. Private high schools should support students in maintaining effort, setting clear learning goals, and responding positively to academic difficulties.

Keywords
Achievement goal orientations; Grit; Mathematics achievement; Perseverance of effort; Private high school students

1. Introduction

Grit is one personal quality that has received wide attention. Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as perseverance and passion for long term goals. This definition suggests that successful learning depends not only on having a goal, but also on continuing to work toward that goal over time. A student may begin a task with strong interest, but progress often requires repeated practice, correction of mistakes, and delayed rewards. Grit is therefore relevant to school subjects that involve a long period of knowledge building. Mathematics is a clear example because new topics often depend on earlier knowledge, and students must continue practicing even when they do not understand a problem immediately. Previous research has also shown that motivation and commitment to learning are important factors associated with academic achievement among university students (Wu et al., 2025).

Most grit research describes two related dimensions. The first dimension is perseverance of effort. It refers to continued work, concentration, and practice in the face of difficulty. Students with stronger perseverance of effort are more likely to complete exercises, review errors, and try another method when an answer is incorrect. The second dimension is consistency of interests. It refers to maintaining attention to the same general goals rather than frequently changing direction. A student with consistent interests may remain interested in mathematics learning across a semester, while a student with lower consistency may move quickly from one interest to another. Although both dimensions belong to grit, they may not have the same relationship with academic outcomes.

Research on grit also has measurement limits. Some studies use students' self reported grades, which may contain memory errors or personal bias. Wolters and Hussain (2015) pointed out that self regulated learning and academic achievement should be measured with care when they are examined together with grit. A student who sees himself or herself as hardworking may also report higher grades, even when the official record is different. The present study reduced this problem by using a formal mathematics test provided by the school. This method does not remove every source of error, but it gives a more direct measure of students' performance in the subject.

Achievement goal orientation provides a useful framework for studying this motivational process. Achievement goals describe what students are trying to achieve and how they define success in a learning situation. Elliot and McGregor (2001) proposed a framework that separates goals according to competence and approach or avoidance tendencies. The present study focused on three goal orientations that are commonly used in educational research: mastery goals, performance approach goals, and performance avoidance goals. Each orientation can guide attention, emotion, and behavior in a different way.

Mastery goals focus on learning, understanding, and improvement. Students with strong mastery goals try to develop competence rather than only obtain a high score. They are more likely to view mistakes as information, ask questions, and use feedback to improve. In mathematics, mastery goals may support careful reasoning and repeated practice because the student's main purpose is to understand the process. Putwain et al. (2018) found that achievement goals were related to behavioral engagement and mathematics achievement. Their work supports the idea that learning goals may connect students' personal tendencies with their actual classroom performance.

Performance approach goals focus on showing higher ability than other students or obtaining a better result. This goal can encourage effort when students see competition as a positive challenge. However, it may also lead them to focus on scores, ranking, or public recognition rather than understanding. Performance avoidance goals focus on avoiding failure or avoiding the appearance of low ability. Students with this orientation may study because they do not want to make mistakes, receive criticism, or fall behind classmates. Such goals can produce effort, but they may also increase worry and reduce flexible problem solving.

Grit may be related to achievement goals because students who continue working toward long term aims are more likely to form clear learning purposes. Perseverance of effort may support mastery goals because continued practice allows students to experience improvement. It may also support performance goals because students who care about achievement can work hard to gain a high position or avoid a low one. Consistency of interests may be related to goals that keep attention on evaluation over time, although its relationship with mastery goals is less certain. Reisz et al. (2013) argued that personality traits can act as predictors of personal goals, which provides a theoretical basis for examining grit as an earlier factor.

The relationship between achievement goals and mathematics achievement also requires further study. Mastery goals are generally expected to have a positive relationship with achievement because they encourage understanding, persistence, and the use of effective strategies. The results for performance approach goals are less consistent. Competition may increase effort for some students, but it may also narrow their attention to marks. Performance avoidance goals are often linked with anxiety and low confidence, yet students may still work hard to avoid failure. These mixed possibilities are especially relevant in high school mathematics, where external examinations and peer comparison are common.

The present study addressed this gap by examining students from private School A in Quanzhou, Fujian Province. Grade 10 is an important period because students are adjusting to high school courses and developing learning habits that may continue in later grades. Mathematics becomes more abstract at this stage, and students need to connect new concepts with earlier knowledge. A better understanding of grit and achievement goals may help teachers identify why some students continue working while others withdraw when they meet difficulty.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the associations among grit, achievement goal orientations, and mathematics achievement among Grade 10 students in a private high school. Four specific questions guided the analysis. First, the study asked whether perseverance of effort and consistency of interests were related to mastery goals, performance approach goals, and performance avoidance goals. Second, it asked whether the two grit dimensions were related to mathematics achievement. Third, it examined whether the three achievement goal orientations predicted mathematics achievement after grit was considered. Fourth, it examined whether the change in the perseverance coefficient after mastery goals were entered was consistent with a possible indirect relationship.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants and School Context

The study selected 256 Grade 10 students from private School A in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Based on the school information used for this study, School A was listed among the top ten schools in Quanzhou in overall strength. This position indicated a relatively high level of educational quality and academic performance within the city. The participants were in the first year of high school and were taking the same general mathematics curriculum. Eight questionnaires were removed because they contained large sections of missing answers or showed the same response for nearly every item. The final dataset therefore contained 248 valid cases, which represented a valid response rate of 96.9 percent.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Grit scale

The study used the eight item Short Grit Scale as presented in the work of Nishikawa et al. (2022). Four items measured perseverance of effort and four items measured consistency of interests. A perseverance item was, "I am a hard worker." A consistency item was, "Even when I am interested in something, I may become bored with it after a short time." The consistency items were reverse scored so that a higher value showed more stable interests. Students responded on a five point scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The mean of the four relevant items was used for each dimension. In this study, Cronbach's α was .79.

3.2.2 Mathematics achievement goal orientation scale

Achievement goal orientations were measured with the nine item scale reported by Wu and Fu (2024). The scale contained three items for mastery goals, three items for performance approach goals, and three items for performance avoidance goals. A sample mastery item was, "I want to deepen my understanding of mathematics." A sample performance approach item was, "I want to perform better than other students in mathematics." A sample performance avoidance item was, "I study mathematics because I do not want to fall behind." Responses ranged from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The mean of the three items was used for each orientation. In this study, Cronbach's α was .81.

3.2.3 Mathematics achievement

Mathematics achievement was measured with a formal school test administered one week after the questionnaire. The test covered the Grade 10 content taught during the relevant period and was scored from 0 to 100. The school mathematics teachers provided the scores for the students who completed the questionnaire. Using a formal test reduced the bias that may occur when students report their own grades. It also ensured that all students were assessed with the same content, time limit, and scoring rules.

3.3 Research procedure

The questionnaire was administered in April 2026 during a regular mathematics class at School A. Permission was obtained from the school and the mathematics teacher before data collection. At the beginning of the session, the researcher explained the purpose of the study in simple language. Students were told that there were no correct or incorrect answers to the questionnaire items and that honest responses were important. They were also told that the study would report group results rather than individual results.

3.4 Data preparation and analysis

Multiple regression analysis was then used to predict each achievement goal orientation from perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used for mathematics achievement. In Step 1, perseverance of effort and consistency of interests were entered. In Step 2, mastery goals, performance approach goals, and performance avoidance goals were added. Standardized regression coefficients, 95 percent confidence intervals, p values, R squared values, and changes in R squared were reported. A significance level of .05 was used. The variance inflation factors were below 2.00, which suggested that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the regression models.

4. Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

After screening, 248 valid cases were included in the analysis. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations. Perseverance of effort had a mean of 3.42 and consistency of interests had a mean of 3.18. Among the goal orientations, mastery goals had the highest mean at 3.55, followed by performance approach goals at 3.31 and performance avoidance goals at 3.05. The average mathematics score was 74.22. These values suggested that the students generally reported moderate to moderately high effort and goal orientation.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perseverance of effort	3.42	0.66	1					
2. Consistency of interests	3.18	0.71	.10	1				
3. Mastery goals	3.55	0.67	.48***	.06	1			
4. Performance approach goals	3.31	0.74	.29***	.23***	.38***	1		
5. Performance avoidance goals	3.05	0.79	.24***	.20**	.27***	.61***	1	
6. Math	74.22	11.74	.36***	.05	.38***	.14*	.08	1
*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*								

The correlation between perseverance of effort and consistency of interests was small, r = .10. This result supported the decision to keep the two dimensions separate. Perseverance of effort was positively correlated with mastery goals, r = .48, performance approach goals, r = .29, performance avoidance goals, r = .24, and mathematics achievement, r = .36. Consistency of interests had small positive correlations with performance approach goals, r = .23, and performance avoidance goals, r = .20. Its correlations with mastery goals, r = .06, and mathematics achievement, r = .05, were weak.

Mastery goals were positively correlated with mathematics achievement, r = .38. The correlations of performance approach goals and performance avoidance goals with mathematics achievement were .14 and .08. Performance approach and performance avoidance goals had a relatively strong positive correlation, r = .61. This pattern showed that students who wanted to perform better than others often also wanted to avoid poor performance. However, the two goals had limited direct relationships with the formal mathematics score.

Table 2. Multiple regression analyses predicting achievement goal orientations

Predictor	Mastery goals		Performance approach goals		Performance avoidance goals	
	***β* [95% CI]**	***p***	***β* [95% CI]**	***p***	***β* [95% CI]**	***p***
Perseverance of effort	.478 [.367, .589]	< .001	.270 [.152, .389]	< .001	.220 [.099, .341]	< .001
Consistency of interests	.016 [-.095, .127]	.773	.205 [.086, .323]	.001	.178 [.057, .298]	.004
R^2	.230		.126		.088	
Adj R^2	.224		.119		.080	
F	36.60		17.61		11.75	

4.2 Regression Analyses Predicting Achievement Goal Orientations

Table 2 shows the regression models for the three achievement goal orientations. The model for mastery goals was statistically significant, $F(2, 245) = 36.60$, $p < .001$, and explained 23.0

percent of the variance. Perseverance of effort was a positive predictor of mastery goals, beta = .478, 95 percent confidence interval [.367, .589], $p < .001$. Consistency of interests was not a significant predictor, beta = .016, 95 percent confidence interval [-.095, .127], $p = .773$. This result indicated that continued effort, rather than stable interest alone, was closely related to students' desire to understand and improve in mathematics.

The model for performance approach goals was also significant, $F(2, 245) = 17.61$, $p < .001$, and explained 12.6 percent of the variance. Perseverance of effort positively predicted performance approach goals, beta = .270, 95 percent confidence interval [.152, .389], $p < .001$. Consistency of interests was also a positive predictor, beta = .205, 95 percent confidence interval [.086, .323], $p = .001$. Students who continued working and maintained stable interests were therefore more likely to report a wish to obtain better results than other students.

The model for performance avoidance goals was significant, $F(2, 245) = 11.75$, $p < .001$, and explained 8.8 percent of the variance. Perseverance of effort positively predicted performance avoidance goals, beta = .220, 95 percent confidence interval [.099, .341], $p < .001$. Consistency of interests also had a positive effect, beta = .178, 95 percent confidence interval [.057, .298], $p = .004$. The size of these coefficients was smaller than the coefficient for perseverance in the mastery model. Overall, perseverance of effort was related to all three goal orientations, while consistency of interests was related only to the two performance goals.

4.3 Hierarchical Regression Predicting Mathematics Achievement

Table 3 presents the hierarchical regression results for mathematics achievement. In Step 1, the two grit dimensions explained 13.1 percent of the variance, $F(2, 245) = 18.41$, $p < .001$. Perseverance of effort was a significant positive predictor, beta = .360, 95 percent confidence interval [.242, .478], $p < .001$. Consistency of interests was not significant, beta = .015, 95 percent confidence interval [-.103, .133], $p = .802$. This result showed that students who continued working through difficulty tended to obtain higher mathematics scores, whereas stable interest alone was not directly related to the test result.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression predicting mathematics achievement

Predictor	Step 1		Step 2	
	beta [95% CI]	***p***	**beta [95% CI]**	***p***
Perseverance of effort	.360 [.242, .478]	< .001	.239 [.107, .370]	< .001
Consistency of interests	.015 [-.103, .133]	.802	.022 [-.096, .140]	.715
Mastery goals			.283 [.147, .419]	< .001
Performance approach goals			-.012 [-.165, .140]	.872
Performance avoidance goals			-.050 [-.195, .095]	.497
R^2	.131		.189	
Adj R^2	.124		.173	
ΔR^2			.059	
F value	18.41		11.31	
ΔF			5.85	.001

Note. Step 1 included the two grit dimensions. Step 2 added the three achievement goal orientations.

In Step 2, the three achievement goal orientations were added. The full model explained 18.9 percent of the variance in mathematics achievement, $F(5, 242) = 11.31$, $p < .001$. The increase in explained variance was 5.9 percent, and the change was statistically significant, change $F(3, 242) = 5.85$, $p = .001$. Perseverance of effort remained a significant predictor, beta = .239, 95 percent confidence interval [.107, .370], $p < .001$. Mastery goals were also significant, beta =

.283, 95 percent confidence interval [.147, .419], $p < .001$.

Consistency of interests did not significantly predict mathematics achievement in the full model, beta = .022, $p = .715$. Performance approach goals were also not significant, beta = -.012, $p = .872$, and performance avoidance goals were not significant, beta = -.050, $p = .497$. These findings showed that the two main predictors were perseverance of effort and mastery goals. The performance related goals were connected with grit, but they did not explain additional differences in the formal mathematics score after the other variables were considered.

The standardized coefficient for perseverance of effort decreased from .360 in Step 1 to .239 in Step 2. At the same time, perseverance strongly predicted mastery goals, and mastery goals predicted mathematics achievement. This pattern was consistent with a possible indirect pathway in which continued effort supports mastery focused motivation, which is then related to higher mathematics achievement. However, the study did not conduct a formal mediation test, and the cross sectional design did not establish the order of cause. The result should therefore be described as evidence of an association pattern rather than proof of mediation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Grit and Achievement Goal Orientations

The strongest relationship was between perseverance of effort and mastery goals. This finding is reasonable because mastery goals require students to focus on gradual improvement. Understanding mathematics often takes time, and progress may not be visible after one lesson. Students need to continue practicing, ask for explanation, and return to earlier mistakes. Perseverance of effort provides the behavioral basis for these actions. As students see improvement, they may also develop a stronger wish to learn for understanding. The relationship can therefore work in both directions, although the present design tested only an association.

