Corruption during and after COVID-19: Analysis of the factors impeding anti-corruption initiatives in South Africa

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the extent of corruption in South Africa. The article explores the corruption and financial misconduct recorded during COVID-19. The study is qualitative, and information is compiled using desktop analysis. Various journal articles, books, and official documents are considered to gather publicly available data. This methodology forms part of the literature review. The information gathered was assessed through conceptual and document analysis. The findings indicate that although anti-corruption Acts and strategies are available, implementation gaps exist to combat corruption successfully. The article highlights the significant role the government can play in reducing corruption as a suggestion for policymakers to consider. Corruption arises for a variety of reasons. Personal greed, the desire for an opulent lifestyle, the ego satisfaction that comes with having power and authority, insufficient institutional measures, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation measures are just a few examples. Whatever the cause, corruption cannot be tolerated. It goes against the organisation's moral standards, code of conduct, integrity, and honesty.

Keywords: Anti-corruption, corruption, COVID-19, public service, qualitative, South Africa.

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Introduction

All instances of corruption inside the nation immediately undermine the core principles of the Constitution of South Africa, which seeks to guarantee everybody's freedom, security, and democracy (Sterfontein & de Waal, 2015). One indication of how pervasive corruption is throughout the country is found in the policies of several political parties that participated in the recent general elections in South Africa (Murimi, 2018, p. 1). It also proves that the political elites in the nation know that the country has much corruption; thus, by being pioneers of positive change, they must alleviate corruption as part of their mission statement when running for office. Young people are most vulnerable to and severely affected by injustice in Africa (Murimi, 2018, p. 1). The growing perception in the country by the masses, especially the youth that has access to information, is that South Africa is very corrupt, so much so that even the president is involved in such scandals that are detrimental to the nation's growth. In recent years, the current leader of the Republic of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, has been linked to various news outlets regarding fraud and money laundering allegations; however, the African National Congress (ANC) dominated South African parliament in December 2022 voted not to proceed the president's impeachment proceedings (Mansoor, 2022). This is not new for a South African president, as Jacob Zuma, the former president of the state, was also linked to severe corruption cases, which also landed the former president in jail after his presidential term was cut short by the ruling party. He was found guilty of contempt by the Constitutional Court for neglecting to appear before a panel looking into allegations of corruption that damaged the reputation of a president who was previously best recognised for opposing apartheid (Eligon, 2021).

"South Africa's development has been curtailed by the level of corruption in the nation" (Pillay, 2004). South Africa cannot take advantage of its mineral riches to the optimal level due to the rampant corruption in the nation. Typically, funds allocated to specific development and growth endeavours cannot accomplish what they were designated for since not everything goes where it should (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). The rampant corruption has prevented the national economy from growing at a stable rate and

has also significantly affected good governance in the country. Political corruption is the main social evil affecting South Africa and many other countries' development (Pillay, 2004).

Since the beginning of the democratic era, numerous pieces of legislation, policies, and tactics have been designed to tackle the problem of unethical behaviour in the South African public sector. However, corruption continues to afflict the country (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). According to Naidoo (2013), the criminalisation of corruption in most nation-states, including South Africa, acknowledges that the country's economic and social progress is severely harmed and distorted when public employees abuse and misuse their position for personal gain. This can be attributed to different types of corruption that take place in the country, including political corruption, judicial corruption, bureaucratic corruption, and public service corruption, to name a few. This means that the people placed in the system to make it effective and efficient often create problems, sometimes worsening it and holding the whole country back from development and growth (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013).

South Africa is the nation in the world with the most unbalanced places in terms of economic distribution. Corruption within the state ensures that the gap between the wealthy minority and the poor majority gets bigger, and the country's riches are enjoyed mainly by the few instead of the masses (Transparency International, 2020). Corruption is one of South Africa's most significant weaknesses, preventing the nation from achieving optimal development and expansion of the economy. The article explores different types of corruption recorded in the literature, the extent of corruption in South Africa, especially during COVID-19, and offers suggestions for improvement.

Conceptual Framework

There are various forms of corruption recorded in literature. Some of the themes are discussed in this section. There is a form of corruption called *petty corruption*. According to Clarke (2011), low- or irregularly paid employees may be forced to engage in corrupt behaviour to provide for their families. Greed, family obligations, other cultural considerations, lax administrative practices in a post-

colonial environment, and opportunity are all factors that increase the likelihood of petty corruption. In developing nations, petty corruption is costly for businesses and people. Researchers from the World Bank calculated that businesses and households paid between $0.6 trillion and $1.5 trillion (10.8 - 27.1 trillion rands) in bribes annually using data from 1999 to 2003 (Clarke, 2011). According to Yoo (2008), the impact was undoubtedly heavy in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) due to the region's severe corruption. Policy officials at the highest level have emphasised the detrimental consequences of 'petty corruption' on the growth potential of developing countries. According to the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s Economic Development in Africa Report 2020 (UNCTAD 2020), it was projected that African nations combined had lost US$50 billion and more a year to illegal flows; however, this figure might be as great as $89 billion annually, or 3.7% of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Another form of corruption is grand corruption, whereby examples include the theft of public monies, the bribery of influential individuals in government or politics, money laundering, nepotism, and cronyism. Grand corruption can have serious repercussions, including the destruction of democratic institutions, a decline in economic and social well-being, and a loss of public confidence in the government (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Businesses also pay to influence future regulatory environments and contract terms. Even when a company's managers are confident that they have a good chance of winning a fair competition, they may still bribe customers if it is the customary way to conduct business, regardless of any laws to the contrary (Rose-Ackerman, 2002).

