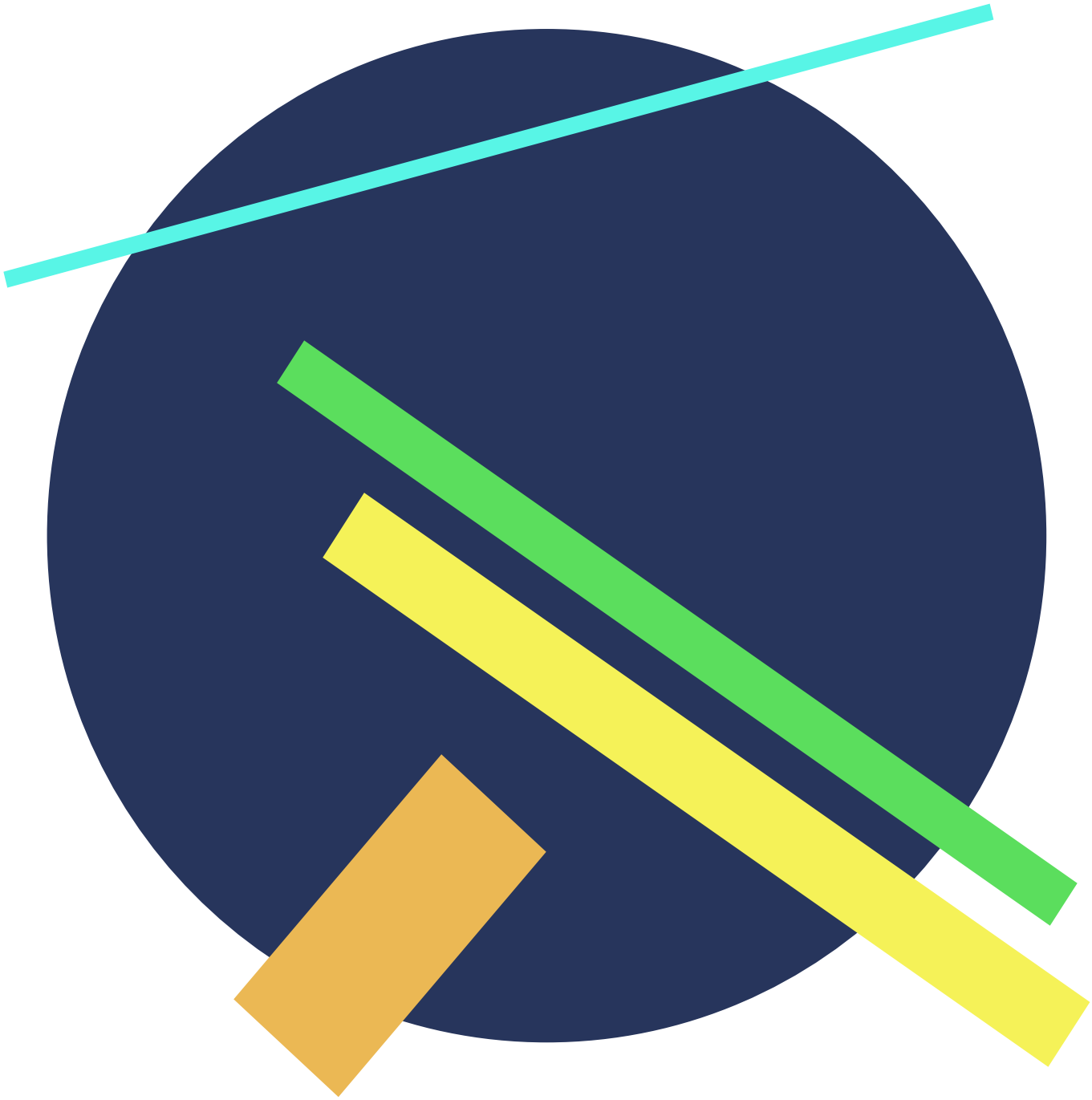
# Politikon:

## the IAPSS Journal of Political Science



ISSN [online] 2414-6633

IAPSS
The International Association
For Political Science Students

*POLITIKON: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*

**Volume 24 Number 1: May 2024**

*Originally published as Volume 57*

**ISSN 2414-6633**

**https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57**

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*Corrected October 2026: volume and issue numbering; author countries added*

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# Editorial Note

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.0

**Anya Kuteleva, *Editor-in-Chief***
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Welcome to Volume 57 of *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*. This issue showcases the breadth and depth of contemporary political science research, featuring articles that employ diverse methodological approaches to shed light on pressing issues in international relations, comparative politics, and political theory.

Our first article by Cecilia Lwiindi Nedziwe explores how non-state actors in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region have organized to address gender insecurities and build regional identity. Drawing on interviews and policy documents, Nedziwe argues for a socio-historical approach to understanding regional organization that recognizes the agency of non-state actors in shaping norms and policies. This article challenges state-centric accounts of regionalism and highlights the complex interplay between states and civil society in Southern Africa.

The second article by Cara McLaughlin examines how Scottish political parties frame their signature issues on social media to persuade voters in the lead-up to elections. Through a qualitative analysis of Twitter and Facebook posts, McLaughlin finds that parties strategically employ threat and victim frames to bolster their electoral prospects, with the extent and focus of these frames varying based on parties' parliamentary strength and governing status. This article contributes to framing theory by illuminating the relationship between issue ownership and rhetorical strategies in a dynamic multi-party system.

Our Conversations section features a thought-provoking film review by Vladimir Rosas-Salazar, who explores how Neill Blomkamp's science fiction film *District 9* (2009) reimagines apartheid-era segregation in South Africa through an alien refugee allegory. This insightful analysis highlights the power of cinema to engage with pressing sociopolitical issues, challenging viewers to reflect on historical injustices and their resonance in the present day.

We believe it is crucial for political science to embrace interdisciplinary interventions like Rosas-Salazar's. In an increasingly complex world, the challenges we face—from climate change to racial injustice to democratic backsliding—cannot be fully understood or

addressed through a single disciplinary lens. By opening up to insights from fields like film studies, history, sociology, and beyond, political science can develop richer, more nuanced accounts of political phenomena and point the way toward more creative and effective solutions.

Interdisciplinary dialogue can also help political science question its own assumptions and blind spots. Rosas-Salazar's analysis, for instance, pushes us to consider how popular culture shapes political imaginations and to take seriously the political work done by genres like science fiction that are often dismissed as mere entertainment. By decentering the traditional objects and methods of political science, interdisciplinary interventions can make the discipline more self-reflective, more inclusive, and more relevant to the urgent problems of our time.

At *IAPSS Politikon*, we are keen to publish more boundary-pushing work that challenges the conventional wisdom of what counts as legitimate objects of study and methods of inquiry in political science. We believe that by embracing unorthodox approaches and unexpected sources of insight, we can reinvigorate the discipline and expand its horizons. In our upcoming issues, we are actively working to feature a greater diversity of interdisciplinary scholarship, from ethnographic explorations of everyday political life to philosophical reflections on the foundations of democratic theory to creative collaborations between political scientists and artists, activists, and practitioners. By creating space for these unconventional interventions, we hope to foster a political science that is more innovative, more engaged with the world beyond the academy, and more capable of grappling with the complex, multidimensional challenges of our time.

This issue also includes two book reviews that critically engage with recent publications in political science. Samuel De Brouwer reviews *Marcel Gauchet and the Crisis of Democratic Politics* (2022), an edited volume that introduces the work of French political philosopher Marcel Gauchet to an English-speaking audience. The review highlights Gauchet's innovative theory of democracy and its potential to shed light on the contemporary challenges facing liberal democracies.

Vojtěch Pohanka reviews Sarah Engler's monograph *Centrist Anti-Establishment Parties and Their Struggle for Survival* (2023), which offers a comparative analysis of the electoral strategies and fortunes of centrist anti-establishment parties in Central and Eastern Europe. The review praises Engler's mixed-methods approach and theoretical framework while also pointing out avenues for further research.

Together, the articles, film review, and book reviews in this issue showcase the vibrant dialogue and debate within political science, as scholars critically engage with new ideas and empirical findings to push the field forward. As we continue to open up the pages of Politikon to bold, boundary-crossing scholarship, we hope to nurture a political science that is more creative, more responsive to real-world problems, and more equipped to imagine and build a more just and sustainable future.

# A Socio-Historical Approach to Regional Organizational Relations? NGOs in Gender Security in the SADC Region

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.1

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## Abstract

*The extant academic literature in the field of regional International Relations has paid little attention to non-state actors' organizational relations in building region-ness. Yet, the region offers sets of organizational relations outside, alongside, and as part of the formal regional state structures to do with gender, which offer insights into non-state regional relations and thus help to fill the lacunae in the field and facilitate understanding of the regional dynamic of international relations. This article examines how organizational relations of non-state actors in gender security play out in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. It highlights the shortcomings of the inter-governmental approach to international relations pursued by various scholars. Drawing on interviews with representatives of NGOs, governments, the SADC, and annual reports, as well as the academic literature, it argues for a socio-historical approach to understanding regional organization and transnationalism, which considers African agency in building region-ness.*

**Keywords:** NGOs; Southern Africa; Organizational Relations; Gender Security; Region-ness; African Agency; Southern African Development Community

## Introduction

This article adopts a socio-historical approach to describe and contextualize non-state regional organizational relations in building gender security and to illustrate their importance in creating a region-ness in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).[1] The concept of organizational relations is used here as a broad framing tool to analyze the relational modes of coordination, alliance-building, networking, and advocacy underpinning regional security governance involving state and/or non-state actors (Nedziwe 2017). The terminology is purposeful to move beyond singular state-centric descriptions of regional organizational relations in the field of International Relations (IR). The article

[1] SADC here is defined as a socially constructed region of the 16 countries constituted by both state and non-state actors from Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (https://www.sadc.int/member-states). I argue here that it is the organizations relations that define and redefine the region through processes and interactions.

focuses on the organizational relations of non-state actors in gender security, which takes into account their agency in building region-ness outside, alongside, or as part of the confines of regional structures. Region-ness here refers to a sense of belonging or being part of building the region, that is regional cohesion and regional consciousness to contribute to shared development and security. Employing this approach to explain the region's social fabric is an exercise in understanding regional transnational behavior in a more nuanced way. Furthermore, by focusing on non-state organizational relations, this work departs from mainstream views in the scholarship on regional international relations along physical territorial logics that depict regional organizations as intergovernmental, overlooking sets of relations, particularly those of non-state actors that equally constitute the make-up of regions. Equally, while mainstream gender studies have premised analyses on universal, rigid binaries and body logic, gender has not been the starting point for non-state organizational relations in SADC[2]. Non-state organizational relations, instead, have emerged outside formal intergovernmental spaces as a way of addressing common regional insecurities (SADC 2008; SADC 2014; SADC 2022). The mainstream logic contrasts with the organizational logic that has emerged in SADC, which reveals African agency as a multidimensional, dynamic phenomenon that can be traced from the socio-history of transformation from political to multi-layered forms of regional organizational relations. The article does not seek to essentialize non-state organizational relations in regional IR thinking but, drawing on Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning, and Amitav Acharya (2016), Siphokazi Magadla (2013)and Heidi Hudson (2016)'s works, engages with mainstream assumptions to shed light on their limitations by uncovering African non-state agency outside, alongside and within state intergovernmental regional spaces in the SADC.

Women-based NGOs in the SADC region choose their identity as regional organizations and their norms according to the gender insecurities that they seek to address, and this strategy reaffirms African agency. These NGOs seek to address multiple gender insecurities through initiating, selecting, and developing norms and policies on gender-based violence, gender and the media, women, law and development, gender and climate change, gender and healthcare, gender and HIV and AIDS, sexual reproductive health rights, women and economic justice, women and human rights and LGBTQ+ issues (Morna, Makamure,

[2] Several significant works in African women's scholarship challenge binary and body logics, such as Oyèwùmí (1997), Nzegwu (1998), and Magadla, Magoqwana, and Motsemme (2021). Magadla (2013) contends that the discourse of International Relations (IR) should prioritise the voices of African women, communities, and indigenous societal actors. Similarly, Hudson (2016) underscores the active agency of women in Africa's international politics, a dimension frequently overlooked.

and Dube 2017, 12, 35)[3]. These multiple gendered issues have found expression in policy documents, with women-led NGOs playing a leading role in their framing, pushing for buy-in and diffusion in global, regional, and national policies[4]. The agency of these non-state actors and their organization within regional international relations is necessitated by the growing gendered insecurities that have impacted women the most. It is from sets of non-state organizational relations that regional gender policies first emerged and expanded, from SADC's first declaration on gender and development in 1997 and its addendum in 1998 to its first legally binding protocol on gender and development in 2008 and the revised version in 2015 (SADC 2008; Gender Links Report 2015).

## Research Design

Mixed methods were employed to gather primary and secondary data in 2016 to map African non-state agency in gender security in the SADC region. The analysis draws on five of 24 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2016 in Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Informants included NGO representatives in both junior and senior positions, as well as officials in the Ministries of Women and Gender, SADC, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). The article also draws on annual reports of NGOs, policy briefs, and databases, as well as inter-governmental gender instruments. Secondary data was drawn from the relevant literature on regional international relations and newspaper articles. This data is used to illustrate the relevance of region-ness that draws on non-state organizational relations to address gender insecurities in the SADC region.

The article discusses the non-state norm selection process in gender security, followed by the actual norms in gender security and non-state agency in building region-ness. The discussion then turns to NGOs in gender security, their organizational relations, and the obstacles and ends with a conclusion. This study adopts an interpretive, multi-layered approach to regional organization, which is more suitable than mainstream approaches because it acknowledges the importance of non-state relations and agency in building a sense of regional identity and cohesion[5]. By emphasizing organizational relations and agency, we can develop a more thorough understanding of a region, gain better insights into the factors

[3] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[4] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[5] The definition of agency here draws on that proposed by scholars in IR and foreign policy as "directed, meaningful, intentional and self-reflective social action" or the faculty or state of acting or exerting power (Chabal 2009, 7; Buzan, Jones and Little 1993, 103, cited in Bischoff 2020, 1).

that drive regionalizing behavior, and engage with the concept of inclusive security in Southern Africa more effectively.