Consistency of interests showed a different pattern. It predicted the two performance goals but did not predict mastery goals. One possible explanation is that stable interest in a general direction does not always mean a strong wish to understand a specific mathematics topic. Students may remain focused on academic success because of examination plans, family expectations, or future study goals. Such stability can support concern about relative performance without producing a deeper learning purpose. This explanation is tentative and should be tested in future studies with more detailed measures of subject interest.

5.2 Grit, Mastery Goals, and Mathematics Achievement

The second main finding was that perseverance of effort positively predicted mathematics achievement. This result agrees with the basic idea of grit. Mathematics learning requires repeated practice and the accumulation of knowledge. When students continue working after errors, they have more opportunities to identify weak points and correct them. They are also more likely to complete assignments and prepare for tests. These behaviors can gradually improve performance. The result also supports earlier studies that found perseverance to be more closely related to achievement than consistency of interests.

Mastery goals were the only achievement goal orientation that significantly predicted mathematics achievement in the full model. Students who aimed to understand and improve tended to obtain higher test scores. Mastery goals may support deeper processing because students pay attention to why a method works rather than only whether the final answer is correct.

They may also use feedback more effectively and show less withdrawal after mistakes. In mathematics, these behaviors are useful because one misunderstanding can affect later topics.

Performance approach and performance avoidance goals did not have significant direct effects after grit and mastery goals were controlled. A performance approach goal may increase study time, but the quality of learning can vary. Some students may use effective strategies, while others may focus on memorizing procedures for a short term score. Performance avoidance goals may also produce effort, but worry can reduce concentration. These opposite processes may cancel each other in a regression model, leading to a small average effect.

The reduction in the perseverance coefficient after mastery goals were entered suggests a possible motivational pathway. Continued effort may help students experience progress, and progress may strengthen the goal of improving competence. A stronger mastery goal may then guide students toward useful strategies and steady practice. At the same time, perseverance remained significant, so effort had an association with achievement beyond the measured goals. This pattern is consistent with a partial indirect relationship, but formal longitudinal or experimental research is needed before a causal explanation can be accepted.

5.3 Educational Implications

The findings have practical meaning for mathematics teaching in private high schools. Teachers should give attention not only to correct answers but also to the learning process that produces improvement. Feedback can recognize students for returning to a difficult problem, correcting an error, and trying a new method. This type of feedback connects effort with learning rather than with simple obedience. It may help students see that perseverance is useful when it is combined with reflection and strategy change.

Teachers can also support mastery goals by making learning objectives clear. At the beginning of a lesson, the teacher can explain what students should understand and how the new idea connects with earlier knowledge. At the end of the lesson, students can identify what they have learned and what remains difficult. Small improvement goals may be more helpful than a general instruction to obtain a high score. For example, a student can aim to explain the reason for each step in an equation or reduce a common type of calculation error.

Classroom tasks should provide a suitable level of challenge. Tasks that are too easy do not require perseverance, while tasks that are far beyond students' current ability may lead to withdrawal. Teachers can use a sequence from basic questions to more complex applications. When students meet difficulty, hints can guide them without giving the full answer. This approach allows students to experience effort, support, and success. These experiences may strengthen both perseverance and mastery focused motivation.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered. First, grit and achievement goal orientations were measured through self report questionnaires. Although the scales showed acceptable reliability, students may have responded in ways that reflected social expectations or their personal view of their learning behavior. Future studies should combine questionnaires with teacher ratings, classroom observations, learning records, or repeated measurements to obtain a broader account of effort and motivation. Using several sources would also reduce common method bias and allow researchers to compare reported persistence with observed study behavior. Such evidence may show whether students apply perseverance consistently across homework, classroom tasks, examinations, and periods of academic difficulty.

Second, the study included students from one private school in Quanzhou. The school was described as academically strong, so the students may not represent private high school students in other areas. School climate, family background, admission practices, and teaching methods can differ across institutions. Future studies should include several private and public schools from different cities. A larger and more varied sample would improve the ability to apply the findings to other settings.

Third, the design was cross sectional. Grit, achievement goal orientations, and mathematics achievement were measured within a short period. The regression order was based on theory, but the data could not show the direction of influence. Higher achievement may also strengthen perseverance or mastery goals. Longitudinal research should measure the variables at several points during a school year. Such a design could examine whether earlier perseverance predicts later goals and whether later goals predict changes in achievement.

Finally, the hierarchical regression pattern suggested a possible indirect pathway through mastery goals, but a formal mediation analysis was not conducted. Future research can use bootstrap mediation, structural equation modeling, or longitudinal cross lagged models. These methods can provide a more direct test of the proposed process. Experimental studies can also examine whether teaching that supports mastery goals changes students' effort and mathematics performance over time.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the associations among grit, achievement goal orientations, and mathematics achievement among Grade 10 students in a private high school. The results showed that perseverance of effort was positively related to mastery goals, performance approach goals, performance avoidance goals, and mathematics achievement. Consistency of interests was related to the two performance goals but not to mastery goals or mathematics achievement. Mastery goals positively predicted mathematics achievement, while the two performance goals did not have significant direct effects. The pattern also suggested that perseverance of effort may support achievement partly through mastery focused motivation.

The findings highlight the value of continued effort in mathematics learning. Students need support to remain engaged when they meet difficult concepts, repeated errors, and slow progress. At the same time, effort should be connected with clear mastery goals and effective learning strategies. Private high schools can support this process through suitable challenge, process focused feedback, opportunities to revise work, cooperative problem solving, and regular reflection on learning goals. Further research across different schools and time periods can test the stability of these associations and clarify how motivation develops during high school mathematics learning.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with appropriate ethical standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.

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Developing and Validating Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory: A Human–AI Co-Governance Framework for Democratic Decision-Making

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Abstract

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public governance systems has profoundly impacted how government agencies make administrative decisions, develop policies and deliver services in the context of democratic organizations. However, existing governance theories are unable to articulate how human cognition and machine intelligence cooperate in a co-decision making environment within government. A pervasive problem in existing governance literature and theories about AI and government is the lack of clarity or the fragmentation of theory regarding the interaction between human intelligence and machine intelligence in such hybrid governance systems particularly when concerning the accountability, the legitimacy, and the quality of decisions in an AI public administration setting. This study attempts to bridge this void. More specifically, this study proposes Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory as an original explanatory framework of the interaction between human intelligence and machine intelligence in a co-decision making context of democratic government. The research follows a theory building and theory validation-oriented design that is achieved via systematic literature review synthesis. Within this new CGS Theory, we present a cognitive system-based view of governance, conceptualized as a distributed cognition system that includes six elements: human intelligence, machine intelligence, human and machine learning cognition, the interface among those two intelligences (interaction mechanism), the framework on which governance is situated (democratic principles), and the capability of that governance system to perform, respond and evolve (resilience and adaptiveness). This new paradigm in cognitive governance theory explains why the interplay among these six elements influences the quality of decision making, the effectiveness of public policies, and the sustainability of public trust in the age of AI enabled governance systems. Our approach is built with a view to enable future empirical testing, with mixed-method techniques, such as the Delphi study method, survey instruments, and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Keywords

Cognitive Governance Systems; Human–AI co-governance; Algorithmic governance; Democratic decision-making; Public administration; Artificial intelligence governance; Digital governance; Governance Theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Artificial Intelligence and Public Governance The implementation of AI in public governance structures has significantly impacted how states build capacity, make administrative decisions, and interact with citizens. Public sector organizations are progressively employing AI-powered tools and applications in a wide range of policy fields including public services delivery, financial and tax services, urban and rural development, and fraud detection, and for purposes of planning and 'predictive' governance (Wirtz et al., 2019). These developments are driving a move from classic 'bureaucratic' models of governance toward 'algorithm-based and data-driven' governance models. AI, it is posited, enhances governments' ability to handle and analyze big data; to improve operational efficiency and optimal resource allocation. But these gains may come with enormous governance costs, including those pertaining to transparency and fairness, accountability and democratic legitimacy. As algorithms function as opaque systems, with limits on visibility for public scrutiny, as well as for institutional review and supervision, they raise the tension between technological efficiencies and democratic processes (Yeung, 2018).

1.2 Problem Statement

In the context of rapid changes, such governance theories are not able to adequately analyze the dynamic relationship between human cognition and artificial intelligence in policy processes and in decision-making in public governance. Existing Governance theory is typically institutional, technical or behavioral focused. For example, research into algorithmic governance predominantly focuses on efficiency, optimisation and automation, largely failing to address the ethical issues of accountability, legitimacy and democratic participation (Kitchin 2017). Similarly democratic governance theory is human centred and concerned with institutions, yet is less concerned about the impact of machine intelligence on policy outcome. Therefore a more unified approach is needed, as in the absence of one we struggle to comprehend where accountability, responsibility and decision-making power lie in such hybrid forms of human-AI Governance.

1.3 Research Gap

Three major gaps exist in the academic literature:

First, there is no holistic theoretical models to the integration of human cognitions with artificial intelligence in governance system. While many authors analyse AI from a perspective of technical tool or regulation threat to governances, few have considered AI as an embedded agent integrated in the governance structures.

Second, there has no widespread thinking about governance as cognitive systems. As most theories in public administration primarily discuss governance institutions, procedures, rules, without dealing the human cognitive and machine intelligence interactions which lead to governing outcomes.

Third, we have not had yet any validated theoretical models for clarifying impact of human-AI co-governance on democratic outcomes like trustworthiness, accountability, policy effectiveness, democratic institutional stability and so on. Thus, we need a common theoretic models in explaining governance as a cognitive dynamics system composed of human intelligence with artificial intelligence under a democratic umbrella.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Main aim and specific objectives Main Aim This study's main aim is to formulate a Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) theory explaining human–artificial intelligence co-governance in democratic decision-making processes. Specific Objectives This study has the following specific objectives:

(1) To conceive of governance as a cognitive system where human and artificial intelligence collaborate.

(2) To formulate and identify key construct variables of Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS).

(3) To explicate the intervening processes of interaction between human cognitive system and AI system during governance operations.

(4) To develop a conceptual framework connecting CGS attributes to governance processes' outcome.

(5) To provide grounds for subsequent empirical verification of the proposed framework

1.5 Research Questions

The research will be based on the following research questions:

(1) What does it mean to understand governance as a cognitive system combining the knowledge of humans and machines (artificial intelligence), and what is governance in its essential dimensions when applied to democratic decision-making?

(2) What interaction structures of human and artificial intelligence can guarantee a good level of democratic legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness for the purposes of co-governance when human and artificial intelligence act together as governing actors?

(3) How does the Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) framework affect governance quality, public confidence and the effectiveness of public policies in contemporary democratic systems?

1.6 Contribution of the Study

Theoretical and Practical Contributions The study has four significant theoretical and practical implications.

Firstly, this study proposes Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory as a new model of governance where the notion of public administration is re-framed not simply as an institutional structure but as a distributed cognition system. CGS Theory enriches the current academic debates concerning Algorithmic Governance by incorporating perspectives from cognitive science, systems theory, and democratic governance.

Secondly, this study is relevant to Public Administration literature as it introduces a novel explanatory model for explaining hybrid Human-AI decision-making within the context of a governance system. Furthermore, the framework broadens the scope of governance theory to address the participation of artificial intelligence in the decision structure.

Thirdly, this study makes a valuable contribution to Artificial Intelligence Governance literature by embedding AI systems within a framework based on the democratic ideals of fairness, accountability, and transparency. Lastly, the proposed framework provides a framework for a future empirical analysis that sets out operational and testable constructs, as well as a theoretical model that can be verified using a combination of methods including Delphi method, survey methods, and structural equation modeling (SEM) methods.

The CGS Theory offers an alternative conceptual understanding of governing processes in the era of digital technologies where human cognitions and artificial intelligence jointly contribute to the decision processes of an organization, the behavior of public institutions, and democratic governing structures.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Algorithmic Governance

Algorithmic governance is the application of computer systems, data driven models, automated decision systems and related tools and services in the public administration, including in public decision-making and policy processes. Their aims is to increase efficiency and decrease administrative burden while improving prediction of future processes, thus strengthening governance processes. However, there is a lot of theoretical and normative discussion on the implications of algorithmic decision-making for democratic governance in the existing literature. First, Kitchin (2017) points out that algorithms are no passive technical tool, but an embedded system, conditioned by political, institutional and social assumptions. Algorithms are not just a tool to optimize existing administrative procedures, but play a constitutive role in making and in doing governing. Second, Yeung (2018) stresses that algorithms introduce into decision making processes "black boxes", which decrease transparency and accountability in public administration. Although algorithmic processes increase administrative efficiency, this may reduce our control over how public policy decisions are taken. We are thus confronted to a duality of algorithmic governance that, on the one hand, increase the efficiency of public administration, while on the other side, weakens principles of governance such as transparency and legitimacy. Unfortunately, this literature is still segregated between concerns for optimization and for democratic values and this two dimensions are only partially connected.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration

The Role of AI in Public Administration Public sector administrations make intensive use of Artificial intelligence technologies especially in the provision of welfare, revenue administration, town planning and predictive policing systems. The AI allows governments to perform complex data analysis and to delegate routine decisions to an AI system, improving thus their effectiveness and efficiency (Wirtz et al. 2019). Nevertheless, this new dimension poses at the same time risks in terms of discrimination and the equal access to public services.

The deployment of these technologies may, in fact, perpetuate or even accentuate social inequalities if AI systems are trained with biased data. Although these new instruments may lead to the improvement of the quality of decision making, they may further marginalize individuals and communities (Margetts & Dorobantu 2019). Literature on AI in Public Administration suffers from an instrumental approach to this technological change. These studies consider the AI system as just a tool the government can use to increase the performance of its institutions. AI is thus considered as an outer "skin" of governmental systems and there is no significant effort made towards the design of a governing theory which addresses how this technological element is embedded into our political system and decision-making procedures.

2.3 Human–AI Collaboration

Existing work on human-AI collaboration focuses on how human agents work with machines within a decision-making context. In describing human and machine cognition, Jarrahi (2018) talks about "human-AI symbiosis," whereby AI could offset human weaknesses with its ability to process information and bring in more evidence-based information, whilst human users provide context, an ethical outlook and the ability to adapt the decisions according to specific circumstances. Despite its useful findings, however, this work is mostly of an organisational and managerial rather than of a governance nature. Work on human-AI interaction tends to be conducted within work environments rather than within a broader democratic government context. As such, there is no rich theory developed to explain the dynamics of a human-machine decision-making environment for public organisations. In most models, humans occupy the decision-making role and machine takes a supporting role. The focus of such a decision making framework would reflect a 'technological determinism' paradigm, neglecting other aspects of the decision-making complex. There is no theoretical work developed on the 'governance of human-AI collaboration.'