There is *judicial corruption.* Law enforcement cannot be a successful anti-corruption instrument without judicial independence from the rest of the state and the private sector. Judges and other court employees must be able to make decisions without being influenced by the government or the commercial sector (Rose-Ackerman, 2007). The court system will have been tainted if they are driven to gain favour with someone who can influence their careers or to supplement their income with cash from a party to a case (Rose-Ackerman, 2007).

A significant one is called *political corruption.* In addition to generating misallocation of funds, political corruption affects decision-making, especially in the administration. Political corruption affects the system of politics and the government's institutions, often leading to institutional degradation that involves rigging procedural laws and political structures (Amundsen, 1999). Therefore, political corruption goes beyond simple violations of formal, written laws, business rules of ethics, or court rulings (Amundsen, 1999). According to Lodge (1998), South Africa is entrenched in political corruption. This was not as visible during the apartheid era as it is now; however, with democracy, the state has become less secretive, aggravated by the increasing level of transparency and public accountability. Lodge (1998) further stated that democratising the state has inhibited corruption in some areas of governance and trade; however, it has also extended the government's activities, making it possible for corruption to thrive in other areas of government.

Outside of the political realm exists *corporate corruption.* Companies across the globe are increasingly being held accountable for engaging in socially responsible behaviours and contributing positively to the society in which they reside (Hoi & Lin, 2012). This business conduct has historically been characterised as corporate social responsibility (CSR). Firms may pursue CSR for several reasons, but it appears to be the cornerstone of today's fiercely competitive industries and a way to decrease corporate corruption (Hoi & Lin, 2012). Otherwise, this nature of corruption may seriously harm their reputation and, consequently, their capacity to make money in the future. Increased expenditure and less effective resource usage are two additional direct economic consequences of corruption (Argandona, 2003). Following the financial crisis in Asia, Russia, and Latin America, corporate governance has become a significant policy priority for many emerging nations. For instance, many developing countries have started various market-oriented reforms to modernise their economies, and a key component of these changes is frequently the privatisation of state-owned firms (Wu, 2005). However, privatisation poses unique difficulties for business and public sector governance in emerging nations. Poor corporate governance in several transitional countries has made it easier for

unscrupulous officials to plunder the already destitute nations during privatisation (Wu, 2005).

Lastly, in this article, there is *systemic corruption.* According to Stefes (2008), systemic corruption is endemic and heavily institutionalised. This means corrupt officials' and citizens' actions are constrained and made possible by unwritten laws and customs. The line dividing the governmental and commercial domains is obscured by the informal networks integrated with these informal norms and standards (i.e., institutions) that pervade the governmental machinery (Stefes, 2008). The result is that millions, if not billions, of individuals endure watching. At the same time, their valuable collective resources—like infrastructure, safe drinking water resources, education for all, and exceptional and efficient health care—are squandered in favour of programmes that mainly serve a wealthy, small few (Persson et al., 2019). If a sizable section of the people views a person, process, or government as corrupt or if they feel corruption is unavoidable in their everyday lives, it is an essential social and political fact. However, in systemic corruption, people encounter a persistent and widespread pattern of wrongdoings that few would hesitate to label corrupt (Johnson, 1998).

According to Johnston (2005), a broad range of behaviours is included under corruption. Many people equate corruption with bribery, which is defined as the unlawful payment of money to a government employee in return for a legally binding, state-approved, authoritative act that has a specific and concrete effect and would not have been made if the exchange of money had not been made in secret (Johnston, 2005, p. 18). A nonprofit group called Corruption Watch published its yearly reports, describing the several forms of corruption that have continued to exist in South Africa in the wake of the pandemic (Corruption Watch, 2021). According to the report, corruption emanates in areas such as corrupt practices in purchasing 16%, improper administration 18%, abuse of power 16%, fraud 14%, resource misappropriation 12%, negligence of duty 8%, stealing or blackmail 8%, and corruption in recruitment 8% (Corruption Watch, 2021).

The public may assume that all public service departments and employees engage in corrupt activities, negatively affecting trust.