## Norm Selection in Gender Security

The initial organizational relations to select norms in gender security have largely occurred outside inter-governmental forms of regional organization where non-state actors have mobilized in networks of NGOs. In turn, these NGOs work alongside and within inter-governmental spaces to further develop and refine the selected norms. For example, the initial non-state relations that developed SADC's first legally binding gender protocol involved the organization of women-led NGOs around cluster of themes based on their expertise and the gender insecurities that they sought to address on the policy level (Made and Morna 2009).[6] Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), a regional non-state transnational community, led the cluster that drafted the provision on constitutional and legal rights in the 2008 protocol, while the Southern African AIDS Information and Dissemination Services (SAfAIDS), also a regional non-state transnational community, led a cluster that put together the provisions on HIV/AIDS (Made and Morna 2009, 27).[7] The initial draft of the regional gender protocol was developed through the collaborative efforts of organizations within the clusters. This demonstrates the significant role of non-state actors, operating independently from state frameworks, in addressing regional gender-based insecurities.

Furthermore, it is important to note that while women-led NGOs have initiated organization around the selection and development of policies on gender and women issues, they also acknowledged the importance of forming social relations with state actors within the intergovernmental space:

> Most of the time, civil society actors initiate regional policy issues on gender. We go to SADC with like-minded organizations to say how we can change this policy. We bring our evidence from our primary actors or community-based organizations and take these issues to SADC and say: Can you please change this policy or protocol on gender?! We go to SADC because it is a political kind of structure that brings all the government ministries and heads of states together. We work with SADC because we want to influence policy around gender. SADC is critical if you want to influence policy. We want to work with SADC because that is where the decision-making process is. We work with SADC because we believe it is the best approach to work as a regional organization. The benefits of working on the regional project are to

[6] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.
[7] In addition, the Gender Advocacy Programme based in Cape Town led the governance cluster, the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre Network in Harare led the economic justice cluster, and the media, information and communication cluster was led by Gender and Media Southern Africa (Made and Morna 2009, 27).

solve problems collectively to address problems like migration, HIV/AIDS, culture, and patriarchy.[8]

The non-state organization, in this case, have been based on not only forming social relations amongst non-state actors but equally with state actors to address gender insecurities. These sets of non-state approaches have involved establishing close relations with various actors operating within the SADC regional policy-making structures. For example, Made and Morna (2009, 34-35) note that the "relationship between civil society organizations and the SADC Gender Unit began in 2005 when hands were joined in a collaborative effort to put gender equality in the spotlight in the run-up to, and during, the SADC Heads of State Summit in Botswana that year." Regional organization to select norms in gender security has involved complex, dynamic organizational relations in clusters outside, alongside, and within SADC inter-governmental spaces as a way to develop regional policies that address gendered insecurities. This mode of organizational relations involving non-state-state actors contrasts with mainstream intergovernmental perspective on regional international relations, according to which SADC is "an implementation body" that enables the heads of states and governments to "call the proverbial shots in the region" (Landsberg 2012, 75). In practice, since the 1990s, both state and non-state actors have participated in selecting and developing norms related to gender security within the intergovernmental policy framework of SADC, revealing a more complex reality than mainstream approaches suggest.

## Norms in Gender Security Governance

Traditionally, norms are seen as being developed at the global level and then spread to regional and local contexts (Finnermore and Sikkink 1998). However, recent research has shown that the norm cycle is more intricate, involving a bidirectional process. Norms can emerge from the bottom-up, originating at the local or regional level and then spreading to the global level, or they can follow a top-down approach, starting at the global level and then being adapted and implemented at regional and local levels (Acharya 2013; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). In the case of the SADC region, norms related to gender security have followed a complex path. They have originated from local and regional organizations, then spread to global platforms, and subsequently been incorporated back into regional and local policies. (Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). Evidence suggests that norms and issues within the African context are not merely adopted from the global level but are often generated locally, highlighting the agency and autonomy of African actors in norm

[8] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

development. Furthermore, the important role of non-state regional organizational relations is revealed through how NGOs come together to form coalitions that center around the selection, development, and diffusion of norms related to gender security. NGOs have been at the forefront of developing regional frameworks that have subsequently been incorporated into global gender security norms and development. This highlights the dynamic agency of African actors in international relations, which extends beyond a purely intergovernmental approach.

Non-state actors have exercised their agency at the global level in two ways: either by working independently, parallel to state actors, or by collaborating with them within intergovernmental policymaking spaces. For example, the report on the 1999 Cancun ministerial meeting highlights the participation of a diverse group of representatives of NGOs that worked both independently and in collaboration with state actors during the event. These included "feminist economists, gender and trade analysts, and women's advocates [who] analyzed World Trade Organization (WTO) policies from a gender and human rights perspective and drew attention to the situation of women in the context of existing and emerging WTO agreements in the areas of agriculture, intellectual property rights, service, and investment" (Equation 2003, 67). A mix of local, regional, and international NGOs, such as the International Gender and Trade Network, Women Environment Development Organization, and Women Edge Coalition, also participated in the Cancun meeting. The participation of these non-state actors demonstrates their agency in establishing social relations and working together with governments from the Global South to resist the WTO Ministerial draft policy on trade. Moreover, they actively sought to raise awareness about the gender-specific consequences of the ministerial draft policy on women and children (Equation 2003).

## Building Region-ness: A History of Non-State-State Relations

In the 1990s, SADC became more open to non-state-state relations. This expansion of the intergovernmental space was a means of acknowledging the importance of social relations between non-state actors and state actors in constructing a sense of regional identity and building a regional community that would be validated by its citizens (Mbuende 2012). The 1992 Windhoek Treaty, which established the SADC, recognizes that the organization:

> shall seek to involve fully, the peoples of the region and Non-Governmental Organisations in the process of regional integration […] shall cooperate with and support the initiatives of the peoples of the region, and Non-Governmental Organizations, contributing to the

> objectives of this Treaty in the areas of cooperation in order to foster closer relations among communities, associations and the peoples of the region (SADC Treaty 1992, 19).

The 1992 Windhoek Treaty suggested a move towards greater inclusivity, forging stronger ties with states that were facing increasing demands for democracy and accountability. As the concept of security evolved, non-state actors became more involved in the regional dynamics, at least in terms of policy and practice, by the mid-1990s. Kaire Mbuende (2012, 56) emphasizes that:

> The involvement of non-state actors relates not only to their input into the SADC Programme of Action but also to knowledge of their own operations. […] NGOs can contribute to regional integration by working with their counterparts in other member states on a number of issues.

Consequently, SADC's policy documents and scholars recognize non-state relations in addressing several regional issues, as well as non-state actors' need to be active agents (Söderbaum 2007; Godsäter 2015; Mbuende 2012; Nedziwe 2020). The recognition of the need to form closer relations with non-state actors and the peoples of the region in the 1992 SADC Treaty and non-state contributions to regional integration (Mbuende 2012) stands in contrast to the environment of the immediate post-independence era of the 1980s. During that time, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), SADC's predecessor, adopted policies that excluded non-state actor participation. This discriminatory approach was manifested in the masculine biases present within the SADCC. For instance, despite women advocating for the establishment of a gender desk within this state-led body, their requests went unheard (Lyons, 1999; Geisler 2004).[9] The democratization and nonlinearization of the 1990s opened spaces for the women's movement to engage in the development of norms within SADC's inter-governmental policymaking structures (SADC Treaty, 1992). In 1998, a SADC Council of NGOs was formed. Through this network, NGOs are expected to interact with SADC institutions to contribute to their context, form, and direction. The growing non-state relations occurring alongside and within SADC point to how organizational approaches transcend an inter-governmental approach that limits analyses to those of state actors.

In this context, SADC played a crucial role in facilitating the development and expansion of NGOs within the region. It acted as a catalyst for the growth of NGOs, empowering them to exercise their agency and generate ideas to tackle a broad spectrum of

[9] While women participated in Zimbabwe's liberation struggles and fighting in the battle front alongside with men, they were left out in the immediate independent governance structures. The marginalization of women is characteristic of post-independent governance structures in other Southern African countries such as Zambia (Nedziwe 2020).

insecurities that have evolved and increased over time (Nedziwe 2020). The combined efforts of regionally-based organizations and NGOs with international affiliations have led to the development of ideas within SADC to address a range of social insecurities in the region. These efforts include advocacy and activism on human rights and democracy issues, led by organizations such as the Inter-African Network for Human Rights and Development and Democracy (AFRONET), Southern African Human Rights NGO Network (SAHRINGON), and the Human Rights Research and Documentation Trust of Southern Africa. Additionally, advocacy and policy research initiatives encompass peacebuilding and conflict resolution, with NGOs like the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) taking the lead. Organizational relations of these actors within the SADC point to the interconnectedness between non-state identities and insecurities (Adler and Barnett 1998, 9-28).

NGOs promoting advocacy around economic justice, development, and trade include the Southern African Network on Debt and Development (SANDD) and Jubilee 2000 Southern Africa.[10] The issues that non-state actors address have also expanded with the scope of norms and funding around emerging and evolving problems. For example, advocacy and activism on environmental issues have involved NGOs such as the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), ZERO, Empowerment for African Sustainable Development (EASD), and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA). Those addressing the nexus between HIV/AIDS and gender and power include the Southern African Network of AIDS Service Organizations (SANASO), AIDS Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), Gender Links (GL), and WLSA and Women and Resources Eastern and Southern Africa (WARESA). Issues concerning workers and students have also gained importance and have been incorporated into regional norms, policies, and organizations through advocacy efforts of such NGOs as the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) and the Southern African Students' Union (SASU). Several organizations focus on advocating for business interests in the region, including the African Business Forum, the Southern African Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SAACCI), the Federation of Clearing and Forwarding Associations

[10] The other organisations include the African Forum on Debt and Development (AFRODAD); Economic Justice Network (EJN); Ecumenical Service for Socio-economic Transformation (ESSET); Southern Africa's Peoples Solidarity Network (SAPSN); Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC); Southern and Eastern African Trade Information Negotiations Institute (SEATINI); Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) and Swaziland Solidarity Network.

of Southern Africa (FCFASA), and the Small Enterprises Promotion Advisory Council (SEPAC). Churches in the region have also formed social relationships by organizing themselves to engage in advocacy and activism. These faith-based organizations have focused on various issues, including liberation, African spirituality, charity, and other broader social concerns (Nedziwe 2020). Such organizational relations have included but not been limited to the Southern African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Southern African Catholic Development Association (SACDA).

Non-state regional organizations and transnational networks have increasingly focused on conducting research to support and inform their advocacy efforts. NGOs conducting research with a regional dimension include the Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and the African Energy Policy Research Network (AFREPREN)[11]. Advocacy and policy research on press and media freedom have also been a focus of organization in the region. The Southern African Research and Documentation Information Centre (SARDC), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), and Africa Information Afrique (AIA) are among NGOs addressing these issues. Additionally, larger networks such as the Southern African Non-Governmental Organization Network (SANGONET), SADC Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGO), and Reflection and Development Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa (MWENGO) reflect the non-state relations and collaboration around common regional insecurities and challenges. NGOs addressing gender security form part of broader regional networks such as the SADC Council of NGOs. Mbuende (2012, 56) notes that "NGOs have formed a regional organization—the SADC Council of NGOs, established in 1998—through which they can interact with the SADC institutions and contribute to regional integration in their own right." This non-state organizational approach, which aims to engage with SADC institutions to confront shared regional insecurities, reflects African agency in fostering region-ness beyond an inter-governmental dominant narrative.

## NGOs in Gender Security in SADC

The engagement of non-state regional actors in gender security with the SADC institutions to support and influence normative change has grown since the 1990s. This process involved developing norms outside the state and then pushing for political buy-in from the SADC governments to adopt policies on gender security.[12] These NGOs include

[11] The other organizations include the Southern African Political Series (SAPES), Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Marine Science Cooperation Programme (MARINE), and the Regional Research Collaboration in Reproductive Health in Africa (REPH).
[12] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.

those working on gender and media-related issues in Southern Africa, such as GL, Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women, Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA), and the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (Made and Morna 2009; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). WLSA and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) have organized around issues of women, law, and development. Regional organizations on gender and healthcare, sexual reproductive health rights, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS have been spearheaded by SAfAIDS and the Voluntary Services Overseas-Regional HIV and AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa (VSO-RHAISA). Gender and education have been prioritized by NGOs such as Education of Girls and Women in Africa (EGWA) and the Southern African Network of Higher Educational Institutions, Challenging Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence (Made and Morna 2009; Morna, Makamure and Dube 2017). The issues that these NGOs address have not been static but have changed and expanded over time. The organization of non-state actors at the regional level in Southern Africa demonstrates the agency of African stakeholders in addressing gender-related insecurities within the SADC region. This agency extends beyond the traditional inter-governmental state perspective, highlighting the crucial role of non-state actors in shaping regional policies and initiatives.

The evolving context of global insecurities and their repercussions for local communities has been characterized by changing norms and policy directions (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017). This has resulted in a growing number of women-led NGOs who exercise agency around climate change and agriculture within a regional context. Non-state regional organizations and transnational initiatives aiming to mitigate the impact of climate change on women and promote their role in the agricultural sector include WARESA, Southern Africa Women for Environment (SAWE), and Gender, Urbanisation, and Environment (GUE). Non-state actors have also organized themselves to address issues related to women's economic justice and human rights. This is evident through the work of NGOs such as the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID), and the DITSWANELO Botswana Centre for Human Rights.

Global norms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their underlying principle of "Leave No One Behind," have influenced regional organizations to expand their focus and include issues related to men's experiences and challenges. These organizational relations have involved NGOs such as MenEngage Africa, which is affiliated with the global MenEngage Alliance and consists of "over 350 non-governmental

organizations at grass-root, national, and regional levels" (MenEngage Africa 2023). It addresses gendered insecurities that range from gender-based violence to HIV prevention, children's rights, positive parenting, and promoting gender, human, and social justice. Non-state actors also address issues that affect LGBTQ+ groups, such as the South African-based Gender Links. Despite the progress made by non-state regional organizations in addressing gender-related issues within the SADC region, there have been challenges in reaching a shared understanding of gender and common regional gender insecurities. This is due to the prevalence of homophobic attitudes in countries such as Malawi, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe (Nedziwe 2017). In addition to the challenges posed by divergent attitudes towards gender and sexuality, there is an increasing trend of non-state regional actors engaging in relational modes of coordination, alliance-building, networking, and advocacy to address gender security governance. These organizational relationships appear to be intentionally designed to transcend traditional state-centric approaches.

There has been a notable increase in non-state organizational relations, particularly in the form of larger networks, aimed at influencing gender security in the SADC region. Some of these networks include the Botswana Council of NGOs (BOCONGO), the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance Network (The Alliance), and the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Network of AIDS Service Organisations (ARASA).[13] The NGO regional networks have adopted a collaborative approach to tackle the complex and interconnected gender insecurities prevalent in the region. Their agency is evident in the way they structure their organizational relations, which operate independently from, in parallel with, and in cooperation with inter-governmental regional organizations. Through these diverse modes of engagement, the NGO networks aim to shape policies and practices related to gender security.