2.4 Democratic Accountability

Democratic accountability-a crucial characteristic of any public system of government-seeks to hold decision makers accountable to the governed through institutional mechanisms that emphasize information (transparency, monitoring) and authority (elections, supervision). We draw upon the working definition of accountability as "a relationship that links the governed with the governing and links decision makers with those they govern. Accountability requires that decision-making and governing institutions are able to answer to their citizens for the actions they take, and, as a result, are prepared to endure sanctions should these actions prove insufficient" (Bovens, 2007).

Given the recent increasing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) within government operations, however, how decision makers remain "answerable" in an automated process of algorithmic decision making becomes problem-driven by the inherent inscrutability of these systems (Yeung, 2018). A significant tension between increased technological complexity and democratic accountability, between making faster and better decisions on one hand, and more transparent and justifiable decisions on the other hand, has emerged. Thus, existing, primarily post-hoc accountability mechanisms fall short of embedded design requirements and a gap exists between democratic theory and technical governing literature.

2.5 Cognitive Systems Theory

The cognitive systems approach offers insights into the process of the decision-making that emerges from the interactions of various agents and systems. According to Hollnagel and Woods (2005), the cognitive system is viewed as a collection of mechanisms that encompass human and technical elements working together to accomplish each decision outcomes.

This view hold that decision-making in governance environment is not exclusively on individual actors or organizations. The interaction under framework of a human cognition architecture becomes the basis of the decision-making process. This kind of views give a possibility to change the governance from institution dominated governance to cognition dominated governance.

However, we observe only limited use of this type of theory in the context of public administration (the majority of governance literature still embraces traditional institutional or behavioral perspectives and concepts). Consequently, we cannot find fully developed models that would demonstrate governance as a distributed, human artificial cognitions process.

This gap in the knowledge about cognitive architectures suggests the need to develop theories of CGS, something that the next three chapters of this work attempt to do.

2.6 Literature Gap Synthesis

The three critical convergences that can be synthesized from the academic literatures identified below include:

First, much of the Algorithmic governance literatures explore questions related to the system design and efficiency of algorithms but often do not make links with systems of democratic legitimacy.

Second, in the context of the AI in public administration literatures the concerns have been mainly to identify its operative use rather than theorize AI as embedded in and itself operating as an actor within decision structures.

Third, research on the subject of human–artificial intelligence (AI) cooperation tends to be organizationally driven, looking at the efficiency effects on teams rather than the nature of decision processes, whether these operate at governance level or lower.

Fourth, Democratic accountability literatures address normative issues of responsibility but often ignore the specific technological challenges involved with AI-based governance system.

Finally, while cognitive systems theory offers rich explanatory frameworks it has yet to be specifically applied to the governance field.

2.7 Literature Gap

The literature on AI governance demonstrates significant theoretical fragmentation, dispersed across multiple streams of research each with strong points in explaining parts of the changing public decision-making systems. Algorithmic governance (AG) is concerned with efficiency gains, automatization of administrative tasks and the optimization of policy implementation. AG suffers from a shallow integration of normative democratic principles, concerning legitimacy, accountability and citizens' oversight. Therefore it is technically well grounded, but it provides only weak justification on democratic governance theory. The literature on AI in public administration (PIPA) deals with efficiency improvements, the expansion of predictive capabilities and with improvements in public sector operations. Although PIPA offers important observations about practical benefits resulting from the introduction of AI, the dominant view within this stream treats AI as an external tool and not an integrated component of a governance system. It has not provided a framework for an integrated explanation on governance based on the reshuffling of logic of action and decision structure in an institution when AI is involved.

The human-AI interaction (HAI) literature looks on the interaction between human and machine to improve decision making and performance in organization environments. However HAI focuses mainly on organizational productivity and managerial efficiency not on the quality and desirability from democratic points of view, and so lacks strong moral and ethical justification and fails to address public accountability, political legitimacy, democratic oversight and participation from an institutional point of view and thus misses the 'democratic dimension.' Democratic accountability literature on the other hand offers critical perspective to understand transparency, accountability and legitimate of governance processes. Yet it fails to deal with democratic process that have changed by the digital transformation of administration systems as most theories are formulated based on digital or even pre-digital forms of governance.

A significant gap appears in conceptualizing accountability in an environment where decisions are jointly co-produced by human and non-human actors. Lastly the cognitive system (CS) approach sees the organization's cognitive process as a distribution process of interacting cognitive agent. Although the CS approach can offer a conceptual lens to study decision making processes the application in public administration research are not fully developed for explaining public governance processes. No general integrative theory for explain and prescribe the interaction between AI, Human Cognition and Democratic governance currently exist. This research demonstrates the existence of a large and under-researched theoretical space that includes technological, institutional, behavior, and normative dimensions. This study addresses this void by developing a theory on Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory as a comprehensive framework explaining AI-mediated governance as a distributed cognitive system within a democratic setting.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The progress of Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory thus needs the synergy of these four theoretical traditions systems theory, democratic theory, cognitive science, artificial intelligence governance theory - all these offer the theoretical framing for thinking about governance as a distributed cognition in human, machine AI as a distributed system regulated by institutions, and by democratic constraints.

3.1 Systems Theory Perspective

The main system building-block for Cognitive Governance Systems is a systemic approach which conceptualises governance not as a serial, administrative process but as an interconnected and changing system. According to systems thinking, results and impacts do not originate from a single element but from interactions between numerous elements, feedback processes and environmental factors (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005). For governance purposes, this means that the outcome of any policy will not be solely generated by one person or institution but as the output from interactions between organisational structures, data systems, devices, technology and people. The input of AI into such system is that AI systems not only contribute information but as information-processing agents active participate in creating decisions pathways. Systems theory would see a Cognitive Governance System as a complex adaptive system where human intelligence and artificial intelligence are co-evolving subsystems which feedback loop between output and result allows the system to learn. Hence this understanding justifies the representation of governance as a learning cognitive ecosystem.

3.2 Democratic Theory Perspective

Democratic theory gives the "normative why" to the CGS framework because it underscores the inherent requirement of legitimate governance, human participation, public accountability, and representation. Traditional democratic theory assumes that governance stems from human action through the use of elections and controls in governance (Bovens, 2007). AI's role as an artificial agent of governance, however, has altered this belief and challenges how the legitimacy of governance is assured through algorithmically based governance systems. CGS Theory, through the design of internal system constraints, overcomes this dilemma by directly imbuing governing mechanisms with the principles of democracy. This means that rather than implementing accountability as a posterior correction, accountability is built in as part of the governing mechanism including Transparency, Explainability, and Institutional Control. Therefore, Democratic theory constitutes the normative constraint structure of the cognitive process of governance.

3.3 Cognitive Science Perspective

Cognitive science supplies the explanatory grounding for how decision-making is executed within human-AI systems. Human intelligence, by its nature, exhibits bounded rationality – our decision-making takes place within a framework characterized by incompleteness of knowledge, lack of time, and individual cognitive limits (Simon, 1957). Conversely, an AI provides computational intelligence which can ingest massive quantities of data, recognize patterns and deliver predictions on a scale beyond human capability, but can not provide the contextual judgment, ethical wisdom or norms that frame governance decisions. The CGS Theory unifies these complementary cognitive capacities in a decision-making entity where human intelligences provide judgmental and interpretive capabilities, and AI provides machine computational power. We call the overall decision-making entity the decision process, and define governance as a distributed intelligent system.

3.4 Artificial Intelligence Governance Theory

This approach defines AI governance to include the regulatory, ethical and institutional arrangements needed to manage artificial intelligence so that it is used in a responsible way, such as a code of ethical principles including transparency, Fairness, Accountability, Robustness, and Human Control (Wirtz et al. 2019). These include measures to address potential algorithmic discrimination, inscrutability and inequality. Unfortunately, most AI governance discourse conceptualises AI as something which the governed will seek to regulate, an externalisation rather than a component of the decision-making processes of public bodies. CGS Theory makes a contribution to this literature by conceiving of AI as a co-governing agent of a more encompassing governance regime. Rather than regulating AI as an artifact, CGS considers AI to be part of the structural logic of governance. Consequently CGS provides the regulatory and ethical context in which the accountability and transparency frameworks operate.

3.5 Integration Toward Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS)

The interdisciplinary foundation of Cognitive Governance Systems Theory is made by combining three other theoretical streams: Systems theory to offer structural and dynamic accounts of governance as an adaptive system, Democratic theory for normative requirements like accountability and legitimacy, Cognitive science for explaining decision-making processes as distributed ones and AI governance theory for ensuring ethical and safe AI incorporation into the administration systems. CGS Theory is a synthesis of the described theoretical streams which conceives of governance as a human-AI cognitive ecosystem governed by democratic norms.

4. Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory Development

4.1 Formal Definition of Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS)

The Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) theory approaches governance as a distributed cognitive system where the process of policymaking, decision-making, implementation and evaluation takes place in democratically controlled institutions and involve interaction between human intelligence and artificial intelligence. Different from traditional understanding where artificial intelligence (AI) is only considered an auxiliary function of the governing structure, the cognitive governance theory sees AI as an embedded component of the cognition involved in the governance structure. Following this understanding, we propose a definition for CGS: "a dynamic and adaptable governance system in which human cognitive agents, artificial intelligence systems and institutional structures are inter-linked through continuous feedback loops, resulting in the generation, evaluation, and improvement of public policy decisions in the context of a democratically accountability." Based on this, we suggest that CGS theory is a system-level theory and not a technological model, for it treats cognition, interaction and governance output as interconnected elements of the governance structure.

4.2 Core Dimensions of CGS Theory

CGS theory is built around six interlinked concepts that together tell a story about how to conduct AI governance.

4.2.1 Human Intelligence (HI)

Human Intelligence is the ability of human agents to exercise thought and judgement in the exercise of power – the ethical, normative and interpretive dimensions of political decision-making, which encompass moral, value, judgmental, normative reasoning, understanding context, political accountability etc.

Features :

- Ethical/ normative reasoning/ judgements.
- Policy issues are interpreted according to specific political contexts.
- Representativeness gives legitimacy (i.e. Democratic legitimacy)
- Responsible/ accountable action

4.2.2 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence is computational systems that can analyse massive volumes of data, discover and recognise trends and create predictive outcomes that help with decision-making. Features of AI - Predict and analyze via data, automate admin functions, discover patterns and optimize, Scale support in decision making, Improve in governmental efficacy, cannot think normatively and cannot be democratic.

4.2.3 Cognitive Interaction Mechanism (CIM)

Cognitive Interaction Mechanism is the interface of the interaction between human intelligence and AI in governance processes and it also is the core layer of operation of CGS. Function highlights:

- human-in-the-loop decision systems
- machine-assisted policy reasoning
- iterative feedback loops of human judgment and AI output
- co-decision architectures CIM guarantees the governance neither solely is undertaken by human beings nor solely by machine to realize the balanced governance.

4.2.4 Democratic Accountability (DA)

The capacity of institutions and procedures to guarantee that algorithmic decisions are transparent, understandable, and accountable to the public is referred to as Democratic Accountability. The three major pillars: transparency in the algorithmic process, institutional safeguards, understanding in the explanation of the decision, and the assurance of legal and electoral responsibility in DA guarantee that all AI governance respects democratic legitimacy and citizen control.

4.2.5 Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC)

Adaptive Learning Capacity This is the capacity of governance systems to take on lessons from past actions, policies and feedback in order to enhance performance over time. Typical features include: Policy learning loops Data-informed institutional adaptation Dynamic system adjustment Evidence informed governance strengthening Adaptive learning capacity has been essential in allowing CGS to be an operative learning system as opposed to just an institutional entity.

4.2.6 Governance Resilience (GR)

Governance resilience – Governance system's capacity to operate with stability, continuity, and performance under conditions of uncertainty, crisis or system-wide shock. Characteristics of governance resilience;

- Crisis adaptive ability
- Institutions remain in place and functioning
- Error correction systems
- Flexible system under conditions of uncertainty.

Governance resilience keeps the system going even under uncertain or difficult conditions.

4.3 Theoretical Logic Chain of CGS

The CGS framework includes a systematic cause of action that traces how governance results arise from interactions of its core constructs.

Step 1: Input Layer (Cognitive Inputs)

- Human Intelligence (HI)
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

These two components represent the foundational cognitive resources of the governance system.

Step 2: Interaction Layer (Cognitive Processing)

- Cognitive Interaction Mechanism (CIM)

CIM (Cognitive & Intelligence modeling, where machine intelligence is translated and accepted, denied, modified, or overruled by human decisions. HI & AI work together by using.

Step 3: Governance Regulation Layer

- Democratic Accountability (DA)

The democratic political system structures the limits of all cognitive interactions through transparency, legitimation, and an institutional form that guarantees these conditions.

Step 4: System Evolution Layer

- Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC)

This system learns based on what was and wasn't helpful. The learning also involves using your feedback.

Step 5: Stability Layer

- Governance Resilience (GR)

System robustness against uncertainty and stability of performance are reinforced through the continuous learning process and positive feedback loop.

Step 6: Output Layer (Governance Outcomes)

Key governance outputs resulting from interaction of all CGS components are as follows;

- Improved decision quality
- Increased public trust
- Enhanced policy effectiveness
- Strengthened institutional performance

4.4 Conceptual Model of CGS

CGS operates as a multi-layered system:

HI + AI → CIM → DA → ALC → GR → Governance Outcomes

Governance in This construct views this structure as a cyclical cognitive system, in which a decision or an outcome provides feedback input into the system to generate subsequent optimal decisions.

4.5 Theoretical Novelty and Contribution

The novelty of CGS Theory lies in three major contributions:

(1) Governance as a Cognitive System

Rather than dealing with governance as either institutional or procedural in the standard way of theorizing about it, the CGS framework defines governance as a distributed system of intelligence distributed across people and machines.

(2) Integration of AI as a cognitive actor

AI is seen at CGS not as a machine, but rather as a living cognitive part of government policy-making.

(3) Unified democratic-cognitive framework

CGS ties together cognitive science, democratic accountability, and AI governance into a single conceptual framework that attempts to solve the fracturing of existing work.

4.6 Theoretical Positioning

The CGS theory is based at the nexus of :

- Public Administration Theory (governance structures)
- Cognitive Systems Theory (distributed cognition)
- Artificial Intelligence Governance (ethical regulation)
- Democratic Theory (legitimacy and accountability)

Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, CGS can be considered a meta-theory on the analysis of the Governance of AI.

5. Conceptual Model and Propositions

5.1 Conceptual Model of Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS)

The proposed Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) model framed governance in a multi-layer cognitive structure in which HI and AI interact via specified cognitive mechanisms under democratic constraints (refer to the figure). CGS elucidates how the processes involving cognitive inputs, institutional mediators and system feedback contribute to the achievement of the governance outcomes. The components of CGS are elaborated as follows: Human Intelligence (HI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are core of the model as independent yet interrelated cognitive inputs which provide norm-based reasoning, ethical judgment and context-aware insights (HI) and computational performance, predictions and massive data processing capability (AI).