The staff may develop low self-esteem in this situation, which is also detrimental to the department. However, corruption has many facets, and it can happen even in the face of institutional safeguards against public mistrust. This was seen during COVID-19 when staff members started looking for dishonest ways to increase their cash flow. Some people's corrupt behaviour created opportunities by abusing their position, processes, and products because people were weak and vulnerable and needed support. Publicly available data indicates that many irregularities were noted during the procurement process. Viral evidence of wrongdoings with the medical emergency kits and equipment was found. Procedures were disregarded, protocols were ignored, and accountability measures were marginalised. Even though some dishonest individuals were apprehended and procedures were found, this raises questions about the ethical culture of organisations and the values of those working in the service industry. All in all, it casts doubt on the nation's culture, calls into question the confidence of its citizens in the government, and presents a picture of inadequate governance to the rest of the world.

The impact of corruption within South Africa's public service is multifaceted, exacerbated by systemic vulnerabilities and a lack of accountability. High-profile scandals have emerged, particularly during COVID-19, revealing significant governance and ethical standards lapses. Reports indicate substantial misappropriation of funds allocated for pandemic relief efforts, with officials exploiting their positions for personal gain, thus undermining public trust in governmental institutions. The racial and socio-economic disparities prevalent in South African society further complicate the landscape, as marginalised communities often suffer the most from these corrupt practices. Consequently, the pervasive culture of impunity perpetuates inequality and hinders effective public service delivery, as resources intended for health and welfare are siphoned off through corrupt schemes (Greiner & Fincke, 2009). This situation calls for urgent reforms to enhance transparency, accountability, and ethical governance to restore integrity within the public sector.

In South Africa, bribery is one of the primary forms of corruption with which ordinary people are likely to come into contact during

their interactions with government officials (Faull, 2019; Crime Hub, 2019a) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of survey respondents who paid bribes for at least one service
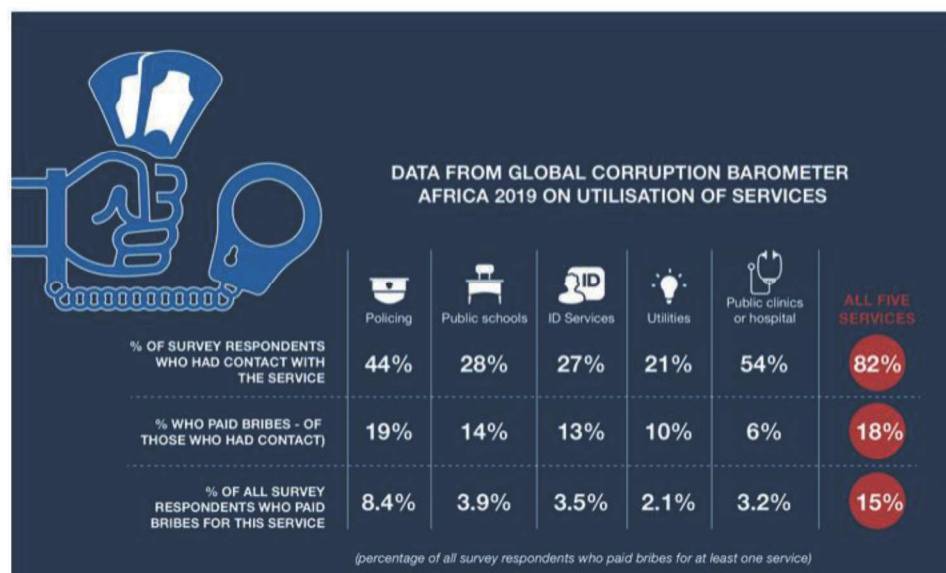
Source: Crime Hub 2019a

From Figure 1, the summarisation and analysis of information sourced from Crime Hub (2019a) shows that the overall b**ribery of all the survey respondents- who paid bribes for each Service are as follows: policing:** 8.4%, p**ublic Schools:** 3.9%, **ID Services:** 3.5%, **Utilities**: 2.1%, **Public Clinics or Hospitals**: 3.2%. The data indicates that a large segment of the populace engages with public services, and within this group, a considerable proportion participates in bribery. Policing and public clinics/hospitals have the highest interaction rates, with policing having the highest incidence of corruption before Covid-19.

The following instances of corruption, noted by Corruption Watch (2020, in Vyas-Doorgapersad 2022) in the COVID-19 response, include bribery for tests, treatment, and other incidents related to health services. These examples further support the scenario mentioned above. The misuse of emergency measures implemented to address the COVID-19 pandemic by corrupt officials in South

Africa is egregious. With 442 whistleblower reports, Corruption Watch received the most police corruption reports in 2020. Ten per cent of these whistleblower reports have something to do with the state's response to the pandemic and the COVID-19 national lockdown. Fraud (11%), employment corruption (15%), and procurement corruption (21%), among other significant forms of corruption, are prevalent in the health sector (Corruption Watch, 2020).