In sum, non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region can be categorized into two main types (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017):

(1) Relations outside formal state frameworks, involving the formation of non-state relations around regional insecurities, initiating and developing norms to

[13] The other organisations include Platforma da Mulheres Accao (PMA) in Angola, Union Congolaise des Femmes des Media (UCOFEM) in the DRC, Fédération Pour la Promotion Féminine at Enfantine (FFPE) in Madagascar, the NGO Gender Coordination Network in Malawi, the Forum Mulher in Mozambique, the Namibian Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (NANGOF), the Southern African Network of AIDS Service Organizations (SANASO), Coordinating Assembly of NGOs in Swaziland, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe, and the Non-Governmental Organization Coordination Council (NGOCC) in Zambia.

influence inter-governmental policymaking, increasing norms to address social issues, growing non-state region-ness, and norm changes.

(2) Relations alongside or within formal intergovernmental structures, involving growing state-non-state relations to address regional insecurities, a norm cycle of initiation, development, adaptation and diffusion, the development of a gender norm cycle, and potential norm changes, social changes, development and greater gender security in the region.

The two main types of non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region, those outside formal state frameworks and those alongside or within formal intergovernmental structures, demonstrate the significant role and agency of non-state actors in shaping norms, policies, and practices related to gender security, as well as their potential to contribute to social change, development, and greater gender security in the region.

## Analyzing Regional Organizational Relations in Gender Security

### *Links Between the Global, Regional, and Local Levels*

Non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region have manifested in various ways, such as elevating local norms to the global level, reintroducing them to the region, and promoting their integration into regional and national policies. Non-state actors' engagement at the global level has been perceived as an important strategy to advocate for local and regional issues to be adopted in global policy. This tendency reveals the agency of non-state actors in linking norms between the global, regional, and local levels. The organizational approaches of women-led NGOs from Southern Africa that have culminated in SADC's key gender policies, as well as their roles in global policymaking, challenge mainstream assumptions that neglect the role non-state actors in regional international relations. For example, the Southern Africa Gender Alliance has played a visible role in forming organizational relations and the development of gender policies at the UN level. Emerging in 2003 as a regional coalition of gender and women's NGOs, the Alliance aimed to promote gender security in the SADC region. In 2014 and 2015, it actively participated alongside other non-state and state actors in the development of UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030 (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017; SADC 2022). Bhekinkosi Moyo, the executive director of the Southern African Trust (SAT), emphasized that the

creation of the SADC Gender Protocol allowed regional NGOs to play a role in shaping the UN's process of formulating SDG 5:

> The Protocol is an example of a one-stop-shop for global, continental, and regional development instruments. It is also an example of an iterative process from regional to global…This network of regional networks is now using the SDGs to lobby for the update and upgrade of the Protocol in line with the SDGs. (Gender Links, 2015, 1)

The participation of Southern African NGOs in shaping SDG 5, followed by their efforts to promote its integration into regional and local norms and their collaboration with governments, demonstrates the agency of non-state actors at multiple levels of governance (Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017, 12, 35).

The development and revision of the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol involving the Alliance organizing outside, alongside, and within SADC's inter-governmental spaces reveal the close ties of non-state-state relations in addressing gendered insecurities in Southern Africa. As such, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development represents

> an example of a sub-regional instrument developed through lobbying and technical expertise from civil society, political buy-in from governments, monitoring of implementation by both civil society and the SADC Secretariat, and resourcing of implementation by funding partners (Gender Links 2015, 1).

Non-state sets of regional organizational relations have included NGOs, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, professional associations, social movements, trade unions, business associations, advocacy and lobby groups, women's organizations, interest groups, and self-help groups. However, many of these entities are not adequately represented in mainstream discourse and thinking. These organizational relations center around coming together to develop norms, while working with states to suggest policy shifts or proposals of new norms. The relations between non-state and state actors to develop norms in the SADC context point to a multifaceted African agency in building region-ness to address social insecurities, including those relating to gender.

The gender policies that have emerged from the late 1990s to date have involved wide participation initiated by non-state actors who then lobbied for their adoption and diffusion in SADC's regional policies. Processes initiated outside the state have been important to non-state actors' organizational strategies, as well as in helping them to obtain the results they seek in developing gender norms and their diffusion. Pat Made and Collen Lowe Morna (2009, 37) highlight the complex nature of engaging SADC officials, emphasizing the importance of understanding their processes and timelines to effectively influence outcomes. They point out that "NGOs often arrive at inter-governmental summits expecting to influence outcomes without realizing that the leg work takes place much earlier." Furthermore, Made and Morna stress that "those with the real power are the senior officials,"

suggesting that NGOs need to engage with these key decision-makers well in advance of the summits to have a meaningful impact on the outcomes. Non-state organizational approaches have further revealed their agency and ideas through lobbying for the integration of regional norms into global norms (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure and Dube 2017). Non-state regional organizing in the SADC region has also involved the sharing of expertise and resources to identify, develop, and advocate for policies that address a wide range of issues, with the aim of effecting change in the region.

The organizational approaches employed by NGOs in the SADC region offer alternative pathways for regional processes that go beyond the traditional inter-governmental narrative. These NGOs provide valuable insights into how the evolution of organizational relations has contributed to the building of a more cohesive region. The involvement of NGOs in the development of SADC protocols and their efforts to lobby member states have resulted in political support from governments. Made and Morna (2009, 37) highlight the importance of strategic lobbying, stating that "successful lobbying on any issue depends on knowing who, what, when, where, and how." They also argue that "through its engagement with the SADC Gender Unit and SADC-PF, the [Southern Africa Gender Protocol] Alliance was able to understand and navigate the process of getting a Protocol before the Heads of States to sign".

In sum, NGOs' active organization in norm development and diffusion in regional and local policies points to the agency in ways that help to shed light on social approaches to address gendered insecurities in Southern Africa. The issues that NGOs have championed point to the agency of non-state actors that moves beyond an inter-governmental lens to explore the dynamic nature of regional international relations that have involved intertwined social relations that include both states and non-state actors. The diverse nature of NGOs in gender security and their organizational relations in complex networks to develop and push for adopting norms that seek to address social insecurities at a localized level suggests the need to move beyond common state-centered assumptions. This non-state agency is visible in the formation of organizational relations and development of norms, as well as their diffusion in global, regional, and local policy.

Non-state actor organizational relations outside inter-governmental spaces have faced challenges, with NGO representatives sometimes disagreeing on the development of gender policies and questioning the necessity of a SADC gender policy given existing protocols at the African Union (AU) and UN levels. For instance, Matrine Buuku Chuulu from WLSA Zambia reflects on the differences that emerged during the development of

SADC's first Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008: "From the outset, the process of coming up with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was a negotiated one between different stakeholders and groups" (as cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29). Chuulu notes that during the 2005 SADC Summit, the newly formed SADC Protocol Alliance pledged to broaden ownership and support for elevating the 1997 Declaration to a protocol through consultations at the national level. However, the Alliance encountered divergent views among civil society organizations:

> Those who participated in the 2005 meetings strongly supported the elevation of the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender to a protocol, while other gender equality and women's rights organizations in the region believed there was no need for a SADC [Gender] Protocol after the African Union (AU) had adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. (As cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29)

Some organizations felt that pressure for the SADC Protocol had started without adequate consultation or inclusion. As Chuulu explains, to ease this tension, the Alliance sought to incorporate language from the AU Protocol into earlier drafts of the SADC Protocol:

> We believed that since the SADC Heads of State had already adopted and started to ratify the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the proposed SADC Protocol should not have weaker language. This would compromise the gains achieved in the AU Protocol and other international instruments like CEDAW. (As cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29).

This example shows that despite differences regarding the necessity of a SADC gender policy, its content, and the language used, women in the region acknowledge the need for compromises to maintain closer relations among themselves and nurture relations with the state to achieve their gender security agenda. This has led to various strategies to manage differences and develop policies aligned with continental and global gender norms: "The art of harmonious negotiation with others was one of the first lessons that members of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance had to learn in getting the SADC Gender Protocol off the ground" (Made and Morna 2009, 29). In sum, although policies addressing gender insecurities have emerged from non-state-state relations, these processes have not been without challenges.

## Obstacles to Regional Organisational Relations in Gender Security

Kaire Mbuende (2012, 56) notes that while the Windhoek Treaty of 1992 provides for non-state actors' participation in SADC's inter-governmental processes, this commitment has not always translated into action. NGOs have faced real obstacles that include states questioning their legitimacy, as they are donor-funded. Similar issues were

raised by the informants who noted government sensitivities when working with NGOs, as well as a lack of clear modalities for non-state participation in SADC's intergovernmental framework[14].

***NGOs as Illegitimate?***

Friction often arises when government leaders or heads of state question the legitimacy of NGOs, as they are frequently dependent on donors and driven by external agendas. In this regards, Mbuende (2012, 56) points out that

> There has been apprehension among SADC governments about foreign-funded NGOs in a number of countries. NGOs are seen either as pursuing a foreign agenda or as opposition parties in disguise. One of the liveliest debates that I witnessed at SADC summits was when the Secretariat tabled a report on SADC cooperation with NGOs. Most of the heads of state who participated at the meeting expressed apprehension about the role of NGOs.

Some SADC heads of state have argued that these NGOs pursue foreign agendas dictated to them by their funders[15]. The irony of this argument is that since the 1980s, when its predecessor, SADCC, was formed, SADC has adopted a neo-liberal framework for its regional integration largely funded by foreign donors for its regional activities (Nedziwe 2020). This reliance on foreign funding for both state and non-state actors in the region raises questions about the autonomy and authenticity of these organizational relations as genuinely home-grown initiatives. Nonetheless, the agency demonstrated by women NGOs in their historical and ongoing organization is embedded in a mix of local, regional, and global influences, which suggests that their agendas and priorities are not solely determined by external factors.

***Power Relations, Sovereignty, and the Lack of Clear Modalities for Non-State Participation***

There are notable tensions in non-state-governmental regional relations. Chuulu, a representative of WLSA, notes that "[t]his friction is rooted in the power relations endemic to civil society-government relations" and "political participation had to be forced out of the power holders" with the help of the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol (as cited in Made and Morna 2009, 30). Furthermore, the SADC governments have raised the question of sovereignty in cases where they have felt uncomfortable with the issues that NGOs have brought to the fore.[16] There is, however, a sense among NGOs that the sovereignty card is

[14] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[15] Personal communication with the representative of the SADC Gender Unit in Botswana, 16.09.2016.
[16] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

played in an attempt to reinforce the dominance of some governments whenever they feel that their power is being threatened or questioned.[17] These sensitivities were noted in countries such as South Africa, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe, where political elites believe that working with NGOs amounts to co-governing with them (Nedziwe 2017).

The way governments have related to NGOs has its history in traditional patriarchy that prioritized men's participation in national and regional governance structures to the exclusion of women. The essentialization of the state as the key driver of formal regional organizations draws on mainstream thinking about regional international relations as an inter-governmental or state-centered affair (Blauuw 2016). However, such mainstream approaches present challenges in the case where the agency of region-ness has involved both state and/or non-state organizational relations to address regional insecurities. Non-state actors have shared in the agency to contribute to SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan to address the social (gendered) insecurities that confront the region (SADC-RISDP 2020). Non-state and state actors have played different but important roles in building region-ness, with the former's efforts remaining unrecognized in much of mainstream thinking. Furthermore, non-state actors have not enjoyed uninterrupted participation in and access to SADC's policymaking structures; in some instances, NGOs have had to tread carefully in their dealings with regional governments. Representatives of NGOs note that "civil society actors always try to be politically savvy to avoid overriding the government because governments do not like it when their job is being done by civil society."[18] Similarly, Mbuende (2012, 57) emphasizes "the differentiated roles of NGOs and governments," meaning that "NGOs cannot be substitutes for governments even in areas where government institutions are weak." While non-state organizational relations are visible in the context of the SADC region, the state remains a central player that holds much power in regional international relations in Southern Africa. This power is visible in the interactions between NGOs and governments, with the former careful not to cross the line or interfere with the latter's job.

Power dynamics in SADC's formal governance structures have hindered civil society engagement in the development of regional policies, such as the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development. SADC governments have, at times, prevented civil society participation "in a bid to flex their power" (Made and Morna 2009, 30). Even

[17] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.
[18] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

influential NGOs, referred to as "big boys" by SADC officials, have been excluded from crucial SADC meetings.[19] These NGOs are seen as both enablers in driving the regional gender security agenda and as a threat when lobbying for an agenda that states consider their responsibility.

The term "big boys" is used to categorize women-led organizations based on masculine and feminine binaries, serving as a tool to divide and exclude them from contributing to processes they aim to influence in order to address regional insecurities. The women and gender NGOs who have been excluded from these processes have played key roles in the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance. For example, Gender Links (GL) was excluded from participating in the final SADC Summit that adopted the revised 2015 Protocol on Gender and Development.[20] This exclusion occurred even though GL led the Alliance team in the initial drafting, consultation, and selection of issues that constitute the revised 2015 protocol that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, some Alliance members, such as SAfAIDS, as well as UN agencies, were included in the SADC meeting that adopted the revised 2015 SADC Gender Protocol. SAfAIDS is considered a preferred NGO by SADC due to the issues it addresses.[21]

Moreover, NGOs that focus on issues considered "hard," such as human rights, constitutionalism, democracy, and good governance, have not always been welcome to participate in SADC's inter-governmental policy-making forums.[22] These NGOs are sometimes perceived as advancing donor-driven agendas, while at other times, they are seen as pursuing issues that border on the sovereignty of SADC countries.[23] In sum, NGOs in gender security have not always received the same treatment from SADC governments, resulting in their exclusion from participating in vital inter-governmental regional summits.

The power dynamics described above highlight the complexities of government-non-state relations, where non-state actors have felt undermined by governments in their level of participation in the SADC agenda. Moreover, although women NGOs reached a consensus on aligning the language used in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the

[19] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.
[20] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.
[21] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.
[22] Personal communication with a senior representative of the SADC Gender Unit in Gaborone, Botswana on 16 September 2016.
[23] Personal communication with the Senior Director of DITSHWANELO Botswana Centre for Human Rights in Gaborone, Botswana on 16 September 2016.

Rights of Women in Africa with the SADC Gender Protocol of 2008, heads of state and government ministers resisted this proposal. Made and Morna (2009, 30) note that "any attempts to retain some of the language and rights issues in the AU Protocol were resisted by government stakeholders," especially concerning matters such as marital rape and women's surname choices after marriage. Made and Morna further contend that accepting weaker language was a necessary compromise to ensure the Protocol's adoption, even though governments had already committed to the language and issues when signing the AU Protocol. The demand to remove these issues and alter the language was perceived as an act of sabotage against the process. In this context, the process of policy development by non-state actors has involved negotiated compromises not only among the non-state actors themselves but also with state actors, although the extent of these compromises may vary. To foster genuinely participatory relations, there is a need for improved interactions and cooperation between non-state and state actors.