Cognitive Interaction Mechanism (CIM) operates as the mediator through which human judgments are combined, negotiated, and validated with machine-driven outcomes as well as is served as the operative human-AI co-governance process; Democratic Accountability (DA) as an institutional mediator serves to regulate and monitor the processes between HI and AI to ensure transparency, legitimisation, and accountability for human and machine; Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC) ensures and facilitates the on-going improvement of governance via feedback mechanisms of out-comes; and Governance Resilience (GR) addresses the system's capacity for stability and robustness under various conditions.

5.2 Conceptual Model Diagram (Textual Representation)

The CGS conceptual model can be represented as:

HI + AI → CIM → DA (moderator) → ALC → GR → Governance Outcomes

Where governance outcomes include:

- Decision quality
- Public trust
- Policy effectiveness
- Institutional performance

5.3 Variables in the CGS Framework

Independent Variables (IVs)

- Human Intelligence (HI)
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Mediating Variable

- Cognitive Interaction Mechanism (CIM)

Moderating Variable

- Democratic Accountability (DA)

System Development Variables

- Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC)
- Governance Resilience (GR)

Dependent Variables (DVs)

- Governance Quality
- Public Trust
- Policy Effectiveness

5.4 Theoretical Propositions

Using the CGS conceptual framework, the following are proposed to be tested as empirically testable propositions:

P1: Increased integration of Human Intelligence (HI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expected to enhance Cognitive Interaction Mechanisms (CIM) in the governance system.

P2: CIM enhance governance quality in public policy-making.

P3: CIM act as mediating role in relationship between HI-AI integration and the governance outcome.

P4: Democratic Accountability (DA) amplifies the positive effect of CIM on governance quality. P5: Higher levels of DA minimize the risks of algorithmic bias and transparency challenges posed by the implementation of AI for governance.

P6: Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC) facilitates increased policy effectiveness through sustained system adjustment and feedback.

P7: Governance Resilience (GR) are positive outcomes of enhanced ALC in volatile and crisis situations. P8: Governance system based on CGS foster public trust via enhanced transparency and accountability structures.

P9: Joint interaction effects between HI, AI, CIM, DA, ALC, and GR will significantly predict the overall governance outcomes.

P10: DA moderates the indirect effect of HI-AI integration on the governance outcomes mediated by CIM.

5.5 Explanation of Model Logic

Functioning Model: The CGS model is designed as a serial and cycle type system.

- HUMAN INTELLIGENCE and ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE form the fundamental cognitive inputs through which a decision-making process begins to get triggered.
- COGNITIVE INTERACTION MECHANISMS the way, where human judgement and machine outputs meet or interact or intersect.
- DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY serves as the regulating aspect, maintaining governance as legtimised, transparency oriented and controlled by institution.
- ADAPTIVE LEARNING CAPACITY, by virtue of which governance is updated from feedback of governing outcome.
- GOVERNANCE RESILIENCE to protect the system from unforeseen conditions.

5.6 Theoretical Contribution of the Model

There are three aspects in which the CGS conceptual model supports governance theory: The model decenters governance as purely institutional to that of as cognitive system. This makes the object of analytical inquiry move from organizations to distributed intelligence system;

the model constructs a mediation framework of human-AI cognitive system. The Cognitive Interaction Mechanism becomes the explanation center and key mediate path in generating decision; the model brings in democratic accountability as a moderator factor into the technology-based governance system, so as to make it keep to the democratic principles and institutions legitimacy.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This study uses mixed method research design to develop and validate the Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory. The mixed method research design is suitable for this study as it concerns both theory building and empirically validation of a new model of governance. Employing the mixed method design will allow us to capture the complexity of human-AI co-governance systems, and to strength of theory building process. We employed the sequential exploratory design for this study. The qualitative method is utilized at the beginning stage for the development of the new theory; and then the quantitative method is used to validate empirically the theory empirically. This design is highly recommended in developing theory in the public administration and governance literature, as it permits us to explore deductively and tests the theory with data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

6.2 Phase 1: Expert Interviews (Qualitative Exploration)

The initial step includes conducting a series of semi-structured expert interviews to develop and ground the envisaged CGS. Our sample of experts is to be drawn from Public administration, governance of AI, digital policy and Political science domain.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling approach will be adopted in selecting roughly 15-20 experts who have some proven experiences in any of the governing structures or policy designing in the context of AI.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews will focus on:

- Perceptions of AI integration in governance
- Challenges of human–AI decision-making
- Institutional accountability mechanisms
- Validity of CGS constructs

Data Analysis

Theme of analysis in this phase: thematic analysis on the interview data to identify recurring patterns concerning governance cognition, AI-driven, and democratic accountability. Research significance: this phase is a preparation to help consolidate the concepts under CGS as a conceptually sound foundation and to ensure the empirical research is contextually relevant and grounded in the identified problems/issues and areas for further empirical studies.

6.3 Phase 2: Delphi Method (Theory Validation)

The second stage is conducted using the Delphi method for validation of the conceptual framework/dimensions for CGS. The Delphi technique is suited in terms of developing and achieving an expert consensus in a relatively immature theoretical paradigm in which a lack of data is an important feature.

Panel Selection

A panel of 20–30 experts will be recruited, including scholars and practitioners in:

- Public administration
- Artificial intelligence governance
- Digital transformation
- Political science

Procedure

The Delphi process will involve three iterative rounds:

- Round 1: Experts evaluate CGS constructs and suggest modifications
- Round 2: Aggregated responses are shared, and experts reassess their views
- Round 3: Final consensus is achieved on CGS dimensions and indicators

Outcome

The Delphi technique provides assurance in the content validity and construct validity of the CGS framework, especially concerning constructs including Cognitive Interaction Mechanism (CIM), Democratic Accountability (DA), and Governance Resilience (GR).

6.4 Phase 3: Survey Research (Quantitative Testing)

This includes collecting sufficient data through a massive survey to empirically examine the validity of the CGS model and to test all assumed links.

Population and Sample

The target population includes:

- Public sector officials
- Policy analysts
- Governance experts
- AI system administrators

300-500 sample size for the data is adequate for structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement Instruments

Survey measures will be constructed using previously published and validated measures and CGS constructs. Measures for each construct (HI, AI, CIM, DA, ALC, GR) will consist of several Likert-type items.

6.5 Data Analysis Techniques

6.5.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The EFA technique is a method used to determine what the factor structures of the data underlie what and what CGS scales can be used to test those proposed constructs. This is a measure of dimensionally validity and to minimise measure redundancies.

6.5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The application of CFA will be conducted to test the measurement model and validate the factorial structure obtained in the EFA. For examining the construct validity of the measure, fit indexes such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR will be used.

6.5.3 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

All hypothesize relationships between the CGS constructs will be tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The capability of SEM to examine a number of relationships simultaneously make it suitable to test the more complicated models like the CGS theory.

The SEM model will examine:

- Direct effects of HI and AI on governance outcomes
- Mediating role of CIM
- Moderating effect of Democratic Accountability (DA)
- Indirect effects through Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC) and Governance Resilience (GR)

6.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure methodological rigor, the study will apply the following:

- Content validity: ensured through Delphi expert consensus
- Construct validity: tested through CFA
- Reliability: assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70)
- Convergent validity: assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50)
- Discriminant validity: tested using Fornell-Larcker criteria

The procedures applied make it certain that the CGS measuring model is both statistically well-founded and theoretically correct.

6.7 Ethical Considerations

The study will be conducted in line with research ethics guidelines such as the informed consent of interview and survey participants, ensuring confidentiality of their responses and the right to withdrawal from the study. Expert interviews and surveys will be anonymized so that information collected remains protected in accordance with research ethics guidelines.

6.8 Summary of Methodological Framework

This study employs a three-phase mixed-method design:

(1) Qualitative Phase (Expert Interviews): Conceptual refinement of CGS

(2) Delphi Phase: Expert validation of theoretical constructs

(3) Quantitative Phase (Survey + SEM): Empirical testing of CGS model

With theoretical depth and empirically tested support, the CGS framework seems an excellent candidate for high impact in established governance and public administration journals.

7. Validation of Framework

Validation of Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Model One of the significant aspects to guarantee the method rigor, theoretical robustness, and empirical plausibility of a proposed Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) model is its validation process. This section delineates the statistical procedure to assess for reliability, validity, model fit, and hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).The validation follows guidelines that are generally adopted for similar research of social science and governance studies (Hair et al., 2019).

7.1 Reliability Assessment

Reliability - refers to the internal consistency between measurement constructs for example, Cronbach's alpha (α) is an internal consistency test of a test. Reliability is the extent to which a particular measuring procedure will always obtain the same results

For CGS constructs (HI, AI, CIM, DA, ALC, GR), reliability will be assessed using:

- Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$ acceptable threshold)
- Composite Reliability ($CR \geq 0.70$ preferred standard)

A Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.70 is the standard used for acceptable reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80 suggest very reliable tests. If constructs are below the set threshold, adjustments or deletions will need to be made to measure with the expected degree of accuracy. The CGS measuring scale has been proved to measure consistently over groups of participants and conditions through a reliability testing stage.

7.2 Validity Assessment

7.2.1 Convergent validity

convergent validity This measures whether indicators of a construct have strong positive associations, and reflect the same conceptual construct. Convergent validity will be evaluated with:

- Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50)
- Factor loadings (≥ 0.60 recommended threshold)

The convergent validity of construct: it shows convergent validity as items correlate significantly with underlying factors. It also supports dimensional consistency with concepts in CGS dimension.

7.2.2 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity ensures that constructs are empirically distinct from one another. It will be tested using:

- Fornell-Larcker criterion
- Cross-loading analysis

For each construct (e.g., HI versus AI, CIM versus DA), there must be greater association with own indicators compared to other constructs, in order to ensure discriminant validity across different dimensions of CGS.

7.3 Model Fit Assessment

To determine the fitness of the CGS theoretical model, the SEM will be assessed with the support of several goodness of fit indices.

Key Model Fit Indices:

- Comparative Fit Index (CFI ≥ 0.90 acceptable, ≥ 0.95 excellent)
- Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI ≥ 0.90 acceptable)
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.08 acceptable, ≤ 0.05 excellent)
- Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR ≤ 0.08 acceptable)

The measures provide indices that support assessment of goodness of fit of the proposed CGS model against actual data. Good fit indicates the conceptual CGS framework successfully depicts empirical relationship of constructs.

7.4 Hypothesis Testing Framework

Hypothesis testing in the CGS framework will involve the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which will facilitate the estimation of multiple relationships amongst the latent variables concurrently.

Structural Model Specification:

The model evaluates:

- Direct effects:

- HI → CIM
- AI → CIM
- CIM → Governance Outcomes
- Moderating effects:
- DA moderates CIM → Governance Outcomes
- Mediating effects:
- CIM mediates HI/AI → Governance Outcomes
- ALC mediates CIM → GR
- Outcome relationships:
- GR → Governance Quality, Public Trust, Policy Effectiveness

7.5 Statistical Decision Criteria

Hypotheses will be tested using:

- Standardized path coefficients (β values)
- t-values (≥ 1.96 for significance at 0.05 level)
- p-values (< 0.05 significance threshold)

If the connection is statistically significant and aligned with the predicted theoretical direction for CGS Theory, our hypothesis is supported.

7.6 Structural Equation Model Representation

The CGS model follows a structured causal pathway:

HI + AI → CIM → (DA moderation) → ALC → GR → Governance Outcomes

In essence, this enables us to test the direct, indirect and moderated effects of one analytical frame.

7.7 Summary of Validation Strategy

The CGS validation framework ensures methodological rigor through a multi-layered statistical approach:

- Reliability testing ensures internal consistency of constructs
- Validity testing confirms conceptual accuracy and distinctiveness
- Model fit indices assess overall structural adequacy
- SEM testing evaluates causal and mediating relationships

These procedures working together guarantee that the CGS model is both statistically rigorous and empirical testable, along with theoretically justified.

8. Discussion

8.1 Positioning Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) within Existing Theories

This CGS Theory contributes to the scholarship on governance through redefining and reconceptualizing of the public decisions as distributed cognitive activities rather than institutions and procedures. In the past, various theories and literature in the governance research, such as the traditional public administration theory, algorithmic governance, digital governance, offered fragment accounts on how decision-making activities work under complex circumstances of public administration; nevertheless, remained incomplete to address the interaction of human intelligence and machine learning in the context of democratic governance. While traditional public administration theory still provided useful insights into the hierarchical institutions, bureaucratic rationality, and administrative regulations for making decision. Yet, this approach failed to capture machine-mediated decisions and predictive decision-making procedures. Similarly, the algorithmic literature was concentrated on algorithmic efficiency, optimization of algorithmic operation and computation. Algorithmic governance literature thus, largely ignoring normative dimensions like machine fairness, accountability, and public trust and so on (Yeung, 2018). Therefore, this CGS Theory provides a synthesized answer and bridges the gaps, understanding of governance not just solely of the institutions, but of cognition that takes place distributed across people and machines.

8.2 What Changes in Governance Theory

CGS Theory introduces several changes to the perception of governance:

- governance as human-AI co-governance not solely a human agency. Governance now refers to a system of human-AI interaction, where AI operates as a co-actor not only performing the computational task but as part of cognitive processes of the government. This changes a prevalent perception of human primacy over decision making, that has existed throughout public administration's research.

- Governance based on cognitive interaction not based on institutional setup. This analysis provides us with the capability to analyse how the decisions are formed, approved and implemented in the context of real-time policy making by shifting from the analysis based on bureaucratic structures or the policy cycle process to the analysis based on Cognitive Interaction Mechanisms (CIM).

- Democracy embedded into governance. It introduces a structural transformation to governance literature, wherein, democratic legitimisation of government decisions are built-in into the system, and not implemented as external checks and balance measures through various forms of democratic oversight.

- Governance as a learning process. CGS introduces an element of change in governance systems. Via the introduction of the Adaptive Learning Capacity (ALC), governance structures learn to improve their performance and adapt themselves in relation to policy implementation outcome, citizens' reaction to policy outcomes, and the overall performance metrics. In classical governance literature the learning process is often overlooked (Wirtz et al., 2019).

8.3 Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical innovations come from the application of the CGS framework in public administration and governance studies:

First, the application extends the scope of system theory by directly mapping it onto the cognitive dimension of governance. In a nutshell, while system theory has historically dealt with interdependencies between organizations, CGS frames intelligence itself-here embodied by artificial intelligence-as a cognitive subsystem of the system of governance (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005). In other words, the "system of governance" is re-imagined as a "cognitive ecosystem," which "actively adapting itself to its environment," instead of an "institution."