People became vulnerable due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and some dishonest public servants took advantage of this to their financial benefit. The nation needed protection kits and other equipment to help the public with their health, but the health portfolio was exposed because of its involvement in unethical practices. This exposes the inadequate oversight and assessment procedures, systematic corruption, ineffective leadership, and weak governance practices. The problem is that those in positions of trust, authority, and public representation carry out certain corrupt activities. The culture of organisations was also impacted by corruption, as financial misappropriation was made public through media coverage. The cases are accessible to the public, and the statement declares documented misconduct. The goal is to examine the situation broadly; no names or positions are mentioned. However, as was already mentioned, all these incidents led to the public losing confidence in public service and governance.

Mlambo et al. (2024) highlight the substantial losses incurred from irregular expenditures that proliferated after the pandemic, illustrating how accountability lapses have compounded existing governance issues. Furthermore, corruption dynamics were pronounced in procurement and vaccination efforts, as seen in Nigeria, where irregularities at both the budgeting and distribution stages led to the solicitation of informal payments by healthcare workers (Onwujekwe et al., 2023). This serves as an illustration of the wrongdoing and anomalies that transpired during the pandemic, highlighting concerns about the widespread corruption that was prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic and that was also observed in other African nations.

The vulnerability of emergency procurement processes has emerged as a significant concern, particularly in the context of South

Africa's governance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rapidly instituted protocols designed to expedite the purchase of essential goods and services often circumvent traditional checks and balances, creating a breeding ground for inefficiencies and corruption. For instance, the lack of standard competitive bidding practices allows for discretionary spending that lacks transparency, thus diminishing public trust in governmental actions. Consequently, cases of misappropriation of funds and the awarding of contracts to unqualified vendors have proliferated, often justified by the urgency of needs during the crisis. As such, it is crucial to analyse these processes to identify immediate failures critically and recommend systemic reforms that will enhance accountability and integrity within public service procurement systems in South Africa (Dorasamy & Fagbadebo, 2021). Addressing these vulnerabilities may be imperative to restore confidence and strengthen the resilience of governmental operations in future emergencies (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: South African corruption by sectors before Covid-19

| WATER OR ELECTRICITY | HOUSING | PENSION OR SOCIAL WELFARE GRANT |
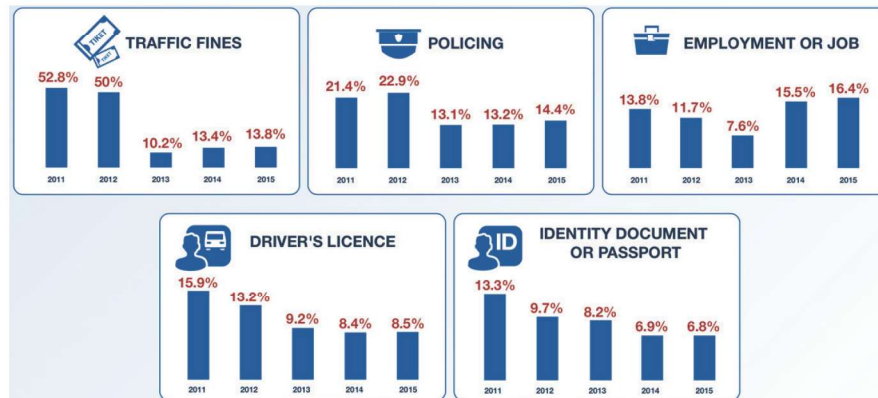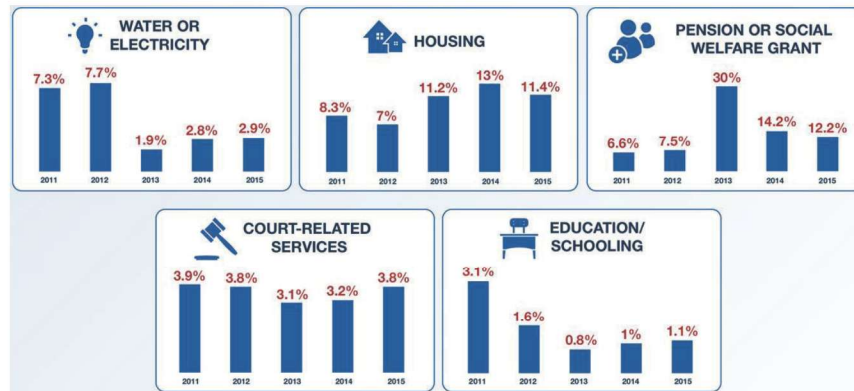
Source: Crime Hub 2019b

Amid the dire public health crisis precipitated by COVID-19, corruption within South Africa's public service highlighted systemic vulnerabilities exacerbated during the pandemic. Various case studies reveal a disturbing pattern of misconduct, where procurement processes for essential goods, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), were manipulated to benefit private entities with close ties to government officials. One prominent case involved inflated contracts awarded without competitive bidding, resulting in severe financial waste and significant ethical breaches that eroded public trust in government institutions. Furthermore, reports indicated that funds intended for pandemic relief were misappropriated, often funnelled into the accounts of politically connected individuals rather than reaching the intended beneficiaries. The implications of these corrupt practices extend beyond immediate financial loss, as they undermine the very fabric of governance and civil society, raising pressing questions about accountability and the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms in crisis circumstances (Greiner & Fincke, 2009).