The 1992 Windhoek Treaty declares that SADC will develop "appropriate mechanisms and an institution framework" to facilitate the involvement of "the people of the region in the process of regional integration" (SADC Treaty 1992, 8). However, there is an absence of well-defined guidelines outlining the specific ways in which non-state actors can participate within the SADC policymaking framework. The authors of the 2023 Centre for Conflict Resolution's Policy Brief acknowledge that "SADC's policy instruments reflect an awareness of the key role that non-state actors can have in fostering genuinely participatory governance" (Adebajo et al 2013, 16), yet they further emphasize the lack of "clarity on the modalities for civil society participation in SADC activities." They further conclude that "NGOs have remained by and large uncertain about which SADC Secretariat directorate to engage, and often meet with resistance and political caution in their efforts to assist the Secretariat" (Adebajo et al. 2013, 16). Clear institutionalized modalities of engagement in SADC's activities could promote more effective non-state participation outside and alongside states to reduce regional insecurities. In these regards, Mbuende (2012, 57) points out that "a successful regional integration scheme must be rules-based, and the involvement of non-state actors cannot be an exception" and proposes creating an institution "through which NGOs systematically, and continuously, provide their input into regional integration efforts." Specifically, Mbuende (2012, 57) suggests:

> One possibility is to establish an SADC Economic and Social Council, which could meet twice a year. Such a council could be attended by representatives of governments, business organizations, labor, research institutions, and NGOs and could serve as a forum for the exchange of views among its various stakeholders." "One possibility is to establish an SADC Economic and Social Council, which could meet twice a year. Such a council could be

> attended by representatives of governments, business organizations, labor, research institutions, and NGOs and could serve as a forum for the exchange of views among its various stakeholders.

In addition to rules-based interaction with states, a legal framework with clear guidelines could facilitate an environment in which non-state actors are guaranteed a sense of belonging to Southern Africa that, in turn, could contribute to a meaningful African agency in building region-ness. SADC's decision to approve the development of a mechanism for formal engagement with non-state actors, which was reached in September 2023, represents a positive step towards improving non-state-state relations (SARDC, 2023). Although the process of developing a legal framework has been lengthy, the ongoing dialogue between governments and non-state actors since 2016 indicates progress in the right direction. This dialogue aims to formulate clear guidelines for non-state participation, which will ultimately promote security and development in the region.

## Conclusion

While the debates around regional international relations largely focus on intergovernmental approaches, the non-state organizational relations at the regional level deserve attention. The mainstream academic literature pays more attention to inter-governmental governance structures and their regional organizations, while non-state organizational relations and how they interact alongside and within intergovernmental spaces is often neglected. Non-state organizational relations have flourished in the SADC region since the 1990s, addressing various insecurities that extend beyond national borders. These developments have entailed NGOs organizing within complex networks to engage in the development of norms both outside of and alongside the intergovernmental policy framework. In this case, non-state forms of social relations that have emerged to address gender insecurities point to the fact that bodily logic or fixed gender binaries embedded in mainstream gender studies have not been the starting point for women's organization. This article showed that NGOs have embraced an organizational approach to address gender insecurities as part of broader regional insecurities, combining aspects of social mores, development, and practices. These gender insecurities are entrenched in a traditional patriarchal system and neo-liberal value systems characterized by persistent inequalities, discrimination, socio-economic marginalization, and domination, particularly of women in governance structures.

The article shows that non-state organizational relations in the SADC region have been wide-ranging, involving efforts that promote norm selection, development, and diffusion through working outside, along, and within intergovernmental policymaking spaces. It shows that organizational relations of non-state actors have centered around developing norms and lobbying for their adoption by SADC heads of state and Governments. While non-state organizational logics and the role they play within inter-governmental policy frameworks remain neglected in regional international relations analyses, a socio-historical approach to non-state organizational relations helps to shed light on forgotten but vital accounts of African agency in building region-ness. The different ways in which non-state organization plays out outside formal state regional frameworks have amounted to the selection and development of norms that seek to address gender security. Non-state strategies have involved organizing in NGO networks, as well as working alongside governments who have the "power" to counter gender insecurities within a common regional framework.

Furthermore, while mainstream approaches to international relations have largely presented accounts that center intergovernmental relations, this article points to the differentiated but important roles that governments and non-state actors occupy within Africa's international regional relations. Non-state actors have organized by way of promoting norm selection and development to contribute to norms, norm changes, or policy shifts on rights issues concerning gender, poverty, social difference, and deep inequalities. The way in which non-state organizational relations have played out in the SADC region points to African agency in regional international relations. Equally, while not devoid of obstacles and challenges, non-state organizational relations reveal agency to address Southern Africa's social insecurities. Future research could explore the increasing organizational relations by regional private businesses and their implications for Southern Africa's international relations and development.

## Acknowledgments

This article draws on data from my doctoral project titled, "Regional Thickening as Game-Changing: Examining Transnational Activities of Gender and Women-focused Civil Society Actors for Region-Building in Southern Africa." I would like to thank the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS)-CODESRIA and the Next Generation Social Sciences Research Council for providing financial resources that supported the research and fieldwork covered in this article. Further, I would like to thank the reviewers of

this article for the very useful comments and feedback on this work. I would also like to thank Professor Paul-Henri Bischoff and Dr Westen Shilaho for their insightful comments and feedback.

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# Issue Ownership and Framing: Comparing the Scottish Political Parties on Social Media

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.2

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## Abstract

*This article explores how Scottish political parties frame their owned issues on social media to persuade voters during the run-up to elections. Through a qualitative analysis of 150 Twitter and Facebook posts from five major Scottish parties, the study reveals that parties employ threat and victim framing to bolster their vote share. Opposition parties predominantly portray the Scottish National Party (SNP) as a threat, while all parties frame the electorate as victims. The extent and focus of these frames vary based on parties' parliamentary strength and government/opposition status. The SNP, holding a strong governing position, focuses on advancing its independence agenda, while other parties critique the SNP and then promote their own priorities. This article contributes to framing theory by highlighting the nuanced relationship between issue ownership, threat, and victim frames in shaping electoral outcomes. The findings underscore the strategic use of social media by parties to influence voter perceptions and decisions.*

**Keywords:** Issue Ownership; Framing; Social Media; Scottish Politics; Elections; Political Communication

## Introduction[24]

Framing has been studied extensively as a method of persuasion used by political parties during elections (Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth 1998; Stuckelberger 2021). Generally, it is generally understood as the process of identifying and interpreting a problem, followed by proposing relevant evaluations and remedies (Entman 1993). When framing is effectively used, the audience should be unaware of its effect (Arowolo 2017). Contemporary popular frames include conflict, consensus, threat, and victimhood (Bartholomé, Lecheler, and de Vreese 2018; Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese 2017; Patterson et al. 2021; Walgrave et al. 2018). These frames can be employed in either a positive or negative manner. However, scholars have debated the effectiveness of positive and negative framing, and the results remain inconclusive (Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, and Babbitt 1999; Olsen 2020).

[24] This research was conducted as part of the author's MSc dissertation at the University of Glasgow in 2021 and 2022.

The use of framing by political parties to persuade the electorate through social media, particularly regarding their owned issues, has received limited scholarly attention. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer political parties unparalleled opportunities to connect with users and present their unfiltered messages, as demonstrated by previous research (Kalsnes 2016; Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez, and Pineda 2018; Vesnic-Alujevic and Van Bauwel 2014). Given the increasing prevalence of online framing, it is crucial to examine how political parties frame the issues they own. The online environment allows politicians and parties greater freedom to frame issues according to their agenda, in contrast to traditional offline media, which often prioritizes impartiality (van der Goot et al. 2022). While a substantial body of literature has explored how political parties present their owned issues to the electorate (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Zhou 2016), there is a gap in understanding how these parties employ persuasive framing techniques in their communications.

This article aims to address this gap by examining how Scottish political parties frame their owned issues on social media to persuade voters. The study focuses on the framing strategies employed by five major parties—the Scottish National Party (SNP), the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (Conservatives), the Scottish Labour Party (Labour), the Scottish Green Party (Greens), and the Scottish Liberal Democrats (Liberal Democrats)—between November 2020 and May 2021. These parties were selected based on their popularity and influence during the Scottish Parliament election held on May 6, 2021.

The data collection method involved a combination of specialized searches and random selection to ensure the relevance of the content to each party's specific issue ownership. The specialized search identified frames within a specific year for each party, while randomization was used to select a manageable sample from the vast number of posts. Posts unrelated to each party's signature issues were filtered out before analysis, resulting in a final dataset of 150 posts divided among the five parties. The article employs framing analysis as the data analysis method, focusing on the perspective of political parties rather than individual candidates. This approach aims to provide a general overview of Scottish party communication and its potential influence on candidate behavior. Although smaller parties may experience the political landscape differently, they have a lesser ability to shape Scottish politics as a whole and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

The findings confirm that political parties frame the issues they own with threat and victim frames in the run-up to elections to increase their vote share and strength within parliament. Opposition parties use the threat frame against the party in power, while every

party perceives the electorate to be the victim. Those with governmental power frame their rhetoric strongly since they can focus wholly on their agenda, giving them a lot of resources to enhance the persuasion of the electorate regarding owned issues. While those without strength in government must put time, resources, and energy into tearing down their opponents, and then trying to implement their own agenda.

The argument is developed by first establishing the theoretical framework connecting issue ownership and framing, highlighting the strategic use of framing by parties to shape voter preferences and electoral outcomes. The following section presents this theoretical framework, examining existing literature on the topic and outlining an analytical framework. The article then identifies the need for further research on parties' framing of owned issues in the online context and describes the research design, underscoring case selection, data collection approach, and analytical methods employed. Subsequently, an analysis of the two social media platforms is provided, along with a discussion of commonalities and variances in how parties frame their signature issues. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key findings and explores wider implications for research on this evolving subject, proposing the analysis of Scottish political parties' framing strategies on social media as a means to address the research gap and provide insights into evolving political communication tactics.

## Linking Framing Theory to Issue Ownership Dynamics

Framing and issue ownership are two fundamental concepts in political communication that work together to shape public perception and influence voter behavior. Framing refers to the focus on specific features of subjective reality and making them noticeable in communication to endorse a "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, p. 52). It involves molding the meaning of a subject, which impacts relevant judgment and levels of significance for the audience and meaning management (Fairhurst 2005). Issue ownership, on the other hand, concerns voters connecting parties with specific issues (Seeberg 2017). In practicing issue ownership, parties bring their core issues onto the political agenda (Fagan 2019). There are two types of issue ownership: competence and associative. Competence issue ownership asserts that when an individual views the successful track record of a political party on an issue, they then associate this party with that issue (Belanger and Meguid 2008). Associative issue ownership, however, suggests that individuals can sporadically associate political parties with issues they assume these parties align with in their minds (Walgrave, Lefevere, and Nuytemans 2009).

Studies have shown that parties frame their owned issues to enhance their reputation among voters (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010), demonstrating the interconnectedness of framing and issue ownership in political communication. However, the debate surrounding the effectiveness of framing owned issues and its impact on voter perception remains unresolved, highlighting the need for further research in this area. This article posits that parties can strategically frame their owned issues to influence voting behavior and expand their power. By examining parties' framing strategies around owned issues, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the evolving landscape of political communication tactics. Due to the limited research on parties' framing of owned issues specifically, this study takes a broader approach by analyzing how major parties have framed key policy issues. The analysis seeks to provide additional insights into how parties utilize the combination of issue ownership and framing to shape voter preferences and electoral outcomes, particularly concerning their signature topics.

Political parties often become defined by the issues they are associated with owning (Seeberg 2017). Traditionally, left-wing and social democratic parties own issues related to the welfare state (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004) and education, while right-wing parties take ownership of issues concerning national interest (Seeberg 2017). These parties then frame their owned issues according to their agenda (Valenzuela, Piña, and Ramirez 2017). In essence, parties shape the public's perception of these issues through the frames they promote, influencing whether audiences view them in positive or negative terms. The frames used by parties give issues a narrative slant, swaying perceptions of where each party stands on these matters. This, in turn, impacts whether individuals support a party or its agenda.

Thus, the framing of owned issues by political parties can determine the level of public agreement. By strategically framing their owned issues, parties can effectively shape public opinion and garner support for their agenda. This highlights the importance of issue ownership and framing in political communication and the crucial role they play in influencing the electorate. The first of such frames is the frame of conflict. This concerns the structuring of events as being conflictual between individuals, groups, or institutions to engage the audience (Bartholome, Lecheler, and Vreese 2018). Conflict frames are regularly used by political actors to ignite reactions from their audience as seen in the Netherlands (van der Goot et al. 2022). These framed conflicts are civil and salient, but do not emphasize any major clashes within this society (van der Goot et al. 2022). Politicians use social media to promote their conflict frames in more respectful ways than expected as they avoid using

unmannerly or impertinent language (van der Goot et al. 2022). However, incivility online is apparent for opposition and populist right-wing parties (van der Goot et al. 2022). This illustrates the importance of conflictual frames for specific party types, for instance, populist and opposition parties.

In Spain, the battle over Catalan independence sparked conflicting frames between pro-independence parties and opponents. Pro-independence parties framed independence as necessary to further democracy, using positive messaging to encourage favorable views of the future (Elias and Núria 2022). The anti-independence Socialist Party employed a conflict frame to promote their vision for Catalonia's future without the instability they saw independence causing (Prim 2015). Overall, nationalism and other political issues can spur negative, conflict-driven framing where parties push people to choose between two outcomes.

The next frame is consensus, which contrasts the conflict frame by emphasizing agreement between actors (Walgrave et al. 2018). Political parties in Germany used this frame frequently because consensus is central to Germany's political system (Ulrich 2006). Former Chancellor Angela Merkel employed a consensus frame to unite parties in addressing climate change, except for the Alternative for Germany (Parry 2017). Merkel calling out former US President Donald Trump's divisiveness on environmental issues highlighted this consensus frame and boosted its appeal across most German parties, showcasing its effectiveness (Parry 2017).