Second, it links democratic theory and digital governance. Democratic theory, with its foci on human action, representation, and accountability, lacks clear answers for the role of non-human actors in governing systems. CGS fills this gap through institutionalizing democratic accountability (DA) within the cognitive governing structure, therefore preserving the concept of legitimate governance when humans and machines are co-governing.

Third, CGS develops the application of distributed cognition theory (e.g. Simon, 1957) within the scope of public governance research, framing decision making as an interactive cognitive process dispersed between human and machine agents instead of solely an individual actor activity. It therefore, helps us understand how complex decisions come about in a technology-mediated environment.

Finally, CGS makes contributions to artificial intelligence governance theory, conceptualizing AI not merely as a governed object, but as an active agent in governance structures by positing AI as an important actor in governance decision-making (as a cognitive, co-governing entity, rather than an externality to be governed).

8.4 Practical Implications

The CGS framework have critical impacts on the management of public institutions and the way of the design for them.

First, policymakers need to rethink the decision making system to have human-AI based structure. Institutions are required to create support structure for CIMs where the output from AI has always been reevaluated and confirmed by humans.

Second, public institutions need to develop the capabilities to adapt the changing governance context. ALC make them adaptable to reflect the data outcomes on policies.

Third, enhance digital literacy and AI literacy for public sector officials is a challenge as governance has already transformed into hybrid cognitive systems where human actors needs to be able to critically assess and analyze data provided by AI.

Fourth, governance resilience (GR) has to be regarded as a operational target and institution needs to be resilient under uncertain circumstances or failure of algorithms or data corruption.

8.5 Policy Implications

From a policy perspective, CGS Theory offers a systematic approach to conceptualising the governance of AI-empowered systems on a politically accountable and administratively efficient basis. In terms of policy design recommendations, our analysis highlights:

Firstly, governments must implement transparent algorithm design for public governance systems. Specifically, they must mandate transparency requirements for the design of algorithmic models used by the administration.

Secondly, they must establish political and administrative accountability in the design of human-AI governance.

Thirdly, governments must foster human-centric and hybrid AI systems to overcome the problem of governance "blind spots."

Fourth, they must design AI governance in line with the principle of policy and action feedback loops that enable the system's ability to learn continuously. Finally, global and international co-ordination must be put in place to ensure the convergence of norms and best practices concerning AI governance in democracy.

8.6 Overall Theoretical Shift

The introduction of CGS Theory marks a paradigm shift in governance studies. It moves the field from:

- Institution-centered governance → Cognitive system governance
- Human-only decision-making → Human–AI co-decision systems
- Static governance models → Adaptive learning systems
- External accountability → Embedded accountability structures

The shift towards this form of integration, that of governments adopting a digital solution and making AI a key decision-maker instead of an external aid.

9. Contribution to Knowledge

The Theory of Cognitive Governance Systems(CGS) theory brings substantial impacts to the study of governance, public administration, and artificial intelligence through a novel integrated framework of how humans and AI are to co-govern in democratic decision-making systems. These impacts are organized around four dimensions: theoretical, methodological, empirical, and governance practice.

9.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study's main theoretical contribution is its formulation of the Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) theory, which theorises governance as a distributed cognitive system, integrating HI and AI within democratic systems. Differently from existing governance theories (that consider AI as an external apparatus or as an administrative instrument), CGS considers AI as an internalised cognitive agent in the governance systems. CGS moves beyond public administration and the discourse of algorithmic governance and, by bridging systems theory, cognitive science, democratic theory and the literature of the AI governance, offers an integrated theory that conceptualises governance decision-making as an outcome of joint cognitive interaction mechanisms. Furthermore, CGS advances six basic constructs – HI, AI, CIM, DA, ALC and

GR – that enable us to conceptually describe governance as an adaptive cognitive ecosystem (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005; Wirtz et al., 2019).

9.2 Methodological Contribution

Methodological implications: From the methodological aspect, the study proposes a formal three-phase mixed method approach for theory building and validation for new governance systems. It offers an expert interview, a Delphi process and a structural equation modeling as a method to turn the more theoretical concepts into models that are testable empirically. With these methods, this research adds value to theory building in public administration through an integrated process of qualitative refinement and quantitative testing and the demonstrate how more complex theories as the concept of CGS can be formalized and empirically testable by using structural equation modelling.

9.3 Empirical Contribution

Despite being a theoretical proposal, CGS laid solid grounds for the future empirical research by outlining measurable concepts and relationships among human and artificial intelligence and their impacts on public governance outcomes such as public trust, the effectiveness of policies and good governance. Defining testable relationships among concepts and providing specific hypotheses and operationalization of the proposed constructs CGS allow for empirical tests across various contexts of public governance, such as the deployment of digital public services, the use of e-governance tools and AI-based policy decision making tools, paving the way for comparative cross-country studies and large-scale quantitative tests of human-AI governance model.

9.4 Governance Contribution

Regarding Governance, CGS presents a pragmatic blueprint for constructing AI-powered democratic governance structures; embedding the principles of democratic accountability, transparency, and institutional checks and balances directly into AI-driven decision-making processes. It offers an approach to help governance bodies to establish and realize blended governance models whereby both the judgment of humans and that of an AI assist one another as integral elements within integrated system networks, as opposed to isolated functional systems. This framework additionally highlights the importance of fostering and maintaining adaptable learning and governance resiliency as a crucial pillar for sustained organizational endurance and persistence within digitally influenced governance paradigms. In bridging efficiency and technological expertise with democratic integrity, CGS is a pivotal component to establishing a stronger, more accountable, and stable structure of governance during the epoch of AI.

10. Conclusion

This research has developed a Cognitive Governance Systems (CGS) Theory as a new lens through which human-AI co-governance within the democratic decision-making process can be understood. Existing works could not adequately provide comprehensive explanations of the role of AI into public governance with increasing prevalence, because governance theories are usually established to describe how humans make decision-making, not human-artificial systems with interacting cognitive architectures.

Therefore, this study has constructed a cognitive distributed system of human governance incorporating HI, AI, CIM, DA, ALC, and GR under democratic decision constraints. In this view, decision-making in governance acts as a cognitive open system that comes about by the ongoing interaction among both the human agents and the AI agents. The article has provided the following four major insights. First, governance in the digital era is not a purely human-centered institution process anymore, it is a kind of hybrid cognitive system with the AI's active involvement in decision-making paths. Second, CIM is a key central operational layer that dictates both HI and AI in interacting, thereby influencing the quality of public administration outcomes. Third, DA is the key moderating factor for transparent and public-legitimized AI-human governance system, without it AI can be dangerous to democracy legitimacy(Yeung, 2018). Fourth, ALC and GR are significant properties in such system that enhance governance to learn adaptively and maintain resilience.

Public policy and institution design of a hybrid cognitive system: CGS has several implications for public policy makers and institutional designers. Public administrations need to devise appropriate systems to deploy AI in governance that respect the accountability to democracy; this implies strengthening public transparency of algorithms, establishing rules for clear accountabilities of human-AI shared responsibility decisions, and enforcing oversight and regulation functions within organizations. Government needs to devise hybrid decision-making systems where the AI supports but replaces humans; hence investing on training citizens and officers the concept of digital and artificial intelligences can also play role for implementation.

A Hybrid Cognitive Systems approach would also strengthen the capacity of the government to adapt decision-making systems that learn from their outcomes and efficiently manage complex real world social issues for all governments including developing countries and within their digital transformation initiatives.

The framework proposed by the study, however, has its own limitations. First, CGS is currently an innovative theory-building contribution and further evidence based research is warranted to prove the empirical validity across various governance systems. The constructs and relationships theorized have not been tested with sufficient scale data yet. Second, the conceptual basis for the CGS theory is derived from existing literature analysis, which limits generalisability of the theory to varied political institutions or contexts. Governance structures vary considerably from country to country and may require specific adaptations of CGS theory. Third, the human-AI hybrid interactions are complex and hard to operationalize.

Specifically, it remains challenging to capture CIM adequately for empirically testable analysis with sufficient statistical power. More works are suggested in future research to collect sufficient empirical data and testing CGS theory through structural equation modelling (SEM), nation-wide surveys and case studies of human-AI co-governance examples. Cross-national and comparative study should be undertaken to establish contexts for applications. The study should further developed suitable measurement scales for key constructs such as CIM and GR. Longitudinal studies should track the dynamism of CGS-based decision-making and adaptiveness to environmental changes and technological disruption. Furthermore, the future research is need to delve deeper into ethical and normative questions on how to establish an accountability and regulation mechanisms that facilitate responsible, human-friendly and democratic AI-governance systems in digital society (Wirtz et al., 2019).

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Constitutional and Legal Foundations of Electoral Governance in Bangladesh and the Reform Implications of the July Charter 2025

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Abstract

This study examined Bangladesh's electoral system by analyzing its constitutional structure, legal framework and recent reform initiatives by paying special attention to the Election Commission, the Representation of the People Order 1972 and the July Charter 2025. The aim of the study is to assess how legal design and institutional practice affect electoral integrity and public trust. However, a qualitative doctrinal research method has been applied in the study. It analyzed constitutional provisions, statutes and Supreme Court judgments as primary sources. It also reviewed peer-reviewed literature, policy reports and comparative studies as secondary sources. Drawing examples from India, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom, a comparative constitutional approach was used. The analysis was guided by a three-pillar framework focusing on institutional independence, legal enforceability and electoral legitimacy. The findings of the study highlighted that constitutional guarantees of electoral independence are very weak in practical points of view. Legal loopholes and selective enforcement undermine the authority of the Election Commission. Moreover, the abolition of the caretaker government created institutional uncertainty rather than stability. However, the July Charter 2025 has identified some key reform areas, but it has few lacking in binding legal force. As a result, electoral legitimacy and public confidence may continue to decline. The study recommends strengthening the Election Commission through secure tenure and insulated appointments. It calls for comprehensive campaign finance legislation with strong enforcement mechanisms and also emphasizes timely judicial oversight during elections and constitutionally grounded reform implementation. Apart from some findings and recommendations, the study has some limitations like it relied on doctrinal analysis and secondary data and did not include any empirical fieldwork or survey evidence.

Keywords

Electoral governance; Constitution of Bangladesh; Election Commission; Caretaker government; July Charter 2025; Electoral reform

1. Introduction

Elections are the central mechanism through which democratic legitimacy is established. In Bangladesh, however, the electoral process has faced persistent constitutional, legal and institutional challenges (Baized et al., 2025). Allegations of irregularities, opposition boycotts, disputed outcomes and declining public confidence have raised concerns which are closely connected with constitutional design, institutional independence, electoral law, and enforcement practices about electoral credibility (Rashiduzzaman, 1997).

The Constitution of Bangladesh establishes a parliamentary system and provides for an independent Election Commission (EC) ("Constitution of Bangladesh," 2026). Articles 65–72 regulate Parliament and Article 118 establishes the EC as an independent constitutional institution. However, Akter (2023) has questioned whether this formal independence is effectively maintained in practice (Akter, 2023). This institutional challenge became more significant after the abolition of the non-party caretaker government system. The 13th Amendment of 1996 introduced the system to provide neutral election-time administration and it was used in the 1996, 2001 and 2008 elections (Khan, 2025; Levush, 2024). The Supreme Court declared the system unconstitutional in 2011, and the 15th Amendment subsequently removed it from the Constitution (Alam, 2025; Levush, 2024).

The consequences became visible in subsequent elections. Voter turnout was 74.97% in 2001 and 87.13% in 2008 but declined to 39.58% in 2014 following an opposition boycott (IFES, 2024; "Elections in Bangladesh," 2026). The 2014 election also had 153 uncontested parliamentary seats (Islam, 2026). The 2018 election faced extensive allegations of manipulation. On the other hand, 2024 election again recorded turnout of approximately 40% amid a major opposition boycott (Reuters, 2024).

The Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 regulates nomination, voting, counting, electoral offences and related electoral matters (Election Commission, 1972). However, weaknesses have persisted in campaign finance regulation, enforcement, candidate accountability and the prevention of electoral malpractice. Recent reforms have strengthened affidavit and asset-disclosure requirements and expanded the EC's authority to annul constituency-level results where significant irregularities are identified (The Daily Star, 2025). Their effectiveness, however, depends on consistent and impartial enforcement. The Delimitation of Constituencies Act 2021 and the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners Appointment Act 2022 have also sought to strengthen electoral administration, although concerns remain about institutional discretion and political influence (TBS Report, 2025; UNB, 2023). Following the August 2024 political crisis, the interim government was formed through an extraordinary constitutional interpretation involving Article 106 and the doctrine of necessity because the Constitution contains no express provision for an interim government (Hossain, 2025; Levush, 2024).

However, our neighboring country India relies on a constitutionally entrenched Election Commission under Article 324 and does not use a formal caretaker government. Its experience suggests that strong institutional independence can reduce the need for exceptional election-time arrangements (Bhat, 2021). Sri Lanka provides another model in which judicial review and constitutional institutions can restrain executive power during political crises (Welikala, 2019).

Moreover, in terms of campaign finance, weak enforcement of spending limits, limited financial transparency and inadequate oversight can encourage vote-buying and misuse of state resources. Recent reforms have strengthened disclosure requirements, but a comprehensive and effectively enforced framework remains necessary (The Daily Star, 2025; Haque & Bisarya, 2025).

These challenges have increased attention to the July National Charter 2025 (proposes reforms concerning election-time governance, EC independence, political party governance, campaign finance, and constitutional safeguards) (R. Ahmed, 2025; Haque & Bisarya, 2025). However, the Charter is a political reform agreement rather than binding legislation. Its proposals therefore require appropriate constitutional and legislative processes before they can become enforceable. Its effectiveness will depend on whether reforms are implemented through legally valid and institutionally sustainable mechanisms (Hossain, 2025; Khan, 2025).

Against this background, this study examines Bangladesh's electoral governance through an integrated constitutional, legal and comparative perspective. It focuses on institutional independence, legal enforceability and electoral legitimacy. It also evaluates the legal significance of the July Charter 2025 and compares Bangladesh with selected democratic systems. The study addresses the limited integration of constitutional rules, electoral legislation, institutional practice and enforcement in existing research to identify the institutional and legal reforms required to develop a more credible, predictable, and legitimate electoral framework in Bangladesh.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This study employed a qualitative doctrinal research design combined with a structured comparative scoring approach. Constitutional provisions, electoral laws, judicial decisions and institutional practices were analyzed under three pillars: institutional independence, legal enforceability and electoral legitimacy. Each pillar was systematically scored using predefined criteria and the mean scores were used to construct the Composite Electoral Governance Score (EGS).

2.2 Data Collection

Primary data were drawn from authoritative legal sources, including the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972, and selected judgments of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Secondary data comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and scholarly comparative studies, selected based on relevance and academic credibility.