Methodology

The article took a qualitative approach, emphasising social practice descriptions that are incredibly diligent and in-depth (Sibanda, 2015); cited in (Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020; 2021; 2023; Mothabi & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). According to the University of Edinburgh (cited in Mutandwa 2023), the information was compiled using a literature review that identifies what is known

about a particular topic and guides previous research efforts. A literature review summarises and evaluates earlier theories and studies, points out areas of disputed claims and controversy, and draws attention to any gaps in the specific research. The conceptual analysis used to evaluate the data is essential for guaranteeing that intricate ideas are precisely defined and highlighting connections between concepts or constructs within a given field. The purpose of employing conceptual analysis as a method of inquiry into a particular field of interest is to enhance the comprehension of how specific concepts are (or could be) used for communicating ideas about that field, as indicated by Furner (2004) and Nyikadzino (2020). The information was also assessed using document analysis. Document analysis is justified by the importance of documents in case study research, their role in methodological and data triangulation, and their applicability as a stand-alone technique for specialised types of qualitative research (Bowen, 2009; Jansen, 2023). When alternative sources of data are unavailable, as is often the case in historical research, when people are reluctant to talk about the subject under investigation, or in dangerous or violent situations, pre-existing documents offer access to the best source of data (Morgan, 2022; Jansen, 2023), and in the context of study is a sensitive matter of exploration, that is corruption, hence justifies the use of document analysis.

Theoretical framework

Using the Good Governance Theory (GGT) as a theoretical framework, the study analyses how corruption affects governance outcomes. Transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law are all emphasised by GGT as crucial elements of good governance (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 1997). Holding public officials responsible for their actions requires openness in decision-making procedures and information accessibility, according to GGT (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi 2010). The use of this theoretical framework is justified by the fact that good governance is defined as the efficient, transparent, and accountable administration of public affairs and resources in a way that supports the rule of law and advances the welfare of citizens. It includes the values of openness, responsibility, involvement, responsiveness, fairness, and inclusivity in how institutions and

governments make decisions (Addink, 2019). In South Africa and other nations worldwide, corruption is a widespread and enduring threat to the rule of law, good governance, and socio-economic advancement. A literature survey shows many studies examining the intricate relationships between corruption and governance systems and possible tactics for thwarting corruption and advancing good governance (Levy, 2007).

Numerous writers have offered perspectives on how corruption affects the government, services, and society. In this context, it is essential to note that Joel Migdal's theory is based on a model of the dynamic interaction between the state and society, which explains the reality of corruption and creates the model of the 'Failed State', or 'the weak state - the weak society', which is one of the patterns of the quadruple model Joel Migdal developed. Additionally, this method aids in explaining how these factors contribute to the state's and society's weaknesses and how they affect how people working in formal and informal institutions behave (Hassan, 2024). As end users of services start to doubt the effectiveness of their governmental mandate, a state is considered to have failed when citizens lose faith in its government and its representatives. Lack of trust in the public administration value system, individualised corrupt agendas for personal gain, a lack of attention to people's demands, a weakening economy, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation measures to instil ethics at the organisational, bureaucratic, political, and individual levels are all signs of a weak state. Remembering that a weak society results from a lack of community involvement is crucial, as people do not speak out against inefficient government and services. A lack of institutional safeguards, inefficient monitoring and evaluation procedures, inadequate reporting systems, and disregard for ethical and public administration standards create a situation where elected officials and bureaucrats may commit corrupt acts without consequences.

Discussion and Findings

In examining the integrity of public institutions, specific scandals reveal the erosion of public trust that often follows systemic corruption. For instance, the 2020 reports of misappropriated COVID-19 relief funds in South Africa showcased not only the

ethical failures within the government but also highlighted a broader context of accountability issues that resonate with citizens' expectations. As outlined in various analyses, the implications for public trust were profound; citizens questioned their leaders' competence and moral integrity, leading to widespread disillusionment. Like the case in Ghana, where political scandals surrounding illegal mining indicated a dangerous intertwining of state power and illicit financial agendas, South Africa's situation underscores that corruption, particularly in times of crisis, can severely diminish public confidence in government systems (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2023). Moreover, the authority's inability to robustly reform and penalise corrupt behaviour only intensifies this sentiment, suggesting a cyclical deterioration in the state's and its citizens' relationship (Donal, 2023). Such unfavourable incidents ultimately erode trust and raise persistent concerns about the government's ability to uphold its ethical standards.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, corruption has remained a notable problem in South Africa, with a particular focus on various scandals associated with pandemic relief efforts. Investigations have revealed extensive fraud and corruption in acquiring personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies. Contracts valued at approximately 2.1 billion rands (about $137 million) have been identified for irregularities, resulting in disciplinary actions against more than 224 government officials and efforts to reclaim misused funds (Prasad & Haslam, 2024)