The third frame is victim, which focuses on inferiority or assigns blame to a perpetrator. This frame is used globally regarding environmentalism. Green parties depict the earth as the victim of human misconduct. The UK Green Party's 2017 manifesto is a case in point. The manifesto frames the earth as a helpless victim requiring safeguarding, calling on those aware of climate change harms to vote Green (UK Green Party 2017). It states that "we" are destroying the earth, identifying humanity as the culprit while urging self-reflection and action (UK Green Party 2017). Similarly, the Australian Greens portray humans as causing but also able to remedy climate change (Australian Greens 2022). They recognize damage from opposing parties in victim framing, declaring Australia itself as the specific victim rather than the wider earth (Australian Greens 2022). Furthermore, they have framed opposition parties as contributors to environmental harm, adopting a victim perspective particularly concerning Australia's environmental condition (Australian Greens 2022). Rather than positioning climate change as a global issue, the party underscores Australia's status as a victim, highlighting domestic environmental challenges.

The final frame is threat, which emphasizes a perilous situation or attackers, constructed around needing urgent action (Patterson et al. 2021). This frame entails portraying an issue, individual, or group as a "danger, risk, or hazard" (Erikson 2020, 1). Thus, the audience must view something or someone negatively, sparking defensive reactions or desertion (Shesterinina 2016). Threat framing is therefore recognized as a key component of framing theory. For example, immigration is often framed as a threat in political media through narratives linking it to "terrorism, criminality, internal security, political stability, and organized crime" in Western Europe (Helbling 2014, 25). During the Trump administration in the United States, there was a notable emphasis on law and order, often directly linked to immigration policies, such as the proposal to build a wall along the US-Mexico border. The Republican party, through its rhetoric, frequently portrayed immigrants in a threatening light, a stance that resonated with segments of the public (Levine and Arkin, 2019). The use of negative language and framing around immigration issues has been shown to exacerbate xenophobia (Heidenreich et al., 2020). The continued perpetuation of such framing has the potential to foster a society marked by increased distrust and conflict, wherein certain groups are unfairly blamed for issues unrelated to them.

In sum, framing involves manipulating a narrative to suit one's agenda. This means that each framed issue can potentially be removed from context, and although it may include facts, the absence of unfavorable facts would be beneficial to the framing actor (Hallahan, 1999). Political parties leverage framing on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to influence audiences.

The level of activity political parties exhibit on Twitter tends to align with their ideological positions (Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez and Pineda 2018). Leftist parties are more active than their right-wing equivalents (Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez and Pineda 2018). Those who use Twitter in Spain are mainly younger and leftist, hence the right-wing political actors fought a losing battle (Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez and Pineda 2018). Twitter usage for political parties depends on whether their audience uses this platform. This means, for example, that left-wing parties create a strong narrative on Twitter, while right-wing parties fall behind. Similarly, parties use Facebook to frame their rhetoric and reach a wider audience. Facebook provides three specific advantages for parties. These include discussions with supporters and potential voters, direct reactions to policies and party performance, and circumventing traditional media outlets (Kalsnes 2016). Despite this, larger parties tend to neglect the potential dialogue available with the electorate (Kalsnes 2016).

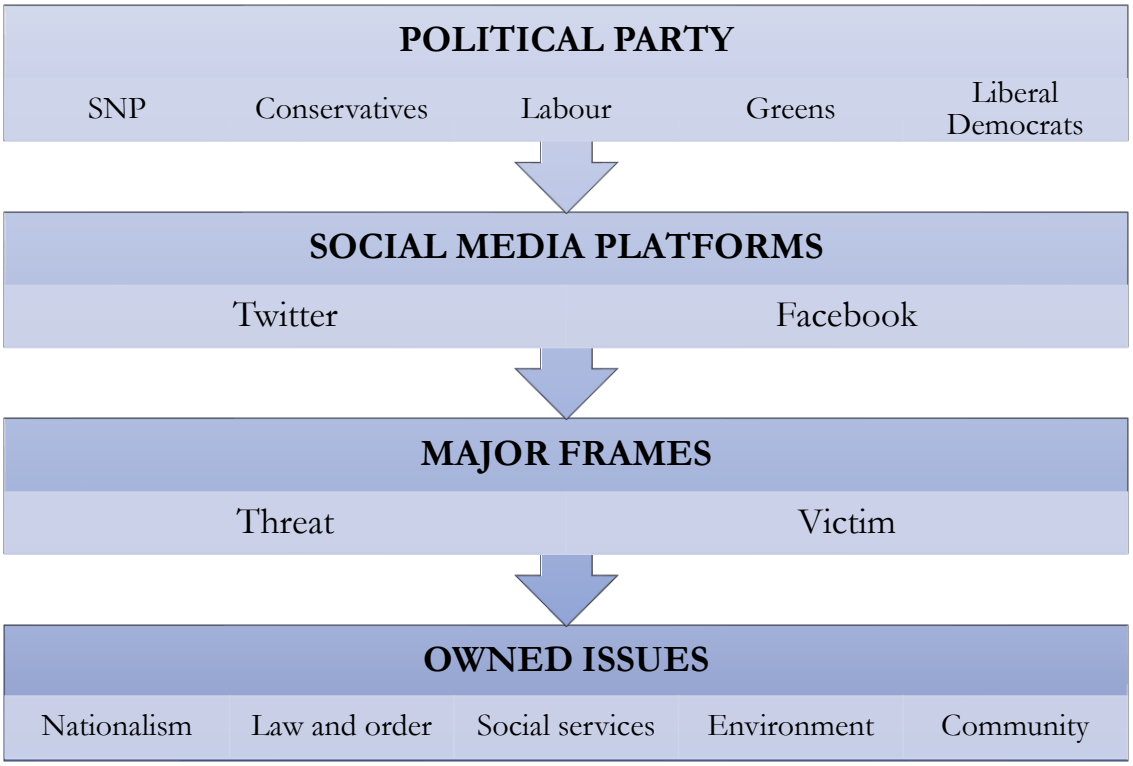
## Analytical Framework and Research Design

This section explains the two frames used in this article: threat and victim. These are chosen among the four main frames encountered in the literature (see the previous section) because the comparison of the two is under-studied despite being directly opposed. For instance, despite each victim frame requiring an immediate threat, there is little research that explores the connection between the two. This article will provide a balanced analysis of relevant owned issues and contribute to the creation of nuanced conclusions. These two frames are simpler to recognize within the rhetoric, which leaves little space for any mistakes or misunderstandings.[25] This article applies a step-by-step analysis which will recognize individual political parties, their use of social media, the frames they use, the issues they own, and whether this increased their support (see Figure 1). Each component is closely interrelated, and overall framing success would be dependent upon the effective usage on every level by political parties. To reach optimal results, political parties must understand the most desirable way to use each platform and determine the benefits and downfalls of utilizing the threat and victim frames within their specific issue range.

This article will analyze the issue ownership of the five main political parties in Scotland. Their owned issues are nationalism, law and order, social services, the environment, and community issues, respectively. The comparison of these parties and their assigned owned issue will be completed through framing analysis. This article will study relevant tweets and Facebook posts to investigate the correspondence between threat and victim frames for the main parties in the Scottish arena. It will use the assigned owned issues of each party and analyze their framing of information as a threat and as a victim to establish how political parties frame issues they own to persuade the electorate to vote for them.

[25] For example, the frames of consensus and conflict are compared on a greater scale than threat and victim. There is no relevant gap in the literature for them to be studied further, despite their significance. Consensus and conflict can be more difficult to recognise within rhetoric, which leaves room for interpretation from the researcher and limits research accuracy since qualitative research remains subjective, and despite neutrality, the researcher's understanding of issues may be influenced by their own experiences.

**Figure 1: An Overview of the Research Design**




*Source: Author*

This article focuses on Scotland, which is a typical case for established representative democracies in which political parties use social media extensively to attract attention from the electorate. The use of social media has become the norm for political parties in contemporary times (Graham and Schwanholz 2020). This case focuses on probing the use of framing online to either confirm or disconfirm traditional framing theory, which further asserts Scotland's typical case selection (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

The analysis covers the largest parties within this electoral arena. These are the SNP with 64 parliamentary seats, Conservatives with 31 parliamentary seats, Labour with 22 parliamentary seats, Greens with seven parliamentary seats, and Liberal Democrats with four parliamentary seats (Scottish Parliament 2022). These figures correspond with the most recent Scottish Parliament election from 2021. This article deliberately excludes smaller parties and independent candidates since their influence on the wider electorate is relatively minor. By focusing on the largest political parties in Scotland, this article seeks to provide a reliable analysis that contains a wide array of in-depth data. This article acknowledges that smaller parties may be visible on social media, but they have not yet gained enough online traction to be considered equal players to the largest parties, and so a comparison between the two would be inequitable.

Each party has a specific issue ownership range. For the SNP, their owned issue is nationalism. This is asserted due to their inherent focus on Scottish independence and their popularity within this realm (SNP 2022). The Alba Party is a smaller party which also favors nationalism, but when compared to the SNP, its influence is minute in 2022 since it had 95% fewer followers on Twitter, and 98% less on Facebook. For Conservatives, their issue ownership lies within law and order which is typical for a right-wing political party (Seeberg 2017). Labour owns issues concerning social services since this has been their main issue in making political gains in the past (Labour 2022). The Green Party, expectedly, own environmentalism which is the core goal of every green political party (Seeberg 2017). Liberal Democrats own grassroots issues concerning communities through their ability to make political inroads this way and enhance their vote share (Liberal Democrats 2022).

The timeframe for analysis runs from November 2020 until the beginning of May 2021.This covers six months of data to analyze in the run-up to the election on 6 May 2021. This specific time frame is expected to provide a vast collection of data with a specific focus on each party's individual owned issues. This is anticipated due to the parties' goal to increase votes in time for the election in 2021. The goal of increased vote share is true for all upcoming elections, not restricted to the one in 2021. The examination of this timeframe will contribute to a nuanced analysis in the field of the contemporary use of framing by political parties concerning their owned issues.

This article employs a qualitative research approach to analyze 150 social media posts from Scottish political parties. Specifically, it examines 30 posts per issue per political party, with each issue represented by 15 posts across different platforms. The selection process involved using a specialized search for Twitter then to randomly choose posts. For Facebook, posts were selected based on their posting date, with the most recent posts appearing first. This article focuses solely on the textual content of social media posts, excluding the analysis of visual or audio elements.

The issues analyzed correspond to specific themes owned by each political party: nationalism for SNP, law and order for Conservatives, social issues for Labour, environmentalism for Greens, and community orientation for Liberal Democrats. Posts were randomly selected and then filtered based on their relevance to each party's owned issue and whether they contained either a threat or victim framework.

The primary unit of analysis for this study is individual sentences within the posts, focusing only on content relevant to the goals of the research. This approach is expected to yield a diverse and comprehensive dataset. Threat frames can be recognized by indications

of insecurity for individuals, their families, or communities (Boydstun et al. 2013). These frames typically highlight "danger, risk, or hazard," strategically elevating an issue on the political and public agendas (Eriksson 2020). In employing the victim frame, actors position the victim as having less power than their opponent (Guggenheim et al. 2015). The language used by political parties in their communications serves as the primary indicator of frame allocation.

The analysis in this article adopts a deductive approach, characteristic of qualitative research, with predefined frames for consideration (Weber 2021). This method, commonly used in qualitative research, enhances the study's reliability (Weber 2021). Framing analysis serves to elucidate how individuals interpret their world and how actors disseminate information to their audience (Foley, Ward, and McNaughton 2019). This analysis aims to illuminate the emergence, transmission, and acceptance of frames (Foley, Ward, and McNaughton 2019). The flexibility of framing analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of short texts, revealing culturally specific narratives (Andersson 2022). The analysis follows three steps: (1) establishing a general understanding of the content through thorough reading, (2) identifying recurring frames, and (3) generating an in-depth comprehension of the data through analysis (Varacheva and Gherghina 2018). Subsequently, codes have been developed for each social media post to assess its relevance to the threat and victim frames. This framing analysis structure is supported by Linstrom and Marais (2012) and forms the basis of this article.

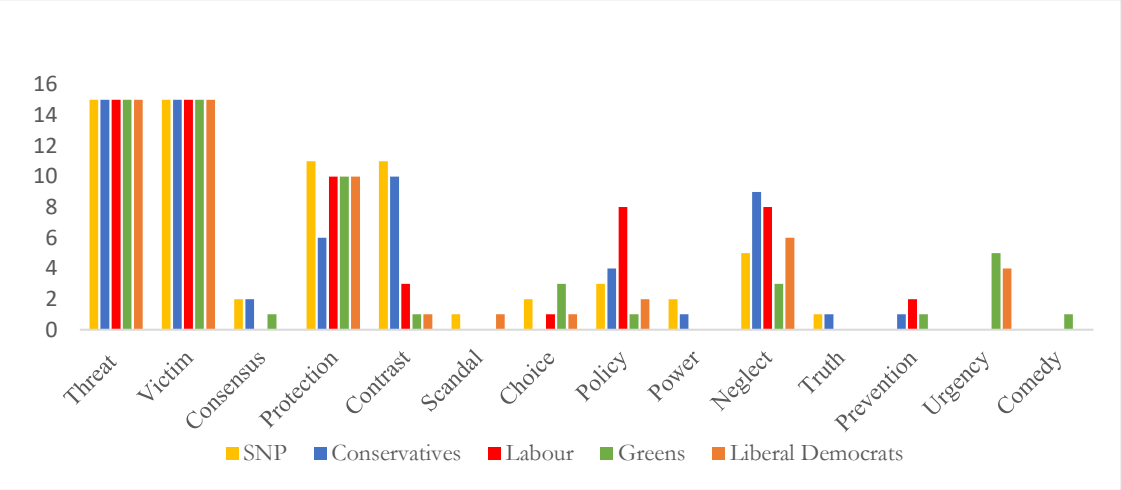
## Analyzing Prevalent Frame Usage Across Parties and Platforms

Scottish political parties utilized various frames beyond threat and victim on social media (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). The SNP was notably active in employing consensus, protection, policy, and power frames on Facebook, while on Twitter, it referenced consensus, protection, contrast, scandal/crisis, and truth frames more frequently than other parties. Conservatives exhibited significant framing control with contrast, neglect, and prevention on Facebook, and consensus, neglect, and truth on Twitter. Labour predominantly presented a policy perspective, particularly on its Twitter feed. Liberal Democrats somewhat dominated the protection frame on Facebook but had less prominence on Twitter. Greens excelled in frames related to choice, urgency, and comedy on Twitter, while on Facebook, they were strong in scandal/crisis, choice, and urgency frames.