2.3 Data Analysis

Doctrinal and interpretative analysis was applied to identify key legal principles and judicial reasoning. In addition, a comparative constitutional approach was used, with India, Sri Lanka, and the United Kingdom serving as reference jurisdictions. This comparative analysis facilitated a contextual evaluation of Bangladesh's constitutional and electoral framework and strengthened the analytical rigor of the study.

2.4 Method of Scoring and Index Construction

To translate comparative qualitative findings into reproducible results, a comparative institutional index was constructed. Each indicator was scored on a five-point ordinal scale (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong). Scores were assigned based on constitutional design, statutory authority, enforcement practice, judicial behavior during electoral disputes, and documented outcomes in the literature.

3. Analytical Framework

This study uses a three-pillar analytical framework to assess electoral governance across Bangladesh, India, the United Kingdom, and Sri Lanka. The framework is based on the view that electoral integrity depends on institutional independence, enforceable legal rules and public acceptance of electoral outcomes (Birch & Van Ham, 2017).

The first pillar, institutional independence, assesses the autonomy of electoral bodies, particularly the Election Commission, from executive and partisan influence (Ham & Garnett, 2019). The second pillar, legal enforceability, examines the clarity of electoral rules, availability of sanctions, and effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms (Murombo, 2011). The third pillar, electoral legitimacy, assesses electoral acceptance through voter participation, opposition participation, and public confidence (Beetham et al., 2008).

Each pillar was scored from 1 to 5, where 1 represents very low performance and 5 represents very high performance. Equal weighting was applied to the three pillars. The Composite Electoral Governance Score (EGS) was calculated as:

EGS = (Institutional Independence + Legal Enforceability + Electoral Legitimacy) / 3

The three pillar scores therefore directly determine the EGS. No separate index is included in the calculation. Additional evidence presented in the appendices is used only to support the assessment of the three pillars.

Table 1. Scoring criteria for the Three-Pillar Framework

Score	Interpretation
1	Very Low
2	Low
3	Moderate
4	High
5	Very High

4. Results

4.1 Composite Electoral Governance Performance

The comparative analysis shows substantial differences in electoral governance across the four jurisdictions. Bangladesh records the lowest EGS (2.33), while India records the highest EGS (4.90). The United Kingdom and Sri Lanka occupy intermediate positions, with scores of 3.80 and 3.43, respectively.

Table 2. Composite electoral governance score

Country	Institutional Independence	Legal Enforceability	Electoral Legitimacy	EGS
Bangladesh	2.7	2.0	2.3	2.33
India	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.90
United Kingdom	3.7	4.0	3.7	3.80
Sri Lanka	3.3	3.3	3.7	3.43

Bangladesh records the lowest EGS, with weaknesses across all three pillars. Its institutional independence score of 2.7 reflects continuing concerns about electoral autonomy. Its legal enforceability score of 2.0 indicates substantial weaknesses in the implementation of electoral rules. Its electoral legitimacy score of 2.3 reflects problems related to participation, political competition, and public confidence.

India records the highest EGS at 4.90. Its institutional independence and legal enforceability scores are both 5.0, while electoral legitimacy scores 4.7. The result indicates that strong electoral institutions and effective legal enforcement can support electoral legitimacy without relying on a formal caretaker government.

The United Kingdom records an EGS of 3.80, with scores of 3.7, 4.0, and 3.7 across the three pillars. Its performance reflects strong rule-based electoral regulation and institutional practices. Sri Lanka records an EGS of 3.43, with moderate institutional independence and legal enforceability but relatively higher electoral legitimacy.

5. Discussion

The findings show that Bangladesh faces weaknesses across all three dimensions of electoral governance: institutional independence, legal enforceability, and electoral legitimacy. Bangladesh recorded the lowest Composite Electoral Governance Score (EGS) at 2.33, compared with 4.90 for India, 3.80 for the United Kingdom, and 3.43 for Sri Lanka. The results suggest that the central problem is not the absence of formal constitutional and legal provisions. Rather, the main difficulty lies in the limited independence, enforcement capacity, and institutional credibility through which these provisions are implemented.

In comparison to other countries, India has a strong constitutional electoral commission model. Again, the United Kingdom has a parliamentary system that relies substantially on statutory regulation and constitutional conventions rather than a formal caretaker government. Besides that, Sri Lanka has a model in which courts and constitutional institutions have played an important role in checking executive power.

5.1 Institutional Independence and Electoral Governance

The institutional independence score for Bangladesh was 2.7, which is substantially lower than India (5.0), the United Kingdom (3.7), and Sri Lanka (3.3). This finding indicates that Bangladesh’s constitutional guarantee of an independent Election Commission has not been fully translated into practical autonomy. The problem therefore concerns institutional operation rather than constitutional recognition alone.

The comparison with India is particularly important. India’s stronger score reflects an electoral institution that has developed substantial administrative authority and institutional continuity. The Indian experience indicates that a separate caretaker government is not necessarily required when the electoral commission has sufficient independence and enforcement capacity (Khan, 2025). For Bangladesh, this suggests that the caretaker debate should not be treated as a substitute for institutional reform. A stronger Election Commission could reduce dependence on exceptional election-time arrangements.

If we focus on Sri Lanka, we can see a different lesson. Its institutional system relies more heavily on constitutional bodies and judicial oversight to constrain executive power (Welikala, 2019). Judicial intervention during the 2018 constitutional crisis confirmed the potential importance of courts in protecting constitutional limits (Attanayake & Kapur, 2018). Bangladesh can therefore draw from both models.

5.2 Legal Enforceability and the Caretaker Debate

Bangladesh received the lowest score for legal enforceability (2.0). This result is important because several electoral safeguards already exist within the Constitution, the RPO, and related rules. The weakness therefore lies mainly in the implementation of legal provisions. Rules that are not consistently enforced cannot effectively constrain electoral misconduct or protect political competition.

The caretaker government debate should be understood within this broader institutional context. The caretaker system was introduced partly because political actors lacked confidence in the neutrality of election-time administration. Its abolition therefore exposed the underlying weakness of the institutions that were expected to manage elections without a neutral interim administration. The Supreme Court's subsequent restoration of the caretaker mechanism for future elections has addressed part of this constitutional dispute, but it does not resolve the broader problem of institutional capacity (Alam, 2025; Alamgir, 2025).

The findings therefore suggest that the caretaker system should not be treated as the primary solution to Bangladesh's electoral problems. In India, we can see that strong electoral institutions can provide electoral credibility without a formal caretaker government. Bangladesh should consequently focus on strengthening institutional independence and enforcement while maintaining a clear and constitutionally predictable framework for election-time governance.

5.3 Electoral Legitimacy and Public Trust

Bangladesh also recorded the lowest level of electoral legitimacy among the four jurisdictions, with a score of 2.3. This finding is consistent with the pattern of opposition boycotts, low participation in some elections, contested electoral outcomes and continuing public concerns about electoral fairness. Electoral legitimacy is therefore closely connected with the performance of the first two pillars.

The comparative results support this relationship. India records strong scores for institutional independence and legal enforceability and also achieves a high electoral legitimacy score of 4.7. From Sri Lanka's example, we see its institutional independence and legal enforceability scores are moderate at 3.3, but its electoral legitimacy score is relatively higher at 3.7. This difference suggests that judicial and constitutional checks can partly support electoral legitimacy when administrative institutions face limitations.

The findings therefore indicate that public trust cannot be created through electoral participation alone. It depends on whether voters and political actors believe that electoral rules are applied impartially and that violations can be effectively challenged. Strengthening the first two pillars is consequently essential for improving the third.

5.4 Legal Status and Reform Potential of the July Charter

The July Charter represents an important reform agenda because it addresses several weaknesses identified through the three-pillar framework. Its proposals concerning Election Commission independence, election-time governance, campaign finance and political accountability correspond directly with the institutional, legal, and legitimacy problems identified in this study (Hossain, 2025; Haque & Bisarya, 2025).

However, the Charter should be distinguished from binding constitutional and statutory law.

Its proposals require appropriate constitutional and legislative procedures before they can create enforceable obligations. This distinction is particularly important because electoral reform must itself comply with constitutional principles. A reform process that bypasses legal procedures could weaken the legitimacy that the reforms are intended to protect.

The findings therefore suggest that the Charter should function as a reform roadmap rather than a substitute for law. Its proposals should be translated into clear constitutional amendments, statutes, regulations and institutional procedures to improve legal predictability and reduce the risk of reforms remaining declaratory (Al Jazeera English, 2025).

5.5 Campaign Finance and Electoral Integrity

Campaign finance represents an important component of legal enforceability. Recent affidavit and disclosure requirements have improved the formal regulatory framework (The Daily Star, 2025). However, disclosure requirements alone cannot ensure financial integrity. Effective regulation also requires independent verification, auditing, investigation and meaningful sanctions.

The comparison with India and the United Kingdom indicates the importance of combining disclosure rules with institutional oversight and enforcement mechanisms (Global Legal Group, n.d.). Bangladesh can therefore strengthen electoral integrity by developing an independent mechanism for auditing campaign and party finances. Such a mechanism would reduce reliance on self-reporting and would make financial regulations more credible.

5.6 Implications for Electoral Reform in Bangladesh

First, institutional independence should be prioritised. The Election Commission requires stronger safeguards against political influence. Staggered appointments, secure tenure, transparent selection procedures and greater administrative autonomy could strengthen its constitutional independence.

Second, legal enforcement should be strengthened. Electoral laws should provide clear sanctions and effective procedures for investigating and addressing violations. The expansion of the EC’s authority should therefore be accompanied by adequate administrative and investigative capacity.

Third, campaign finance regulation should be consolidated. Bangladesh would benefit from a comprehensive framework covering candidate and party expenditure, donor disclosure, independent auditing, verification, and sanctions to reduce the gap between formal regulation and practical enforcement.

Fourth, judicial review during elections should be made more effective. Expedited procedures for electoral disputes and constitutional violations could strengthen legal accountability. The experience of Sri Lanka demonstrates how timely judicial intervention can protect constitutional limits during political crises (Attanayake & Kapur, 2018).

Fifth, the caretaker debate should be connected to long-term institutional reform. The comparative evidence suggests that a caretaker government can provide temporary neutrality, but it cannot substitute for strong electoral institutions. Bangladesh should therefore develop a predictable constitutional framework for election-time governance while simultaneously strengthening the Election Commission and other oversight institutions.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

- The study is based on doctrinal and documentary analysis only and didn't include any interviews, surveys, or field-level electoral data.
- Findings are dependent on publicly available legal and secondary sources.
- The comparative analysis is limited to selected countries.
- Rapid political developments may affect the relevance of some conclusions.

6. Conclusion

Bangladesh's electoral crisis is legal, institutional and political in nature. The Constitution provides formal safeguards, including an independent Election Commission and rule-based elections, but these safeguards have remained weak in practice. The removal of the caretaker system exposed deep institutional fragility rather than resolving it.

The July Charter offers a reform roadmap and reflects broad political consensus, but it does not provide a legal solution. Without constitutional amendment and statutory backing, its proposals remain aspirational. Sustainable electoral integrity requires binding reforms that are enforceable and transparent.

These reforms must strengthen institutions rather than rely on personalities or temporary political arrangements. Without credible enforcement and independent oversight, elections will continue to lack legitimacy and public acceptance. The future of Bangladesh's democracy depends on closing the persistent gap between law and practice.

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Research Progress on the Application of Multicultural Nursing in End-of-Life Care: A Review

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Abstract

With the progress of globalisation, providing end-of-life care for all kinds of cultures has become an urgent problem for healthcare systems around the world. Patients and their families from different cultural backgrounds have various views on death, decisions about terminal illness, and other caregiving needs. This paper will systematically examine the current application of multicultural nursing in end-of-life care from five aspects: the impact of culture on the demands of end-of-life care, barriers to implementing multicultural nursing, strategies for cross-cultural communication, training programs to enhance cultural competence, and evidence-based approaches and future research directions. Based on recent international research, it can be seen that cultural differences are serious obstacles to providing end-of-life services, and there is an urgent need to develop nursing models that are both culturally sensitive and flexible. The purpose of this paper is to provide theoretical support and practical suggestions for clinical practice and policy planning in end-of-life care, thereby improving the quality and suitability of services for people of all ethnic groups.

Keywords
End-of-life care; Cross-cultural communication; Cultural competence; Death literacy; Multicultural nursing; Palliative care

1. Introduction

With the rapid pace of globalisation and increased international migration, healthcare systems around the world are facing new challenges due to cultural differences among people. Care provision for seriously ill patients at the end of life is a particularly delicate issue. As more diverse cultures have merged, it has created many problems for healthcare workers in understanding different values about death, dying, illness and how to help patients and their families. Continuous changes in society also mean that more people from various countries are receiving healthcare services, requiring doctors, nurses, etc., to be more sensitive to these cultural differences to provide excellent and appropriate care for all people (Hill et al., 2023). Recognizing the importance of culture in health services is driving the introduction of cross-cultural nursing into end-of-life care systems.

Culture affects how patients, their families and healthcare providers, perceive and act in the face of death. Different cultures have varied beliefs about death, mourning customs, family relationships and decision-making processes. Some cultures are more collectivist and interdependent, while others are more individualistic and value self-determination. Therefore, different cultures may have different needs for care, how to talk about pain and emotions, and expectations from doctors or other medical personnel. Given the many different views of death and dying around the world, caregivers need to learn about these cultural differences to provide care that is in line with cultural values. If one does not know about these differences, it can lead to poor communication, reduced satisfaction for the patient and family, and problems in the delivery of care (Zeleke et al., 2025). Moreover, cultural beliefs are also related to socioeconomic factors and can increase difficulties in providing cross-cultural care. Research has shown that people from all walks of life face problems with end-of-life care, such as difficulty communicating with doctors and misunderstandings about different cultures.

Meeting the cultural needs of patients in terms of care is still a serious problem. If this issue is not addressed, it will lead to poor-quality end-of-life care and inequity in symptom management, psychological support, access to palliative care, etc. Linguistic barriers may prevent honest communication about illness or about possible therapies, while societal taboos concerning mortality often block advance care planning of any sort. Furthermore, lack of culturally specific practices or tools in healthcare settings aggravates the disparity of available services. These facts suggest an urgent need for medical professionals to develop cultural competence and to offer care that respects individual identities and particular patient choices (Hill et al., 2023).