The challenges of corruption in South Africa's public service, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore a pervasive issue that demands urgent attention. A multifaceted approach to governance reform is crucial for restoring public trust and ensuring accountability. The pandemic exposed significant vulnerabilities within state institutions, revealing how crises can amplify existing corrupt practices and foster new forms of mismanagement. As highlighted throughout this analysis, practical measures, such as enhanced transparency and community engagement, can mitigate these risks and promote ethical conduct within public administration. Furthermore, the role of civil society and proactive citizenry cannot be overstated, as collective action is a bulwark against systemic corruption (Matebese-Notshulwana, 2019).

This necessitates that stakeholders actively pursue governance transparency. Employee awareness and education regarding the organisation's ethical standards and the processes for reprimanding unethical behaviour are also crucial to enhancing good public service sector governance.

However, despite these mechanisms in place, the country is still riddled with corruption cases. The reasons could have been too much political interference in the affairs of anti-corruption organisations and processes. Political influence is a significant barrier to the application of anti-corruption policies. Politicians and those with connections to politics occasionally abuse the system to shield dishonest people, especially if they are higher in the administrative hierarchy. This may diminish the capacity of anti-corruption organisations to act against corrupt officials and jeopardise their independence (Mmakwena & Moses, 2022). The Zondo Commission provided explicit details on state capture, a form of political meddling where corporate interests significantly influence state decisions. State capture was estimated to have cost the nation up to ZAR250 billion between 2014 and 2017 and slowed GDP (gross domestic product) growth by almost 4% annually (Dhai, 2023). According to some reports, state capture under the Zuma administration severely hurt the nation's economy, virtually undoing the work done by the Mandela and Mbeki regimes to grow it. The consequences of corruption have been disastrous for everyone in the nation except for the corrupt (Dhai, 2023). According to Mokhutso, Marumo, and Motswaledi (2023), the primary causes of corruption around the country include political instability, corruption, and the absence of representative, responsible governance.

The situation is also getting challenging in the public service sector. People are experiencing corruption in the form of bribes in exchange for public services, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number and percentage of individuals who were asked to give money to a government official in exchange for a service/favour, 2019/20 and 2022/23

Government official	2019/20		2022/23	
	Number ('000)	Percentage (%)	Number ('000)	Percentage (%)
Traffic officials (e.g., Metro Police, Traffic police)	845	2,1	859	2,0
Police officials (SAPS)	560	1,4	481	1,1
Traffic centre officials (driving licence, vehicle testing)	395	1,0	444	1,0
Local municipality officials	150	0,4	164	0,4
Home Affairs officials	*	*	102	0,2
Social services officials (SASSA)	*	*	62	0,1
Health services officials	*	*	61	0,1
Court officials	*	*	54	0,1
Housing officials	*	*	42	0,1
Education officials	*	*	28	0,1
Tax or revenue officials (SARS)	*	*	*	*
Correctional services officials	*	*	*	*

Source: Statistics South Africa 2023

Table 1 shows the quantity and proportion of people who, in 2019–20 and 2022–23, were asked to pay or give gifts to a government official in return for the services they required. The most significant percentage of officials who requested bribes from people in 2019–20 and 2022–2023 were traffic officials, followed by police officials and traffic centre officials (Statistics South Africa 2023). As a result, there is a loss of trust in people towards their government and mandate, see Figure 3.

Figure 3: Trust in various institutions | South Africa | 2021
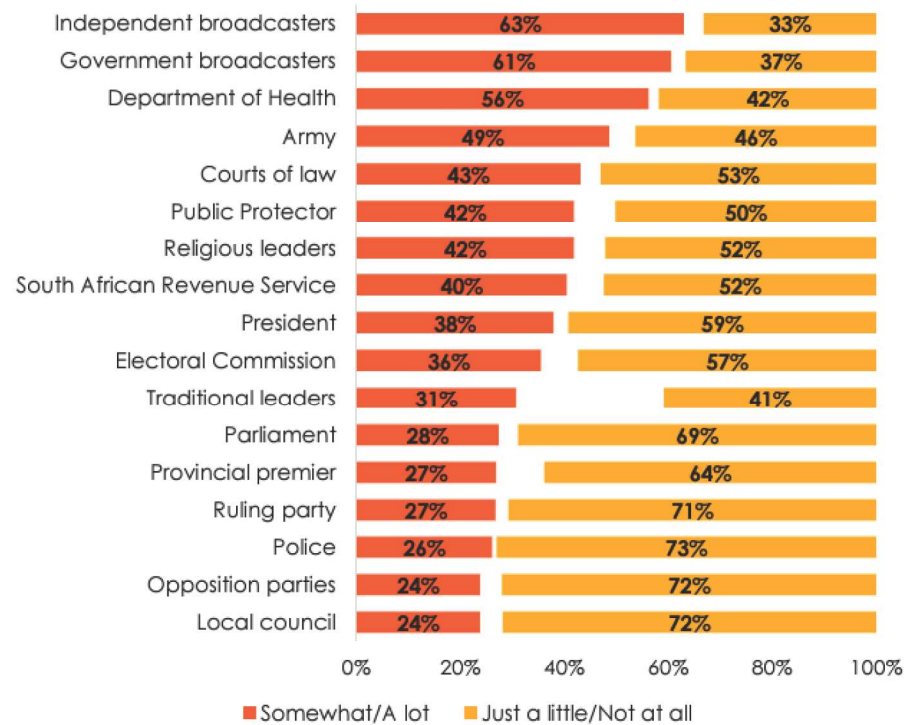
Source: Afrobarometer 2021