Comedy was rarely utilized as a frame. Greens achieved this by highlighting derogatory language used against their party and asserting "Better [this] than a Tory" (post

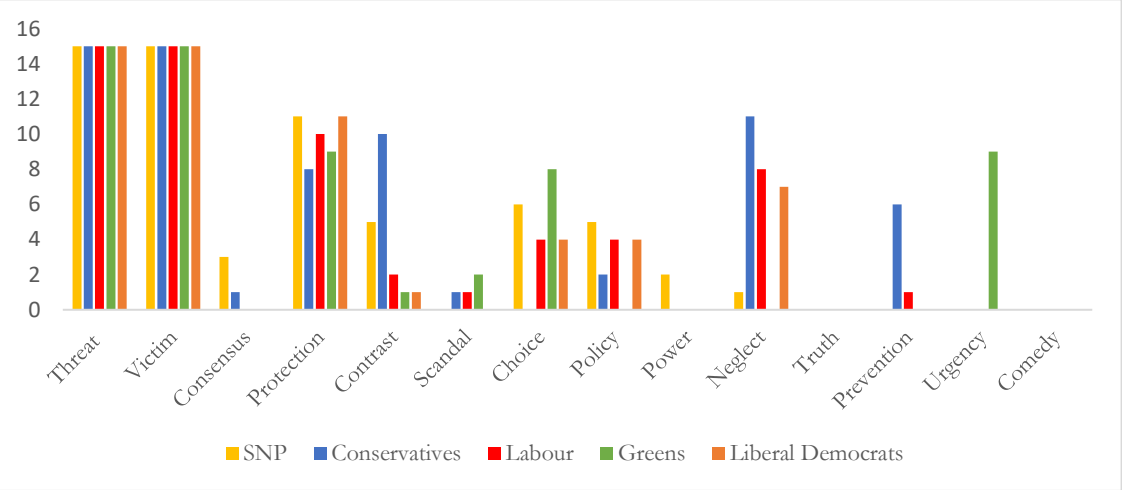
102). Urgency was another infrequently used frame but remained evident in the Greens' emphasis on the sudden importance of addressing environmental issues (post 96). The scandal frame was utilized by the SNP to underscore Boris Johnson's untrustworthiness by discrediting his character and governance (post 3). Lastly, the truth frame was employed by the two largest parties to emphasize their perceived reliability and authenticity.

**Figure 2: The Use of Frames on Twitter**




*Source: Author.*

**Figure 3: The Use of Frames on Facebook**




*Source: Author.*

On Twitter, the SNP employs threat framing in its communication to highlight the perceived negative impact of Boris Johnson and the UK Conservative Government on Scotland and its people. For instance, Johnson is depicted as out of touch with Scotland and its values. In one tweet, it is stated, "Boris Johnson's values are not Scotland's values" (tweet

2). Johnson and his government are portrayed as unsuitable to govern Scotland, implying that independence is the preferred path forward. The SNP explicitly advocates for independence by asserting, "Let's put Scotland's future in Scotland's hands" (tweet 2). This suggests to the electorate that the Westminster government is illegitimate and poses a threat to Scotland's well-being.

Regarding the SNP's use of the victim frame, the focus primarily centers on portraying the Scottish people and Scotland as victims, particularly of neglect by the Westminster governments. Through a comparison of British versus Scottish wants and needs, the SNP implies that Scotland and its people are marginalized by the UK government. For instance, one tweet compares the two parliaments, depicting the Scottish Government as treating its people positively and empathetically, while the UK Government is portrayed as disrespectful and dismissive (tweet 9). This narrative contributes to the perception that the UK government poses a threat to Scottish society. The SNP effectively employs threat and victim framing in its Twitter posts on constitutionalism to bolster its vote share and advance its goal of independence.

Furthermore, by suggesting that the SNP is threatening within the Conservative's domain of law and order, the latter party paints the SNP as agents of disorder and illegality. The SNP is depicted as careless (tweets 31, 39-45), soft (tweet 32), illegitimate (tweets 33, 37), and harmful (tweets 34-38). Sturgeon is specifically labelled a threat to law and order, and portrayed as a hypocrite due to her involvement in the spread of COVID-19 in 2021 (post 40). By positioning the SNP as proponents of opposing norms and ideals, Conservatives aim to present themselves as a preferable alternative.

The Conservative party also employs victim framing, similarly, positioning the Scottish people as victims. Both major parties strategically aim to garner support from the electorate by portraying empathy towards the people's needs and suggesting their party will act in their best interests. For instance, tweet 36 suggests that the SNP will break up families and create division within society, disrupting order, while Conservatives promise to maintain family strength and rebuild the country post-COVID-19. Conservatives depict the SNP as rule breakers who conceal evidence and ignore crises (tweet 41). Through victim and threat framing, Conservatives imply that their opposition threatens the law and order of society.

Labour engages in extensive threat framing targeting the SNP, Scottish Government, Sturgeon, independence, Greens, Conservatives, and hunger as relevant threats. Directly attributing responsibility to the SNP (and Greens) for the crises in the social care sector (tweet 61), Labour indirectly links the SNP to issues like employment (tweet 62), healthcare

(tweet 63), poverty (tweet 64), and education (tweet 65). Labour's threat framing effectively influences discourse on social services.

In victim framing, Labour aligns with the SNP and Conservatives by portraying the Scottish people as the primary victims. Labour's identification with social services lends authenticity, addressing specific aspects of life affected by Scottish politics and incorporating supporter voices in tweets (tweet 65). The party consistently advocates for wage increases for undervalued care workers (tweets 68, 70, 71), aiming to bridge the gap between politicians and society. Labour strategically employs threat and victim framing to distinguish itself in Scottish political debates.

Greens primarily identify climate change as the main threat, consistent with their environmentalism focus. They emphasize the "climate crisis" (tweet 94) and often apply a sense of urgency to enhance the fear factor (tweets 95, 96), linking climate change to salient issues like employment (tweet 97). They criticize Johnson's trustworthiness and promote their approach for a greener future (tweet 91). Greens' victim framing emphasizes Scottish children as victims of Westminster nuclear decisions (#*BairnsNotBombs*, tweet 99). It also portrays Scotland as unequal, environmentally unfriendly, and constrained (tweets 91, 93, 103), as well as aligning the global environmentalist movement with national concerns.

Liberal Democrats utilize threat framing by targeting the Scottish Government and the SNP specifically, highlighting their failure to fulfil past promises on council tax, childcare, and education (tweet 123), and questioning when they will aid the people (tweet 129). By positioning themselves as advocates for the thriving of Scottish people unlike the SNP government, Liberal Democrats connect with the electorate while discrediting opponents. In victim framing, the party consistently sympathizes with Scottish people in every tweet, highlighting its strong connection with the electorate and emphasizing its reputation for people-centric policies.

Overall, all parties effectively use threat and victim framing in their Twitter communication, by emphasizing key issues and connecting with their respective electorates (see a summary in Table 1A in Appendix). Each party tailors its approach to align with its core values, policy priorities, and target audience. By skillfully leveraging threat and victim framing, these parties seek to shape public perception, mobilize support, and distinguish themselves in the competitive landscape of Scottish politics.

The SNP's threat framing on Facebook mirrors its approach on Twitter, with a primary focus on Boris Johnson. Johnson is portrayed as a failure (post 17), a danger (post 19), damaging (post 20), and unreliable (post 21). Westminster is depicted as a threat,

disassociated from Scotland by the SNP, highlighting key disparities and misalignments between the Scottish people and the Westminster Government (post 18). Unlike its Twitter rhetoric, on Facebook, the SNP employs the threat frame against the Labour party and its leader, Anas Sarwar. This strategic online rhetoric deepens the perceived divide between Scotland and Westminster while minimizing the potential of its opponents without discrediting its independence-favoring allies.

The SNP primarily portrays Scotland and the Scottish people as victims on Facebook, associating Westminster with imposing austerity, power control, and nuclear weapons on Scotland (post 22). They depict themselves as victims, illustrating other parties' ignorance of their wants and needs (post 20). By employing both threat and victim frames, the SNP enhances its independence agenda while emphasizing the separation of Scottish people from Westminster.

Conservatives assert that the SNP poses a major threat to law and order in Scotland, particularly focusing on Sturgeon as the figurehead for independence, which they claim will bring chaos and uncertainty (post 46). They associate her with illegitimacy, carelessness (post 52), illegality, and scandal (post 53), reinforcing the idea that change brings disorder to society. Victim framing by Conservatives highlights Scottish people's victimhood through strong language, emphasizing the damaging effects of the SNP on the country (posts 48, 49, 59).

Labour's threat framing on Facebook emphasizes the need for action, highlighting threats such as the mental health crisis, employment, education, environmentalism, and healthcare (posts 76-78). They do not directly depict the Scottish Government as a threat but instead focus on the status quo in politics. Victim framing by Labour centers on the undervalued efforts of care workers and portrays Scottish people as victims, aligning with supporter sentiments (posts 79, 80, 84).

Greens utilize threat framing on Facebook by declaring the saliency of the climate "emergency" and portraying themselves as combatants of this threat to increase their vote share (posts 108, 109). They also emphasize Scotland as the object of climate suffering, appealing to the electorate through strategic wording (post 106).

Liberal Democrats use threat framing on Facebook to connect with people's local spirit, highlighting the need for positive change in education, healthcare, employment, and environmentalism, and presenting the Scottish Government and independence as threats to their constitutional agenda (posts 136, 139). Victim framing by Liberal Democrats focuses

on various marginalized groups, illustrating a close and representative connection with the Scottish population (post 141).

Overall, all parties effectively use threat and victim framing in their Twitter and Facebook communication, by emphasizing key issues and connecting with their respective electorates (see a summary in Table 1A and Table 2A in the Appendix). While there are some common themes and tactics used across the political spectrum, each party adapts its framing approach to align with its unique policy priorities, ideological stance, and electoral goals.

## Interparty Variations in Issue Framing

During election campaigns, the five Scottish political parties employ threat and victim framing in their social media rhetoric to bolster their vote share. While it was expected that parties would share more overlapping frame usage in their main topics, the opposite was observed. Nonetheless, several similarities exist in their framing strategies (summarized in Table 1). Parties predominantly portray the electorate as victims, strategically positioning themselves as combatants against societal challenges often attributed to opposing parties. This communication tactic varies from discreet word choices to direct messaging, reflecting parties' distinct goals, values, and agendas. Despite differences, parties employ similar techniques to frame their social media communication and sway the audience.

The main three opposition parties highlight the SNP as a significant threat, each utilizing different reasons based on their issue ownership. Conservatives focus on law and order, warning of the SNP's potential to "plunge us into chaos and uncertainty" (post 47). Labour critiques the SNP's performance in education within the realm of social services (post 65), while Liberal Democrats emphasize community ownership to link SNP's limited progress on various issues like council tax reform, treatment time guarantees, cycling initiatives, fuel poverty, childcare, and green jobs (post 123).

There were notable differences in the communication approaches of these political parties, particularly among those not in government. The SNP's framing techniques diverged from other parties due to its current power position, allowing it to focus on its political goals and popularity without resorting to a discrediting, threat framing agenda. The SNP intensively concentrates on the constitutional question and portrays the UK Government as disconnected and disrespectful to Scotland (posts 1 and 3).

In contrast, Conservative discourse on Twitter and Facebook heavily emphasized the SNP as a threat to society, associating them with "cover-ups, lies, deceit, secrecy, sleaze, [and]

the abuse of power" (post 37). While some opposition parties viewed the SNP as a threat, none did so to the extent practiced by Conservatives.

Labour stood out as the only party using supporters to communicate its issue ownership and frames strategically, aiming to align more closely with the people. They employed direct quotations like "there's only one party who's pledging to keep people like me in jobs," presenting Labour as the sole provider of suitable employment, emphasizing trustworthiness. Labour linked their victim frame to the specific societal group of "care workers" (posts 83, 84, 85, 87).

Liberal Democrats made a concerted effort to connect with the people, particularly on Twitter, where they portrayed Scottish people as the sole victims. They differentiated themselves by showing overwhelming concern for the electorate, connecting with specific communities like mothers, minorities, and families in their tweets (posts 146, 147, 141, 138). These specific connections personalized tweets and facilitated a stronger connection with the party. Interestingly, Liberal Democrats and Labour were the only parties that did not use frames to victimize themselves. This parallels their close alignment with the electorate on owned issues, suggesting a deliberate strategy rather than coincidence.

**Table 1. Contrasting Approaches to Threat and Victim Framing Among Scottish Parties**

| Similarities | Differences |
|---|---|
| All parties portray the Scottish people as victims in their framing. | Greens emphasize urgency and time constraints in their framing, being the only party to focus on environmental issues as a threat. |
| Parties use a mix of direct and indirect communication to convey their message, with some directly stating opponents' shortcomings and others implying negative traits indirectly. | Labour specifically identifies subgroups of the Scottish population as victims on both Twitter and Facebook, while other parties do not. Labour incorporates supporter voices in its communication on both Twitter and Facebook. |
| Parties depict opposition leaders and parties as threats while emphasizing their own ability to tackle these challenges. | Liberal Democrats only have one victim frame on Twitter. Liberal Democrats and Labour are the only parties that do not portray themselves as victims. |
| Labour, Greens, and Liberal Democrats frame the political status quo as a threat, while the two dominant parties, SNP and Conservatives, do not. | Conservatives consistently focus their threat framing on the SNP across both Twitter and Facebook, a level of consistency not seen in other parties' communications. |

*Source: Author*

## Conclusion

This article explored how Scottish political parties with parliamentary representation frame their owned issues to influence the electorate's voting decisions. The findings suggest that parties' framing strategies are deeply rooted in their political context, with those in government focusing on advancing their agenda, while opposition parties often resort to discrediting their opponents while promoting their own priorities to gain support. This dichotomy highlights the power dynamics at play in the Scottish political landscape and the ways in which parties adapt their communication strategies to navigate this complex environment. This finding also underscores the nuanced and context-dependent nature of political communication strategies.

The study found that political parties strategically employ threat and victim framing in their rhetoric on Twitter and Facebook, albeit in different ways. The SNP concentrates on its independence agenda to bolster popularity, while other parties must critique the ruling party before advancing their own agendas. Victim framing portrays the electorate as victims to evoke sympathy, consistent with previous research on framing strategies of right- and left-wing parties. The extent and focus of threat framing vary based on parliamentary strength, ranging from specific issues and institutions to individuals.

This article contributes to framing studies by highlighting the nuanced relationship between issue ownership, threat, and victim frames in shaping electoral outcomes. It underscores that every political party employs victim framing to enhance its electoral prospects by positioning itself as the most competent for action while identifying other parties as threats. The extent of threat framing depends on parliamentary strength, with stronger parties focusing on agenda implementation and weaker ones on discrediting opponents.