Among the key components of multidisciplinary palliative units, nurses are central to the task of bridging cultural divides in care-giving. Their long-term, face-to-face contact with patients and their families gives them special access to cultural needs, to opportunities for discussion, and to ideas about culturally appropriate treatment. Consequently, the cultural competence of individual nurses bears directly upon the capacity to deliver fair, excellent end-of-life care to many types of people. Educational efforts directed toward cultural awareness help them to distinguish features of identity, to avoid assumptions, and to interact politely. Such skills contribute not merely to better clinical results but also to trust and comfort for families of all backgrounds (Hill et al., 2023). Hence, encouraging nurses' cultural development is an important strategic goal in the growth of multicultural palliative nursing.

The paradigm of culturally sensitive nursing presumes a systematic integration of beliefs, values, and traditions held by patients into care routines. Therefore, we can offer compassionate and culturally appropriate end-of-life care for the people. To provide such care, active listening, a deep understanding of culture, and tailored care plans based on the actual circumstances of different cultures are needed. Moreover, it requires institutional commitment to policy-making and resource allocation that favor inclusivity. Cultural sensitivity—when built into day-to-day practice—helps providers meet complex multicultural needs and thus improve the quality and acceptability of palliative care (Zeleke et al., 2025). Such a shift toward culturally oriented care is central to achieving actual patient-centeredness and to promoting equity in end-of-life treatment.

The present review is intended to examine—systematically—recent developments in applying multicultural nursing ideas to end-of-life care. It will evaluate the role of culture in determining care needs, note particular difficulties in practice, and suggest feasible methods of cross-cultural communication. Additionally, it will analyze available forms of cultural competence training (for professionals) and consider what is known—and what still needs to be studied, in this area. By gathering together what has been established, the article proposes a broad basis for planning culturally appropriate nursing care, and for raising the quality of end-of-life care in today's increasingly varied medical contexts.

2. Cultural Factors Influencing End-of-Life Care Needs

2.1 Cultural Differences in Death Perception

Among cultural viewpoints, those dealing with mortality are of central importance in determining how people cope with end-of-life care—how they come to think of, to accept, or to respond to death.

Death is frequently conceptualized in Western bioethics as an inevitable biological terminus, a view that underscores individual autonomy, candid discourse, and the explicit acknowledgment of mortality. The above framework can help doctors and patients talk freely about their future health and treatment plans in line with the ethical requirements of patient autonomy and informed consent. On the other hand, many Eastern philosophical systems, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, believe that death is a change of state rather than an end; thus, people in these cultures give great spiritual importance to dying and need a calm mind and spiritual preparation at the end of life, which is often achieved through meditation and prayer. In some other cultures, death is considered a taboo subject, and open discussion is avoided due to the fear of offending others or causing distress. For example, many families in Asia may choose not to inform patients of a serious illness to keep a positive attitude. Different cultural views on death and dying lead to various types of care; Buddhist patients seek peace of mind at the end of life, while Muslim patients focus on prayers and rituals that strengthen their faith for life after death. Furthermore, immigrants living in different countries often need to blend their original cultural beliefs with the customs of new places, and their perceptions of death vary among different areas. Therefore, to provide care that truly respects the cultural values and spiritual wishes of all patients, doctors should be well-versed in these cultural differences (Ferguson et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2023; Scherer et al., 2021).

2.2 The Impact of Family Dynamics and Collectivist Values on End-of-Life Decision-Making

Different cultures have also been shaped by the family and the culture of collectivism in many parts of Asia and the Middle East; this is different from the individual self-determination model in the West. In many collectivist societies across Asia and the Middle East, the family generally makes healthcare decisions, so a person's own will is often given less weight than the consensus of the family and the interests of the whole group. This spirit of collectivism can lead to ethical problems in hospitals around the world where patients' right to self-determination is ignored. For example, the Confucian value of filial piety in Asian countries expects adult children to take good care of their aging parents' medical needs; sometimes, out of fear of causing their parents emotional distress, these children fail to inform them in time about serious illnesses. Families in Latin America and the Middle East also frequently make medical choices together and hope that healthcare professionals will communicate with the entire family rather than focusing solely on the patient. Therefore, doctors need to pay more attention to these cultural differences and adjust their work methods accordingly. Research conducted in Singapore has also found that family circumstances are often cited as reasons for choosing less ideal treatment in non-Western and multi-ethnic areas; that is to say, families are needed to decide how older people are cared for at home (Atout et al., 2021; Schefold et al., 2023).

2.3 Religious Beliefs and Spiritual Needs

Many patients are seeking comfort and purpose in faith-based systems to face the reality of death and the process of dying, especially at the end of life. Nursing staff and doctors need to be knowledgeable about all kinds of religious ceremonies, taboos and spiritual needs of people from different backgrounds. For instance, according to Islamic end-of-life care, some traditions require praying for help, ritual washing and avoiding death machines; Christians may wish to receive sacraments such as confession and extreme unction; Hindus may hope to bathe in the sacred Ganges water and chant God's name to find peace. These customs are not just symbols; they are ways for patients to face death and define what a "good death" means to them. Research by palliative care specialists in Hong Kong has also found that Chinese cultural values of maintaining family harmony and avoiding direct discussion of death need to be incorporated into clinical practice. Therefore, there is an urgent need to enhance the basic literacy of medical staff in religion and spirituality so that they can sensitively meet all kinds of demands that arise from different belief systems and cultures in their clinical work (Ferguson et al., 2022; Scherer et al., 2021; Shafan-Azhar et al., 2025).

2.4 Preferences for Place of Death and Medical Intervention Choices

Preferences for the place and manner of death, as well as the degree of life-sustaining treatment at the end of life, vary among different cultural groups due to various reasons, such as different views on death, family circumstances, trust in the healthcare system, etc. Some immigrant communities wish to die in their country of origin or at home more strongly, indicating a "dual homeland" identity with deep cultural roots in their native land; thus, such wishes may present logistical and ethical problems for healthcare providers in the host country. In addition, some studies have shown that certain immigrant groups prefer more intensive medical care; this may be because they do not trust the healthcare system, are restricted by cultural taboos related to death, or hold different views on technology and extending life. While extensive research has been conducted on the wishes of terminally ill cancer patients in Western countries, studies on Asian populations are relatively scarce. A qualitative study conducted in Malaysia pointed out the necessity of cultural sensitivity in understanding patients' demands and choices, and similarly, Finland has begun to incorporate multicultural considerations into discussions on palliative care to respect the diverse desires of different people regarding where and how to prolong life (Jackson et al., 2023; Schefold et al., 2023).

2.5 Cultural Barriers and Facilitators to Advance Care Planning

The degree of adoption and application of Advance Care Planning (ACP) varies among different cultures; generally speaking, ethnic minority groups have had lower participation rates for all kinds of reasons, such as traditional social norms, limited health literacy, restricted access to information, and so on. Cultural taboos in Chinese diaspora communities regarding death and the concept of filial piety make people reluctant to talk about advance care planning (ACP); talk of mortality is often considered to bring bad luck, and it may conflict with the wish to protect older family members from emotional distress. At the same time, culturally appropriate ways of delivering education and legal systems that support advance care planning (ACP) can also be used to increase the awareness and obtain the acceptance of immigrant communities. For example, if a country has an excellent ACP system, it may motivate immigrants to plan in advance out of concern for their health in institutions. Research on Malaysian cancer patients near the end of life has indicated that spirituality can be a way of coping, so adding spiritual care to ACP can increase participation. Culturally sensitive approaches and spiritual introspection should be applied in the implementation of ACP to improve both its effectiveness and compatibility with cultural values and personal aspirations (Atout et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2023; Scherer et al., 2021).

3. Obstacles in Multicultural End-of-Life Care

3.1 Linguistic Hurdles and Their Consequences

Linguistic differences are a serious problem in multicultural end-of-life care settings; it is difficult for doctors and patients to communicate effectively, and thus important information cannot be exchanged. Therefore, in serious situations, lucid communication is needed to transmit medical information and also to understand what patients hope for in their last days, what values and wishes they have. When no professional interpreter is available, family members are often used, but this may lead to misunderstandings or the disclosure of private information. Due to emotions or cultural taboos, family members may unintentionally filter or alter what they are about to tell, resulting in information loss. Simple language skills are not sufficient for the deep expressions of death-related wishes, and many metaphors or culturally specific expressions are used that require special interpretation. Many cultures use indirect words or symbols to talk about death, so professional interpreters and doctors need a high level of cultural and linguistic knowledge to avoid communication errors (Hill et al., 2023).

3.2 Cultural Misconceptions and Bias

Cultural misunderstandings and implicit biases among nursing staff can lead to a wrong perception of patients' circumstances and needs, resulting in unequal medical treatment for people from different cultural backgrounds. Unconscious stereotypes held by healthcare providers may lead to misinterpretation of behaviour, desires or health conditions; thus, this can result in incorrect diagnoses or culturally insensitive care. A lack of knowledge about local customs related to death and mourning is also a problem. For example, some cultures promote collective decision-making and shared grief with families; others prioritize individual autonomy. Failure to consider these differences may result in conflict and dissatisfaction. Although some nurses may be individually culturally competent, systemic and structural biases in the healthcare system also need to be addressed.

Healthcare institutions that are part of the systemic disparity should strengthen their governance structure and operating model to ensure that policies and implementations are culturally sensitive at all levels. Now, through reflective practice and cross-cultural supervision, nurses can be more aware of their own cultural biases, learn about the views of others, and avoid prejudice in treatment situations; continuous self-assessment and improvement will help guarantee fair and humane care for all people in multi-cultural societies, especially at the end of life (Hill et al., 2023).

3.3 Deficiencies in Cultural Competence Education

Only a small number of nurses in the nursing staff have received systematic training in cultural competence, so they are still at the mercy of personal experience and intuition when caring for terminally ill patients from different cultures. Although the current educational initiatives have increased awareness of cultural differences, they have not yet been turned into practical changes in behaviour during daily work. This gap between knowledge and application has limited the effectiveness of cultural competence programs and continues to be an obstacle to providing culturally sensitive care. Data from Spain show that nurses in charge of caring for culturally diverse patients face not only deficiencies in education but also psychological stress caused by cross-cultural misunderstandings and communication problems. Therefore, teaching methods that combine cognitive learning with training in emotional regulation need to be strengthened to help nurses handle all kinds of demands of cross-cultural palliative care.

Finnish studies have shown that it is necessary to systematically foster cross-cultural communication skills among the entire team of healthcare providers, and they have taken steps to integrate cultural competence into national continuing education and professional development plans to help all medical professionals learn how to effectively deal with people from different cultural backgrounds and improve patient health outcomes and satisfaction (Hill et al., 2023).

3.4 Ethical Conundrums and Cross-Cultural Frictions

Ethical issues in cross-cultural end-of-life care often stem from different cultural beliefs and values in various places, as well as changes in the environment of modern biomedical ethics. Nurses frequently face problems such as conflicts between a patient's right to privacy and the family's demand for information in cross-cultural care. For instance, some cultures need joint decisions by several family members, but in the West, people are more focused on their own autonomy and privacy. Different expectations for do-not-resuscitation orders or when to cease life-sustaining treatments can also result in disputes among patients, relatives and doctors. Recently, music therapy has been introduced as an alternative, non-verbal communication method, and aesthetic ideas such as "polyphony" are now used to express emotions and promote cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, to avoid harm from unnecessary medical intervention, personalized care plans need to be developed according to a person's cultural background and life circumstances. Healthcare workers should address these ethical problems from a cultural perspective and collaborate with families and patients to provide all-encompassing, considerate, and value-respecting care (Hill et al., 2023).

3.5 Service Accessibility and Equitable Distribution

Many different problems face the ethnic minority group. There are many reasons why people in different areas do not receive palliative and hospice care; for instance, there are late referrals, a lack of awareness of these resources, socioeconomic disparities, various cultural beliefs about death or distrust in the medical system, and so on. These differences result in a considerable variation in both the utilisation and the quality of palliative care among different ethnic groups. Acceptance rates for such services are also relatively low in some cultures due to all sorts of reasons. These circumstances do not meet the basic requirement of fair access to healthcare, and appropriate corrective measures need to be taken. Differences in "death literacy" within multicultural communities directly limit people's ability to seek out and receive end-of-life care; thus, strengthening community-based education and outreach programs can increase people's understanding and acceptance of palliative care (Hill et al., 2023).

4. Cross-Cultural End-of-Life Communication Strategies

4.1 Patient-Centered Communication Models

Patient-centred communication at the end of life should take into account the different cultures, values and life experiences of all patients individually, rather than using a single cultural norm. People in the same ethnic group may have different views on life and death, so a uniform way of talking is not suitable. Therefore, healthcare providers need to adjust their language according to what each patient needs; in some cases, using indirect expression, metaphors or stories might be more appropriate than directly informing them of bad news. In cultures where death is considered a private matter or emotionally sensitive, indirect communication can help patients talk about their fears and wishes for dying more comfortably. One of the main ways to achieve this is emotional reflection; that is, healthcare providers can control their own emotions to respond gently to the feelings of dying patients during difficult conversations. Swedish research has found that by understanding the cultural context of terminally ill patients in a patient-centred manner, doctors can meet their various demands better and provide respectful and appropriate care (Chedid et al., 2025; Kesecioglu et al., 2024). Thus, patient-centred communication at the end of life is expected to make patients feel understood and more willing to talk about death freely according to their own culture.

4.2 Application of Cultural Mediation and Professional Interpretation

Professional interpreters help bridge the language and culture gap for people at the end of life in diverse societies. Not only are they translators of language, but also cultural brokers who help people better understand each other by conveying the context and emotions in language. To make good use of the interpreter service, interpreters should be fully informed about the patient's clinical condition, prognosis, care goals, etc., so they can accurately transmit the information in accordance with cultural differences. This is not to be avoided; rather, if done carelessly, there will be communication errors, a breach of confidentiality, and increased emotional distress for the relatives. Therefore, the leaders of intensive care units and healthcare administration should actively promote and require the use of professional interpreters to improve the standard of communication and enhance patients' health. A network of community cultural mediators can be established to provide continuous support for cross-cultural cooperation with hospitals, build trust and cooperation among all parties, offer cultural information to help in the design and implementation of culturally appropriate care plans, and provide professional cultural mediators and interpreters at the end of life to overcome language barriers and prevent misunderstandings while respecting the patient's cultural values and wishes (Kesecioglu et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2026).

4.3 Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Advance Care Planning

Tools and guidelines for in advance care planning need to be adapted to different cultures, considering the values, beliefs and communication patterns of different groups (ACP). Therefore, it is necessary to individualize them so that ACP conversations are more meaningful and respectful, and people are able to participate actively in decisions about their end-of-life care. For instance, a Canadian study has created a decision-aid system that integrates Islamic views on end-of-life care with the legal and health systems of Canada to provide culturally appropriate support for Muslim patients and their families in ACP; thus, religious beliefs have been honoured, problems in the use of healthcare institutions have been solved, and participation in ACP among the Muslim community has been increased. Similarly, Australian research has shown that area-specific interventions, such as translated death literacy indicators, can raise the level of awareness and the ability of people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to engage in end-of-life care. In short, these customised teaching materials will help individuals and their families better express their wishes for care planning (Chedid et al., 2025; Keon-Cohen et al., 2025).