There are at least three reasons why the public trust levels shown here might be concerning. The Department of Health (56%), government broadcasters (61%), and independent broadcasters (63%), which have been in the news since the first Covid-19 case was discovered in March 2020, were the only three of the 17 organisations that Afrobarometer questioned that were able to inspire at least "some" trust in over half of South Africans (Afrobarometer, 2021). A decline in public trust indicates a weak society and a failed state.

The information gathered from secondary sources revealed issues that continue to limit the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives in the South African public service. The Public Service Commission (PSC) regularly released research studies on specific concerns, including financial misconduct. The review shows that the four themes generally hampered by political interference are reporting/disclosure, functional capability, regulatory challenges about employment and codes of behaviour, and problems with anti-

corruption oversight and enforcement (Jackson et al., 2009). The ruling party's political meddling, which was driven by selfish interests, has exacerbated the corrupt interactions between public servants and outside parties (Ngcamula & Mantzaris, 2023). Following President Zuma's ascent to office, the Scorpions were disbanded, which sparked a discussion and drawn-out legal battles that reached the Constitutional Court and demanded the creation of an 'independent anti-corruption agency' like the Scorpions, which is the Hawks. In South Africa, as exhibited by the National Development Plan (NPC, 2011), the belief is that a multiple-agency system is more effective at combating corruption because it does not face interference from existing checks and balances. This is because multiple agencies are not subject to the same political capture and loss of independence that a single agency would face. However, criticism has been that the Plan avoided engaging in conversation or participation with civil society, significant stakeholders, and important players while crafting the policy document (Pillay, 2017).

Despite significant laws progressively reinforcing adherence over the past ten years, even local governments in South Africa routinely fail to fulfil mandated policy criteria in finance and supply chain management (Pillay, 2017). According to Alexander et al. (2022), analysis of the causes of non-compliance demonstrates that it can happen for personal benefit, ascendancy, or as a type of corruption. However, it can also occur because of other professional interests or moral commitments not covered by the established standards, the observance of 'uncodified rules', political involvement, or because many local governments lack the necessary skills, competence, and resources.

There could be other reasons, such as weak governance, poor leadership, lack of oversight, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation procedures, to name a few. Future publications may explore these aspects individually in detail. The article suggests that the government can play a significant role in counteracting these harmful elements. This suggestion is rationalised by the fact that corruption compromises the state's capacity to achieve its development goals (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). Therefore, a people's contract must include efficient regulatory frameworks and procedures for developing reliable National Integrity Systems. A

continual exercise of equilibrium between personal interests and the requirements of the public is required of public servants in their work environments. Governmental representatives are regarded as stewards of the nation's assets and keepers of confidence that the populace has entrusted them (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013). These arbitrary powers, which are subject to abuse, frequently hurt governance. Considering this, it is essential to comprehend the role that ethics plays in the execution of governmental duties. Ethics is a crucial check and balance to avoid the capricious application of governmental authority (Manyaka & Sebola, 2013).

South Africa is rapidly realising that corruption constitutes one of the primary obstacles to effective advancement (Pillay, 2004). The development of one of the most cutting-edge and sophisticated legislative frameworks for combating corruption in the national, regional, and municipal sectors of the administration, as well as the initiation and implementation of several programmes, have all served to validate the new democratic government's vow to the fight against corruption (Kroukamp, 2006).

The South African government must use technologies to reduce the amount of financial misconduct that occurs in the country. According to Silal et al. (2023), electronic (e)-governance has already taken centre stage in other nations' modernising agendas as national governments strive to use its transformative potential to re-engineer their operations and so expand the range of public offerings for citizens (Silal et al., 2023). By enhancing human capital, making information and communication technology (ICT) available to the public, and strengthening the public-government relationship through digital or online means of providing public services, the entire development of e-governance in a nation aims to empower citizens. When there is a clear and open communication channel involving the people and the government, disintermediation inevitably reduces the discretion formerly accessible to intermediary public officials (Silal et al., 2023). ICTS/ e-governance can be significant in exploring the reduction of corruption, highlighting the need to conduct future studies expanding this area.