Despite its contributions, this article has limitations. The data was restricted to 150 posts across two social media platforms over six months, potentially limiting nuance and framing dynamics before elections. Single-coder data analysis and the focus on two framing types may introduce interpretation errors. Future research could expand to other political contexts, employ qualitative and quantitative methods, and compare online and offline framing strategies to explore the evolving impact of issue ownership on political communication.

In conclusion, this study offers a valuable contribution to our understanding of how Scottish political parties frame their owned issues online, laying the groundwork for future research and enhancing our knowledge of political communication strategies. As digital

communication continues to play a central role in political campaigns, understanding the nuances of how parties frame issues and engage with voters online will be crucial for researchers, strategists, and citizens alike.

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# Appendix

**Table A1: Tweets as Threat and Victim**

| Party | Threat | Number of tweets | Victim | Number of tweets |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SNP | Westminster | 4 | Scotland | 11 |
| | UK | 1 | Scottish people | 7 |
| | Conservatives | 2 | Scottish Government | 2 |
| | Boris Johnson | 6 | Scottish Parliament | 1 |
| | UK Government | 4 | | |
| | COVID-19 | 1 | | |
| | Brexit | 1 | | |
| | Rishi Sunak | 1 | | |
| Conservatives | SNP member | 1 | People of Scotland | 10 |
| | SNP | 12 | Scotland | 4 |
| | Sturgeon | 2 | Conservatives | 2 |
| | Independence | 1 | Justice | 1 |
| | | | Scottish Parliament | 1 |
| Labour | SNP | 5 | Care staff | 4 |
| | Greens | 1 | Care users | 1 |
| | Independence | 2 | Scottish people | 9 |
| | Scottish Government | 5 | Scotland | 1 |
| | Conservatives | 1 | | |
| | Hunger | 1 | | |
| | Sturgeon | 2 | | |
| Greens | Boris Johnson | 2 | Scottish people | 2 |
| | Hunters | 2 | Scottish wildlife | 2 |
| | Westminster | 1 | Scotland | 7 |
| | Climate change | 6 | World | 1 |
| | Scottish Government | 2 | Environment | 1 |
| | Ignorance | 2 | Greens | 1 |
| | Nuclear Weapons | 1 | | |
| | Fossil Fuels | 1 | | |
| Liberal Democrats | Scottish Government | 5 | Scottish people | 15 |
| | Repetition | 2 | | |
| | SNP | 5 | | |
| | Nicola Sturgeon | 2 | | |
| | Boris Johnson | 1 | | |

*Source: Author.*

**Table A2: Facebook Posts as Threat and Victim**

| Party | Threat | Number of posts | Victim | Number of posts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SNP | Boris Johnson | 7 | Scotland | 11 |
| | Anas Sarwar | 2 | SNP | 2 |
| | Labour | 4 | People of Scotland | 5 |
| | Westminster | 5 | | |
| | Liberal Democrats | 1 | | |
| | Brexit | 3 | | |
| | UK Government | 1 | | |
| | Nuclear weapons | 1 | | |
| | Conservatives | 1 | | |
| | COVID | 1 | | |
| Conservatives | Sturgeon | 5 | Scottish people | 9 |
| | SNP | 10 | Conservatives | 2 |
| | Independence | 1 | Scotland | 4 |
| | Salmond | 1 | Scottish Parliament | 1 |
| | John Swinney | 1 | | |
| Labour | Independence | 2 | Scottish people | 11 |
| | No support | 1 | Care workers | 4 |
| | Other Scottish parties | 1 | Care receivers | 1 |
| | Missed cancer diagnoses | 1 | | |
| | Politics staying the same | 4 | | |
| | SNP | 4 | | |
| | Poverty | 1 | | |
| Greens | Westminster | 2 | Scotland | 13 |
| | Politics staying the same | 2 | Scottish people | 1 |
| | Climate change | 7 | World | 1 |
| | Nature emergencies | 3 | | |
| | Aviation emissions | 1 | | |
| Liberal Democrats | Politics staying the same | 4 | Scottish people | 10 |
| | Independence | 3 | Civil servants | 1 |
| | COVID-19 | 2 | Minorities | 2 |
| | Poverty and hunger | 1 | Children | 2 |
| | Scottish Ministers | 1 | | |
| | Scottish Government | 3 | | |
| | SNP | 1 | | |
| | Scottish society | 1 | | |

*Source: Author.*

# From Aliens to Apartheid: Reimagining Segregation in Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009)

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.CON1

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## Abstract

*This review analyses how Neill Blomkamp's 2009 film District 9 uses an alien species forced into a refugee camp as an allegory for the institutionalized racial discrimination experienced in South Africa under apartheid. Three key aspects are explored in the following paragraphs: 1) District 9's resonance beyond typical sci-fi entertainment by engaging with pressing sociopolitical issues; 2) Its representation of dehumanization and oppression of marginalized groups through the alienation of the aliens; and 3) The film's innovative mockumentary style blending fiction with documentary realism to enhance emotional impact.*

**Keywords:** Film; South Africa; Apartheid; Fiction; Framing; Racial Justice

## Introduction

The power of cinema to transport us to extraordinary new worlds would be a mere illusion if it does not resonate with pressing social issues and real-life events. Indeed, in some cases, they are productive in offering a (dramatic) understanding of the past. Take the case of racial injustice, for example. Historical dramas such as John Boorman's *In My Country* (2004) and John Kani's *Nothing But The Truth* (2008) tackle racial injustice in apartheid South Africa, a rather dark period in that country's history. Another drama, such as Clint Eastwood's *Invictus* (2009), a film where Nelson Mandela used rugby as a unifying force to bridge racial divides, was also crucial in dramatize how reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa unfolded. In 2009, the same year as the premiere of *Invictus*, Neill Blomkamp's directorial debut *District 9* was released. *District 9* became the first film that tackled apartheid through the lens of science fiction and gained cult status in the following years. In this film review of *District 9*, I explain how science fiction, in its ability to speculate about alternate realities, works as a potent vehicle for social commentary. Unlike his drama-oriented predecessors, I show how Blomkamp in *District 9* took an inventive approach to exploring segregation and oppression as experienced in South Africa by transposing them into a sci-fi context.

In *District 9*'s alternate reality, where South Africa's institutionalized racial discrimination seems to have never existed, a massive alien spaceship has come to a standstill over the city of Johannesburg. The multi-ethnic South African government removes the extraterrestrial occupants from the ship and confines them to District 9, a segregated refugee camp. This alternative Johannesburg cityscape serves as the backdrop for Blomkamp to explore themes of apartheid, xenophobia, immigration policies, and media manipulation. In this film review, I explore three fundamental aspects. First, I argue that *District 9*'s socio-political commentary resonates far beyond the bounds of science fiction cinema, which is usually dismissed as mere mass entertainment. Second, I show how Blomkamp's film uses science fiction to reflect on historical and contemporary issues, explores the parallels between fictional and real segregation, and visualizes the metaphorical dehumanization of marginalized communities through alien characters. Third, I demonstrate how Blomkamp uses the mockumentary style to dive even deeper into topics such as apartheid, xenophobia, immigration policies, and media manipulation.

To fully grasp the film's political resonance, one must first delve into the historical backdrop that inspired it. In this regard, one of *District 9*'s most prevalent achievements is how it translates the harsh experiences of apartheid into a thought-provoking science fiction parable. In short and with the goal to simplify a complex operation of power, apartheid (a term derived from Afrikaans meaning apartness) was a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination. This racially discriminatory system was implemented by the Afrikaner National Party after it came to power under Prime Minister D.F. Malan in 1948 and lasted until the early 1990s (Beinart and Dubow 1995, 3). Its origins, however, can be traced back to 1910 when the right to vote was denied to people of color in certain regions of South Africa (Maylam 2001, 179-180). From that point forward, the South African government systematically stripped away and curtailed the rights of non-whites in every domain of society. District 9 takes the horrors that this history caused on millions of victims, predominantly non-white communities, and transmutes it into the tangible personal experiences of a series of characters that play a part in this story. Especially the way the aliens are treated and pejoratively called "prawns" for their distinct physical features is something that becomes relevant as the film continues to unravel. District 9, the ghetto where the aliens are forced to live, becomes an urban and social microcosm that illustrates the second-class citizenship that apartheid enshrines into law based on race or, in this case, species.

However, Blomkamp's creative vision extends beyond mere historical allegory to probe the deeper themes that underpin apartheid. The film explores institutionalized

discrimination through key aspects, particularly in how the government denies the aliens basic rights enjoyed by humans precisely because of their non-human status. This lack of rights granted to the aliens by virtue of their otherness kicks off the film's main storyline. Through legal formalities, the government seeks to remove the aliens from District 9, which has become a makeshift shelter in their stranded state, and relocate them to District 10, a new facility constructed miles away from the city. This process very much mirrors the South African segregated townships, or underdeveloped areas destined to non-whites, which reinforced the country's spatialization of race (Haarhoff 2011, 187-193). Moreover, in District 9, the government's forced relocation of the aliens to a segregated area exemplifies the systemic inequalities implemented to carry out spatial separation between humans and the extraterrestrial beings. Wikus van de Merwe is the film's main character. He is a bureaucrat who works for Multinational United (MNU), a private military contractor, and he is tasked with transferring aliens to District 10. MNU's management of the alien situation is ruthless. More so, it is driven by the exploitative pursuit of profit through the acquisition and control of the aliens' technology and resources for the human's military industry.

I focus on Wikus van de Merwe here because he embodies the obliviousness and the lack of moral sense of many white South Africans who enabled apartheid through their compliance with an unjust system. Indeed, I argue that his bureaucratic indifference to the aliens' suffering, which is prominent in the first half of the film, reflects the "banality of evil" described by Hannah Arendt. This concept arose from Arendt's report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official who helped organize the mass deportation and murder of Jews during the Holocaust. Arendt was struck by Eichmann's very ordinary and bureaucratic attitude in the trial, which contrasted with the enormity of his crimes. Indeed, Arendt saw Eichmann's evil deeds as stemming from "sheer thoughtlessness" and an "inability to think" (Arendt 1977, 287-288). For Arendt, Eichmann's response during the trial showed that horrific acts are sometimes committed not by fanatics but ordinary people. In District 9, Wikus's initial lack of moral reflection shows him as the archetype of a bureaucrat who, within the confines of his role, becomes a cog in the machinery of oppression. He executes his duties with little moral questioning. He believes he is merely carrying out standard procedures. By doing so, he becomes a representative of the historical reality of many individuals who worked within bureaucratic systems and became complicit in enforcing discriminatory policies without necessarily embracing the ideologies that drive those policies.

Talking about the legal formalities Wikus enacts to displace the aliens, one could argue that they encapsulate the illusion of free will under coercion. A striking example

emerges at the beginning in a scene where Wikus approaches aliens that live in District 9 with documents for allegedly voluntary eviction agreements. On the surface, these actions are framed by MNU to be exercises in individual agency, and they are understood as the capacity to act and make choices within and as a result of the social, cultural, and political structures in which people (or, in this case, migrant aliens) live. In making the aliens sign the papers, they are responsible for and agree to their own eviction. However, this apparent freedom of choice, as the film reveals, is a deceptive façade. The decision to sign the eviction agreements is made under duress and devoid of genuine consent. The aliens, marginalized and vulnerable, are subjected to intimidation, threats of violence, and the prospect of losing their livelihoods. Indeed, the film highlights how oppressive systems operate by concealing their discriminatory practices under the guise of individual agency, which was precisely the case of the 'real' (or historical) South Africa. In the film, Wikus's ironic trap lies in portraying these procedures as benign and voluntary agreements, when in fact, they represent a manifestation of institutionalized discrimination.

If film theory has taught us anything, it is how the dramatic transformation of main characters often drives the overall story. Thus, as the story progresses, Wikus van de Merwe undergoes a profound change as a character. After being sprayed with a mysterious fluid during the eviction, he slowly mutates into an alien himself. Wikus's physical transformation into an alien prawn catalyzes the most pivotal shift in his identity and perspective. Here he transitioned from being a part of the oppressive system to becoming a member of the oppressed group. In one striking scene, Wikus examines his alien claw while also seeing his human hand holding it. This image represents the split that is taking place in his identity. In these initial stages of transformation, Wikus becomes forced to see himself through two sets of eyes, unable to reconcile his prejudices with his new oppressed identity. In a way, this experience reminds us of W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness," coined to describe the psychological experience of African Americans who see themselves through both their own eyes and the prejudiced eyes of a white-dominated society (Du Bois 2020 [1903]). As a human, Wikus is deeply conditioned by his innate prejudice against the alien prawns whom he sees as inferior. However, upon mutating into a prawn himself, Wikus is abruptly forced to confront a new double consciousness. On one level, he still self-identifies as human and maintains his ingrained biases. He is also forced to see himself as the other. Thereby, he gains first-hand experiences of how prawns are dehumanized and oppressed by society. Just as Du Bois described the twoness experienced by black Americans navigating a

racist society, Wikus is painfully awakened to the prejudices the prawns are facing—prejudices he once perpetuated nonchalantly when he was a human.

Wikus's transformation is also productive in shining a light on society's othering and xenophobia toward the aliens, who may not even share human concepts of individual identity or dignity. Inspired on its repurposing of apartheid ideology, the South African society in District 9 has constructed the alien population as inferior others. This view justifies denying the aliens the same rights and privileges enjoyed by humans to fuel fear, spread disgust, and provoke hostility towards them. The dehumanizing label "prawn" epitomizes this othering process and reduces the aliens as mere vermin in society's eyes to further legitimize their mistreatment. This use of words reinforces the idea of other groups as fundamentally less advanced. Another way in which othering takes place is language itself. As the film showcases, language is a system that highlights the difference between aliens and humans. The aliens' language is portrayed as harsh, grunting noises that lack nuance, and their inability to speak English reinforce their isolation. Indeed, it is ironic that one of the few relevant alien characters in the film—Christopher Johnson—adopts an English name as an (failed) attempt to mingle with his new earthly environment. The aliens in *District 9* are ultimately segregated precisely because of their perceived difference and nonconformity to (imposed) human norms, stressing their frustration even more.

A powerful element in *District 9*'s portrayal of the dichotomy "us" versus "them" is its strategic use of visual devices to emphasize the aliens' otherness against the human society (to the audience's eyes). Here, story development becomes more audiovisual and less narrative-based. Close-up shots fixate on details like the aliens' crustacean-like shells, creepy insectoid mandibles, and quivering antennae. Extreme close-ups highlight their sharp fangs and slimy, green blood, which evokes disgust. The way in which the aliens are depicted here becomes especially relevant when Wikus turns into one of them himself. The aliens' bizarre physicality and strength are portrayed as something to be feared and rejected—the aesthetics intentionally play up qualities seen as strange or dangerous to manufacture an ominous threat. As film theorists like Laura Mulvey note, controlling the visual gaze can powerfully direct emotional responses and perceptions (Mulvey 2006, 344). To this end, the aliens' jarring, unpleasant aesthetic in *District 9* seems to be constructed by Blomkamp as a reminder to audiences about how aliens become prey to a prejudiced lens.