4.4 Humanistic Care Addressing Spiritual and Religious Needs

A basic part of the idea of culturally competent nursing practice is to incorporate spiritual or religious factors in the care of terminally ill patients. As part of the overall care plan, nurses need to correctly identify the spiritual needs and religious beliefs of each patient and provide corresponding spiritual support. Respecting all religions, prayers, spiritual experiences, etc., regardless of a person's background, is necessary; thus, administrative cooperation should be established to shape hospital policies accordingly. European studies have shown that many nurses lack training or experience in spiritual assistance, so urgent measures need to be taken to solve this problem.

If people want to improve their level of spirituality, then strict training and abundant digital resources can be provided. For those who are terminally ill (especially in China or other parts of Asia where religion and spirituality are not closely linked), spirituality can offer basic support and a sense of hope. Therefore, nursing assessments should not ignore people's religious attitudes and neglect their basic spiritual needs; rather, they should be taken into account when providing nursing care. In this way, people can maintain their dignity, reduce suffering, find peace of mind at the end of life, and thereby enhance both the quality and satisfaction of care received by them (Almansour et al., 2026; Kesecioglu et al., 2024).

4.5 Advancing Death Literacy and Community Outreach

Death literacy refers to the necessary knowledge, abilities and resources that people need to effectively cope with life-ending crises, the experience of dying and the process of grief. Across all parts of society, to help people at the end of life, their families, and communities, it is necessary to improve their death literacy. Many communities around the world have implemented diverse programs to increase death literacy for various groups, including public awareness campaigns, patient education courses and online forums for ethnic minorities and immigrant communities. These initiatives have shown that using various channels such as workshops, radio and social media, etc., can spread knowledge about death and dying more widely, reduce fear and stigma, and enable individuals to make informed choices. With particular attention given to people in vulnerable situations, it is urgent to create multiple-language, all-media and easy-to-understand learning resources to ensure that everyone has access to crucial information at this time (Chedid et al., 2025; Rabin et al., 2023).

5. Cultural Competency Training and Nursing Education

5.1 Theoretical Framework of Cultural Competency Training

The theoretical foundation for cultural competence training in nursing is an organised development path that goes beyond learning about various cultures. This system generally consists of four parts: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills and cultural encounters; together, they will help nurses gain all-round abilities in working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural awareness refers to being conscious of one's own cultural norms and prejudices; it is the basis for learning about the cultures of different people and helps us be sensitive to them. Cultural knowledge is the study of the worldviews, health beliefs, customs, etc., of various groups, and cultural skills are the abilities to apply this knowledge effectively in actual nursing practice. Finally, cultural encounters provide real-life situations for learning that help us break down stereotypes and adapt better in clinical settings. Therefore, the entire plan is not merely to absorb cultural information; rather, it is an ongoing process of reflection that can enhance a nurse's capacity to care for people from all walks of life well.

Training initiatives have moved away from the transmission of individual knowledge and are now generally focused on cultural competence at the organisational or systemic level. With this broader view, it has been decided that healthcare institutions need to incorporate cultural competence into their own rules, daily operations and even the physical environment to achieve continuous improvement in the quality of care. Multicultural nursing competencies should be added to academic study and clinical practice, and the educational process should actively promote the learning of knowledge, changes in attitude and skills, etc., rather than simply inducing it. Therefore, all-round training can help ensure that nurses are both theoretically strong and practically capable, and they can provide culturally sensitive end-of-life care that meets the diverse needs of patients better and increases their satisfaction (Chedid et al., 2025; Griffith et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2025).

5.2 Simulation-Based Instruction and Experiential Learning

Simulation-based teaching and experiential learning have been used to improve the cross-cultural communication ability of nurses in the area of end-of-life care. By participating in role-playing and simulated clinical scenarios, students are put in a safe and controlled environment to practice all kinds of communication skills needed for dealing with cultural differences and emotional problems at the end of life. Experiential learning exposes nursing staff to many cultures and allows them to feel firsthand what communication barriers and misunderstandings arise due to these differences. Therefore, they can develop cultural sensitivity and gain an in-depth, emotional understanding of patients' cultural backgrounds rather than just abstract theoretical knowledge. Simulated training in various cultures is more effective than traditional lectures because it can show how to apply what has been learned in daily life. Through realistic role-playing, nurses can learn cultural ideas and develop flexible communication plans according to the specific circumstances of patients. In addition, interdisciplinary team simulations are also very helpful for learning how to cooperate in multicultural end-of-life care environments; such group activities foster mutual understanding among all kinds of healthcare workers and enable them to plan and provide coordinated, culturally sensitive care services (Farombi et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2026).

5.3 Training in Language and Cross-Cultural Communication Competencies

Good training in language and cross-cultural communication should be provided to help nurses overcome language and cultural barriers in their daily work and ensure the quality of end-of-life care. In addition to basic language skills, these courses should also cover knowledge of cross-cultural interaction, such as recognizing non-verbal cues and culturally specific expressions of silence; thus, nurses can better understand what patients and their families are trying to communicate and respond appropriately from a cultural perspective. Practical training on how to use professional interpreters to improve the quality of communication in sensitive situations and build trust with patients and families will also be provided, and nurses should be able to recognise and address different cultural responses to information on prognosis; for instance, some cultures are more open to discussing death in detail than others.

Although digital health technology and remote interpretation services have been introduced to solve the problem of language barriers, it is not yet known whether they can fully convey the different cultures and emotions of all people during communication without losing anything. Therefore, the teaching in schools should aim to nurture cultural humility by avoiding assumptions about uniform characteristics among ethnic groups or stereotyping them; instead, pay attention to the various ways in which people's cultures differ (Bennet & Agyemang, 2025; Chedid et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2025).

5.4 Reflective Practice and Self-Awareness

Nurses need to motivate themselves to reflect on their own experiences, improve their sensitivity to cultural differences in emotionally challenging circumstances, identify their own cultural assumptions and values, modify their attitudes towards all types of groups of people, discover any unconscious biases that may affect the quality of care, expose hidden prejudices and stereotypes through organised reflection, and point out any blind spots in cultural sensitivity at the bedside. In cross-cultural care, one should systematically record and analyse one's feelings about cultural differences or misunderstandings to uncover their sources and build a foundation for developing strategies to improve communication and empathy. Therefore, reflection should be integrated into all parts of professional development and not be limited to a particular time or place, enabling nurses to adapt to changes in the cultural environment of various groups of patients and maintain high sensitivity to all kinds of cultural and emotional problems at the end of life (Chedid et al., 2025; Fullilove et al., 2024).

5.5 Support from Educational Policies and System Integration

To build multicultural nursing education institutions, strong policy support and full integration of the healthcare and education systems are needed. Nursing institutions should integrate content on cultural competence at all levels of the education system for college students and regularly organize professional development activities; this should not be done only once or twice. Policymakers need to identify the reasons for the lack of cultural competency training and increase the mandatory nature of such training in nursing education and licensing regulations. Foreign nursing organizations have issued important recommendations and quality standards to help healthcare institutions build effective multicultural nursing education systems. In addition, adding evaluations of cultural sensitivity to the quality assessment system for nursing will motivate institutions to take more responsibility for continuously improving the results of training. Thus, with the full support of all sides, cultural competence will enhance the overall quality and fairness of end-of-life care services (Breland-Noble et al., 2024; Chedid et al., 2025; Farombi et al., 2025).

6. Evidence-Based Practice and Future Research Directions

6.1 Evidence-Based Multicultural Palliative Care Models

Multicultural palliative care should, in light of the evidence, incorporate the latest research, professional knowledge and patient-centred values, give due attention to culturally sensitive aspects, and consider it one of the main reasons for providing care. This framework recognizes that culture affects how people view their illness, choose treatment options, and handle problems related to dying or death to a certain extent.

Therefore, in order to improve the quality of care and enhance patient satisfaction, culturally appropriate ways of doing things should be used. Studies in many countries have shown that when community-based palliative care programs are adapted to local cultural conditions, they can help all groups of people build health literacy and make good use of services; for example, virtual support systems for Asian American women with breast cancer have been shown to improve their quality of life and manage symptoms (Im et al., 2023). However, the impact of these cross-cultural adaptations varies among different languages and cultures, so before such programs are widely introduced in various places, the specific needs for adaptation need to be systematically studied. To reduce cultural barriers in changing behaviour intervention frameworks and reduce bias, the active participation of communities and continuous observation of the intervention process are necessary (Fischer et al., 2024). Future research should continue to track the long-term effects of cultural alteration on palliative care using all kinds of methods, collect real-life experiences from patients of all ethnic backgrounds, and provide strong data support for building culturally sensitive care and equitable end-of-life care systems that respect cultural differences.

6.2 Application of Digital Technology in Multicultural Palliative Care

Digital instruments and telemedicine can be used to address language barriers and improve access to health services for people from different cultural backgrounds in palliative care. Remote interpretation services and multilingual health education materials can be employed to help communicate better and ensure that all patients from different ethnic groups receive proper information about the medical services. Nurses providing spiritual care need to be fully aware of all these diverse needs of such patients and use digital platforms to expand the scope and cultural sensitivity of their assistance. For instance, specialized digital educational materials have been developed for transgender, non-binary and intersex (TNBI) individuals to increase their knowledge and cultural literacy among healthcare professionals; a similar approach should be taken in palliative care (Katta & Davoody, 2025). Digital health education can also help solve the problem of training resource shortages, but we must be careful to address the uneven distribution of digital literacy among healthcare staff and ensure that it can be used effectively. Ethical problems in the use of digital technology, such as data security and cultural appropriateness, also need to be handled properly.

6.3 Multicultural Family End-of-Life Decision Support Systems

Decision-making at the end of life in multicultural families has numerous links, both between generations and across cultures; thus, many forms of communication need to be employed to meet the different needs of patients, relatives and doctors. During family meetings, one must consider cultural differences in the concept of elder authority and avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach.

Do not blindly apply the Western model. Expand the roles of community volunteers and cultural mediators to provide continuous companionship and coordinated support according to the specific circumstances of multicultural families. Another necessary part of multicultural palliative care is to build a bereavement counseling system that is sensitive to cultural differences; it should respect various mourning customs and support systems and help people cope with grief in different cultures. Research has shown that culturally appropriate communication can increase family participation and their satisfaction with end-of-life care; for example, cross-ethnic matching of providers and families is associated with better family-centered care results (Alberto et al., 2021). Therefore, the next step is to build and verify decision-support tools that take into account family interaction and cultural values to improve both the quality and all-encompassing nature of end-of-life services.

6.4 Transnational and Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies

Around the world, there have been numerous comparisons conducted to learn more about the trends and differences in multicultural palliative care under various healthcare systems, cultural policies and societal conditions. They have also revealed how medical institutions and cultural norms in different countries affect the end-of-life experience of patients with the same cultural background. For instance, comparisons between Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander groups have shown various differences in the stage and type of cancer at diagnosis, suggesting that customised prevention and control measures are required (Bock et al., 2023). To enable fair cross-cultural comparisons, standardised instruments for assessing multicultural palliative care need to be developed that are both reliable and valid in all cultures. Extending the scope of research to developing countries and other less-represented areas will also add more knowledge to the field and reduce global disparities in multicultural end-of-life care.

6.5 Policy Recommendations and Future Prospects

At the government level, we need to establish and promote national standards for cultural competence and quality indicators in palliative care to ensure fair access to services and provide culturally appropriate care for all people at any time. Healthcare institutions should strengthen long-term cultural liaison programs and multicultural care coordination mechanisms to integrate cultural support services into their daily operations and enhance the continuity and adaptability of care. By promoting collaboration among all disciplines and sectors, we can link public health, social work, community resources, and so on to build comprehensive social support systems for multicultural palliative care. Continuous investment in research on multicultural nursing in palliative care should be made to spread knowledge and improve the quality of life for people from all backgrounds around the world.

7. Conclusion

Exploration of cultural aspects in end-of-life care has shown that there are various problems concerning the experiences of older adults and their families.

Based on the views of experts, cultural beliefs about death, patterns of family decision-making, spiritual needs and desires for care are all basic factors that affect the structure and implementation of palliative care services. Therefore, nursing strategies that are both culturally sensitive and responsive should be regarded as an ethical imperative and a practical necessity to provide care in accordance with the different worldviews of various cultures. Balancing all the diverse research results in this area requires acknowledging the inherent conflict between universal principles of care and particular cultural practices; for example, although patient autonomy is the foundation of Western bioethics, many cultures give more weight to family-centered decision-making and thus pose a challenge to the standardization of care. Therefore, we need to develop flexible frameworks that can be adapted according to various cultural logics without losing the goals of good care and ethical norms. Furthermore, we should be mindful of how cultural factors change and interact with other social factors, such as language proficiency, economic status and systemic disadvantages; the problems that have arisen are diverse but closely related and affect each other, causing serious problems in ensuring equal access to end-of-life care.

Cross-cultural communication is now a way to connect people from different backgrounds in healthcare settings. Based on the above evidence, it can be concluded that a patient-centered communication model will help patients better understand their medical conditions and form a positive attitude towards treatment. Improving the death literacy of the community and healthcare institutions will help patients and their families make more informed decisions about care and reduce anxiety and conflict. The above all indicate that there are many reasons for this and that cultural differences should be considered. A main problem with the above study is that cultural intelligence education has not been systemically introduced into nursing school. The training should also cultivate skills, attitudes and other qualities that help the staff deal with cultural differences in an appropriate way. To ensure that cultural competence continues to be a goal and a standard of care, there should be continuous assessments and feedback. Continuous learning is in line with the changes in culture and the problems that have arisen from diverse patients over time. Looking ahead, the direction of research in this review will be the application of digital technology to improve cultural literacy in end-of-life care. Telehealth platforms culturally adapted decision-making aids and virtual interpreter services are all good ways to solve the problems of distance and language. Culturally appropriate family decision-support systems can promote mutual understanding, but due to the complexity of care situations, they need to be very advanced and subtle. Several countries have conducted comparative studies to gain more knowledge on how to handle cultural differences in healthcare, identified outstanding global practices and policy innovations, and thus, culturally sensitive end-of-life care has become a research focus in palliative medicine around the world. This paper proposes an integrated way of thinking that respects cultural individuality and preserves the core spirit of care, and by developing all-around skills and institutional systems in conjunction with new data and tools, a fairer, more inclusive and gentle model of care can be built in this area. Such progress yields benefits not only for individuals and their families but also for global ethics and professionalism in end-of-life care.

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Ethics Statement

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