Conclusion

South Africa has implemented various legislative frameworks to deal with corruption and misconduct. The Prevention of Organised Crime Act, 1998; the Protected Disclosure Act, 2000; the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004; and the Public Audit Act, 2004 and 2018 are significant. In addition to these frameworks, various anti-corruption strategies exist, such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020-2023, the National Development Plan 2023, and a Special Investigation Unit established to fight corruption.

Nevertheless, the literature review also demonstrates that current anticorruption laws and initiatives are notably ineffective, and institutional attention solely serves the interests of the wealthy while ignoring the needs of ordinary citizens (Ncala, 2024). Public knowledge of South Africa's anti-corruption legislation is also conspicuously lacking. There is doubt about how well South African law enforcement agencies can combat corruption (Ncala, 2024; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024). Nonetheless, it is believed that state-level actions are taken to guarantee that the nation has laws, policies, and plans in place to combat corruption and improve good governance. Good governance fosters an atmosphere of openness, responsibility, and morality. Vyas-Doorgapersad and Aktan (2017) suggested the following model, which shows various components of good governance, in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Components of good governance

Source: Vyas-Doorgapersad and Aktan (2017)

The study's theoretical framework is based on the value of good governance, which is supported by Figure 1. The study's most important facets are e-government, ethics, society, and participation. Figure 3 demonstrates how important ethics are in fostering a culture of sound governance. As suggested in this article, all public and private sector organisations should implement organisational ethics management (OEM). This suggestion is substantiated by the views of Satyendra (2014), emphasising that by giving management the knowledge and resources they need to properly recognise, analyse, and suggest solutions to ethical problems and quandaries, OEM can help to improve ethical decision-making (Satyendra, 2014; Maile, 2023). Another two significant aspects are society and participation. Strengthening resourcing and coordination of performance and accountability, whistleblowing, encouraging and promoting active citizenship, integrity, and transparency, improving governance in institutions, and advancing employee professionalisation are the six pillars of the South African government's National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020–2023 (Corruption Watch, 2018). The National Anti-Corruption Strategy aims to establish a country where improved administrative and procurement procedures enhance transparency, accessibility, dependability, and monitoring. The entire administration, private, and civil society actors are encouraged to participate by the 'whole of government and whole of society' approach (Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2022; Dhlamini, 2024). The last important aspect is e-government. A study done by Ibrahimy, Virkus and Norta (2023) shows that through the use of social media, online complaint forms, emails, and a toll-free number, e-government disperses and decentralises authority among public employees, lowers corruption, and fosters accountability and transparency (Ibrahimy et al., 2023) in a country-specific context. However, a study conducted in South Africa by Habtemichael (2009) states that even though it is currently necessary to integrate ICTs into anti-corruption initiatives, the quantity and quality of South African public departments fall short of expectations.

Regarding tracking capabilities, some ICTs (like PERSAL) are outdated, and the more recent ones that are available are not adequately integrated as needed. The distribution of ICTs and

qualified personnel to manage and link financial and human resources transactions and keep an eye on the supply chain is still lacking (Habtemichael, 2009). The situation has not improved, and ICT challenges still exist in the country. Nkgapele (2024) highlighted a need to call for the government to increase ICT spending so that South Africa has enough staff to address issues like inadequate internet connectivity in rural areas. However, Jacket-Salie (2020, in Nkgapele 2024) noted that one of South Africa's main challenges was the lack of skilled ICT graduates. On the other hand, Thusi and Chauke (2023, in Nkgapele 2024) noted that the South African government is currently battling high turnover, particularly in the ICT sectors, with limited qualifications. This further demonstrates the need for the South African government to hire and retain ICT professionals in the country, as the success of electronic government hinges on their ability to help remove obstacles in rural areas and protect citizens' private information.

Based on the discussions and findings, it is suggested that organisational ethics must be instilled in the public service sector to guarantee the successful implementation of these legislative measures. Regular training sessions on organisational values, the code of conduct, and disciplinary measures can be held to educate new and senior employees. This arrangement might help workers be ready to take responsibility for their actions should they engage in unethical behaviour. Nonetheless, this knowledge could also help workers act righteously, morally, and ethically in the workplace. Since personal greed is an individual quality, unethical behaviour can only be justified in cases where one has self-realised their values.

Strict regulations and legal frameworks about public administration ethics must be put in place by the government. If misconduct is observed and reported, departments must have appropriate reporting procedures. Prompt action is required to prevent corrupt behaviour and actions from spreading.

The article contributes towards the discipline of public governance. Since the topic is sensitive, conducting interviews was considered impossible. Future studies will explore corruption at local government levels and may select a few municipalities to assess the extent and causes of corruption. This will also be done through a qualitative desktop analysis of secondary information. Future

articles may form part of comparative studies in the domain of public governance.

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