A final aspect I focus on in this film review is *District 9*'s witty use of mockumentary techniques, which is crucial to the film's effectiveness. The term mockumentary is widely credited to American film critic Rob Reiner in the 1980s to describe the mockumentary-style

comedy film *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), which he directed (Roscoe and Height 2002, 120-125). A mockumentary is a scripted work of fiction that employs techniques and styles normally associated with documentary filmmaking. By constructing the film out of documentary codes and conventions like talking head interviews, handheld camerawork, and archival footage (especially in the first half of the film), Blomkamp aims to blur the line between truth and fiction to achieve an extraordinary sense of gritty realism. Ohad Landesman's notion of hybrid documentary explains how fiction benefits from the digital video's aesthetic of realism to endow stories with a sense and a feel of immediacy (2008). District 9 does not use amateur technologies, but amateur-like aesthetic devices to pursue a similar intent that forces the audience to experience the film's heavy socio-political themes not as abstract commentary but as tangible, emotionally charged events unfolding before their eyes.

Indeed, this compelling illusion of reality is prevalent during the eviction sequence. Filmed with a chaotic mix of documentary-style video (with characters addressing the camera) and security cam footage, these scenes offer gut-wrenching immediacy. The documentary aesthetics make the events painfully believable and elevate a fictional story into experiential reality for audiences. Carl Plantinga examines how documentaries use specific stylistic choices and cinematic codes to elicit intended emotional reactions and guide the audience's sense of what feels "real" (2009, 86-96). In *District 9*, the intentional use of these aesthetic techniques serves to evoke empathy towards the aliens in the eviction scenes, confronting the audience with the moral dilemma of the situation. While the eviction itself is not presented as a positive action, the film's style further encourages viewers to question the ethics of the eviction and the treatment of the aliens as lesser beings—a moral quandary that is central to the film's commentary on oppression and discrimination.

*District 9*'s use of mockumentary style to engage the audience emotionally and morally parallels pioneering works like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which also manufactures reality through pseudo-documentary verisimilitude. Raw emotions like anguish, rage, and despair come to the forefront via its you-are-there intimacy in both films. In this sense and drawing from Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner's discussion of documentary style expectations (2006, 8), I suggest that films such as *District 9* intentionally destabilize notions of absolute truth and authorial intent. By remixing the aesthetics of realist documentary genres, the film highlights how truth can be constructed and obscured. To put it simply, *District 9*, through fictional pseudo-documentary techniques, is ultimately self-reflexively questioning documentary truth claims.

As we saw above, *District 9*'s hybrid visual style, blending fiction with documentary style, enables the film to deliver its thought-provoking allegory of apartheid dynamics in a hard-hitting, experientially affective manner. The film's interweaving of stylistic creativity and sociopolitical reflexivity allows *District 9* to transcend mere symbolism. Instead, it takes a significant step in fostering empathy for injustices within the sci-fi genre, making the allegory all the more poignant and impactful. The issues dramatized in the film persist today, not only in South Africa but also in other parts of the world. The segregation and oppression of marginalized communities, as seen in the Gaza Strip, serve as a stark reminder that the themes explored in *District 9* remain relevant. As the boundaries between reality and fiction continue to blur in the digital age, *District 9* is a reminder that entertainment can and should tackle issues of discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization, ultimately providing incisive insights about society's past, present, and future.

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# Review of "Marcel Gauchet and the Crisis of Democratic Politics" edited by Natalie J. Doyle and Sean McMorrow

*Marcel Gauchet and the Crisis of Democratic Politics*
Edited by NATALIE J. DOYLE and SEAN MCMORROW
New York: Routledge, 2022
266 Pages, US$43.99
ISBN 9780367696894

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.R1

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The volume *Marcel Gauchet and the Crisis of Democratic Politics* (2022) is a collection of essays by international scholars from Australia, Canada, France, and the US. It is the first edited volume dedicated to Gauchet in the English-speaking world. The French political philosopher Marcel Gauchet (1946–present) is a prominent figure in what is known as the return to political philosophy in France, along with other notable figures such as Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, Pierre Clastres, Miguel Abensour, and Pierre Manent. Gauchet is primarily known in English for his groundbreaking work *The Disenchantment of the World* (1997), prefaced by Charles Taylor, and his dialogue with Alain Badiou in their co-authored book *What Is to Be Done?* (2016). The remarkable contributions gathered in this newly published edited volume will help Anglophone political scientists better understand Gauchet's work, most notably his theory of democracy.

The two introductory texts by Daniel Tanguay and the editors, Natalie J. Doyle and Sean McMorrow deliver a compelling argument for the relevance of Gauchet's insights and offer explanations for the lack of reception in English academia. Both texts highlight the guidance that Gauchet provides on the contemporary crisis of democracy. Since the 1970s, liberal democracy has faced many complex challenges, such as climate change, inequality, illiberal ideologies, disruptive new technologies, and racial injustice. We are still in a dire condition, with no dominant political alternative to liberal democracy emerging. Furthermore, the mainstream theories of liberal political philosophy fail to solve the current

crisis insofar as they seem to belong to a bygone era when the most important question confronting liberal democracy was the pursuit of individual rights.

To address the inadequacy of liberal normative theory, Gauchet offers a compelling narrative theory that aims to ground democracy within the process of autonomy at work throughout the whole history of humankind. According to Gauchet, throughout its history, humanity has been structured heteronomously, with societies grounding political legitimacy in external sources of authority such as ancestors, gods, or natural entities. In European modernity, autonomous societies emerged, recognizing that political communities derive their legitimacy only from within. However, the principle of autonomy does not ensure a seamless transition—numerous challenges stem from the ambiguity of what an autonomous society encompasses. Readers can explore Gauchet's ideas firsthand through two translated essays, which appear as the opening chapters of the volume. The first essay, "Democracy from One Crisis to Another," compares the current crisis of liberal democracy to the crisis of representation that plagued nascent democracies around the beginning of the 20th century. Serving as an applied case of Gauchet's grand theory, the second essay, "Populism as Symptom," provides a nuanced analysis of Trumpism and other contemporary authoritarian populisms.

Stéphane Vibert, Sean McMorrow, and Mark Hewson's contributions delve into Gauchet's anthropological reflections on the eclipse of the political, political autonomy, and individualism. Craig Browne's text is particularly noteworthy as it attempts to reconstitute the theories of modernity within Gauchet and Badiou's debate (2016). This comparison is particularly insightful, as Browne carefully unpacks Gauchet's criticisms of Marxism and, most notably, why it fails, in Gauchet's view, to make sense of the experience of the political within human history.

The essays by Brian C. J. Singer, Paul Blokker, and Julian Martin and Natalie J. Doyle examine Gauchet's critique of the logic of human rights, which links the depoliticizing effects of the unilateral foundation of politics within human rights with the surge of populism across the West. The argument goes as follows: while human rights are an essential component in the advent of modern democracy, they encourage an unbridled individualism that obscures the social bonds that are the very conditions of political communities and, therefore, of rights themselves. In this light, populism can be understood as a reaction against the progressive disappearance of the political.

Brian C. J. Singer's contribution stands out as one of the volume's most interesting, as he not only lauds Gauchet's theoretical reflections but also attempts to think against

Gauchet, raising sharp criticisms. Indeed, Singer—as well as Vibert—expresses doubts concerning Gauchet's self-professed "pessimism in the short term/optimism in the long term." If human rights are so powerful in obfuscating the political—transforming society into a market composed of self-interested monads (a darksome depiction of which can be found in Doyle's concluding contribution)—how can one hope for autonomous societies to find a solution to the crisis of liberal democracy? Singer's objection has the merit of pointing out that, despite providing an ambitious analysis of the historical factors that led us to this situation, Gauchet's theory does not provide clear solutions that might pave the way to a higher form of democracy. Nevertheless, Gauchet's work offers something unique and rare in political theory nowadays: intelligibility. He manages to coherently bring together a vast array of phenomena that would otherwise seem chaotic and disconnected, and we should praise him for this outstanding achievement.

In summary, Doyle and McMorrow's remarkable volume successfully shatters the timid apathy surrounding Gauchet's work in the English-speaking world. While too little of Gauchet's work is translated and debated in English, this book provides a wealth of insights into his theory of democracy that will be of great interest to political scientists interested in the topics of democracy, populism, liberalism, history of political thought, and French political theory.

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# Review of "Centrist Anti-Establishment Parties and Their Struggle for Survival" by Sarah Engler

*Centrist Anti-Establishment Parties and Their Struggle for Survival*
By SARAH ENGLER
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023
224 Pages, US$90
ISBN: 9780192873132

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.57.R2

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The frequent emergence, rapid electoral success, and fast decline of new political parties have been among the distinguishing features of politics in Central and Eastern Europe over the last couple of decades (e.g., Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015, 2020). In her excellent new monograph, Sarah Engler offers a fresh perspective on this phenomenon, focusing on the group of parties that she terms "centrist anti-establishment parties" (CAPs). According to Engler, CAPs are new parties that seek to appeal to voters not by offering a clear ideological alternative to existing parties but rather by vehemently criticizing established political elites, typically for their alleged corruption, dishonesty, or incompetence. Unlike radical anti-establishment parties, CAPs challenge the establishment while remaining within the mainstream of their party systems.

Such ideologically moderate newcomers have accounted for much of the political change in the post-communist EU member states since 2000. However, while CAPs have been among the most electorally successful new parties in the region, they have also been generally characterized by a failure to maintain stable electoral support over time. Engler's book focuses on the key question of why some such parties survive, becoming stable and important actors in their party systems, while others do not, dropping out of parliament just as quickly as they emerged. In her endeavour to solve this research puzzle, Engler employs an impressive mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, combining data from expert and voter surveys with insights gleaned from dozens of interviews with party officials, MPs, activists, and country experts.

After introducing the CAP concept in the first chapter of the book, Engler examines the nature of these parties' electoral appeal. Using an original expert survey tracking the salience of anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric of parties in the post-communist EU member states (Engler, Armingeon, and Deegan-Krause 2021), Engler makes a significant empirical contribution by systematically showing how politicizing corruption has been a key element in the electoral campaigns of CAPs that emerged between 2000 and 2016. This part of the book also brings the important finding that these parties may be less centrist than previously assumed, as many combine their non-ideological anti-corruption appeals with relatively distinct liberal or conservative stances on the cultural dimension.

In the third chapter, Engler develops the main theoretical contribution of the book: a framework for explaining the survival of CAPs based on their electoral strategy. She argues that since CAPs initially rely strongly on their novelty appeal to attract voters, they tend to quickly lose their electoral advantage, especially as many of them enter government immediately after their first election. Thus, to successfully retain support in subsequent elections, CAPs must modify their original "pure protest" strategy. To do so, they can choose from three main strategies. First, as part of the *mainstream* strategy, CAPs can drop their anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric, seeking to transform themselves into a mainstream party. Second, they can also adopt the *issue* strategy, which entails dropping anti-establishment rhetoric while focusing on politicizing corruption in an attempt to gain ownership of the anti-corruption issue. Third, CAPs can employ the *reframed protest* strategy, maintaining their original anti-establishment and anti-corruption claims while moving away from the ideological mainstream, for example by adopting a radical-right populist position. Using the latter strategy, CAPs reframe the meaning of "the establishment" to distinguish themselves from other parties on different terms than their original "pure protest" appeal based on novelty and anti-corruption.

In the subsequent empirical chapter, Engler demonstrates that only those CAPs that adopted one of the three strategies were able to survive in the long term. The argument is further bolstered through in-depth case studies of three successful CAPs: the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), the Latvian Unity (V), and the Slovak Direction (Smer), with each case serving as a detailed illustration of one of the three strategies. PiS opted for reframing its protest appeal, transforming itself into a populist radical-right party. In contrast, Unity and Smer both dropped their anti-establishment discourse. Unity focused on anti-corruption, while Smer dropped both its anti-establishment and anti-corruption appeals, seeking instead to become a mainstream party occupying the economically left and socially conservative part

of the political spectrum. Unfortunately, since the analysis stops at the 2020 elections, Smer's more recent shift to overtly far-right sociocultural positions is not covered. In general, while the case studies describe the development of the parties' electoral strategies in detail, the emphasis is primarily placed on party agency. Consequently, it seems that Engler missed an opportunity to explore more deeply how external factors, such as political opportunity structures, impact CAPs' programmatic shifts.

Chapter 6 is perhaps the most interesting part of the book, presenting an innovative study of how the ideological positions of CAPs' voters constrain the parties' ability to successfully change strategies. Relying on voter survey data, Engler demonstrates that an initial electorate that is homogeneous in terms of economic position makes it more likely that CAPs can successfully adopt one of the three strategies. Conversely, a more heterogeneous support base puts the parties at greater risk of losing voters if they change their electoral appeal. The book thus concludes that ideological anchoring is an important determinant of the long-term survival of CAPs, which is unexpected given the supposedly non-ideological nature of their appeal. This finding aligns with earlier research that found that even in the relatively unstable post-communist party systems, ideology still plays a role in structuring party competition (Rovny and Polk 2017).

Overall, the book makes an important contribution to the literature on party politics, providing a new theoretical framework that can be tested in contexts beyond the post-communist region. However, it seems that the focus on electoral strategy does not quite explain the whole story of the success and failure of CAPs. Although Engler argues that these parties are generally underdeveloped organizationally, exploring the potential interaction between certain organizational features of CAPs and their electoral strategies could provide valuable insights into their survival. In this regard, a certain weakness of the book is that it has little to say about the Czech Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011), which competed in its second election after 2016 and is thus not included in most of the analysis. Despite being one of the most successful centrist anti-establishment parties in the region during the past decade, ANO 2011 does not seem to fit clearly with one of the three main strategies for success outlined by Engler. Lacking a coherent ideological position, ANO 2011 is more notable for its strong organizational cohesiveness (as discussed by Cirhan 2023), suggesting that this factor may have contributed to its success.

Nonetheless, these limitations do not detract from the contribution of Engler's monograph as the first book-length study of the CAP phenomenon. Instead, they open up a promising agenda for future research. Still one of only a few studies examining parties in

the entire region from a truly comparative perspective, this book will be a rewarding read for anyone seeking to understand party politics in Central and Eastern Europe.

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