Methodology and Political Science Research Databases: A Critical Postcolonial Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The dominant datasets, such as Polity V, Freedom House, Afrobarometer, and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), among others, are predominantly produced in the Global North, reflecting epistemological priorities and methodological frameworks rooted in colonial or neo-colonial legacies. These datasets often marginalize local contexts and knowledge systems, perpetuating unequal power dynamics and epistemic dependency. The methodology used in this study incorporates document analyses and critical assessment of on-line based databases to explore the use and impact of political science research data in Southern Africa. A critical postcolonial lens reveals deeper concerns regarding the epistemic foundations and contextual applicability of these databases. The reliance on databases like Polity V, Freedom House, and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) reflects the dominance of knowledge systems rooted in the Global North. These databases often dominate curricula and research agendas, side-lining indigenous methodologies and epistemologies that could provide more contextually relevant insights. Institutions and researchers primarily lead the production of these datasets in the Global North, and may also perpetuate unequal power dynamics and epistemic dependency. A postcolonial critique of Western-driven methodologies highlights the need for decolonial approaches in political science research. Decolonial methodologies emphasize the co-creation of knowledge with local communities, the use of indigenous epistemologies, and the prioritization of context-specific research questions.

Keywords: Global North, Polity V, Freedom House, Afrobarometer, V-Dem, Epistemic Dependency

INTRODUCTION

This article critically examines the impact of the production and use of political science research data in teaching political science in Southern Africa. By adopting a post-colonial lens, it interrogates the origins, contexts, and implications of the dominant datasets used in political science research, with particular emphasis on their relevance to the Southern African context. Many political science datasets, which span over a century and covering nearly all 195 countries globally, have been produced predominantly in the Global North. These datasets reflect epistemological priorities and methodological frameworks rooted in colonial or neo-colonial legacies, often marginalizing local contexts and knowledge systems (Mamdani, 1996; Zeleza, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). While survey data, as noted by Le Roy (2013), can provide valuable insights, their production

and application may perpetuate unequal power dynamics and epistemic dependency (Chilisa, 2012; Mbembe, 2015).

This article begins by providing some definitions of the keys concepts and proceeds to outline the methodology used to gather data. Following this, the paper presents a critical review of some of the prominent political science databases, such as Polity V, Freedom House, V-Dem, IIAG and Afrobarometer, interrogating their accessibility and relevance to scholars in the region. The article then examines how these databases are employed in teaching political science across universities in Southern Africa, focusing on the intersection of knowledge production and power. It also explores the socio-economic and infrastructural barriers that hinder students' access to and utilization of these datasets, identifying these challenges as remnants of colonial underdevelopment (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

In addition, the article assesses the broader contributions of political science databases to the discipline in the region, critically examining their implications for fostering or hindering local knowledge systems. It evaluates the infrastructural and institutional capacities of Southern African universities to effectively leverage these databases, noting the disparities in resources and expertise that exist (Zeleza, 2006; Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2018). The concluding sections provide recommendations for decolonizing political science education and research practices in Southern Africa, emphasizing the need for local capacity-building, infrastructural investment, and the promotion of alternative, pluralistic methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Mbembe, 2015).

Key Concept Definitions

To build a clear conceptual foundation, we begin by defining essential terms that recur throughout this article:

Epistemic dependency describes how scholars and institutions in the Global South frequently rely on Western-centric theories, validation systems, and academic frameworks. This reliance reinforces hierarchical knowledge structures that undermine local intellectual autonomy and suppress indigenous epistemologies.

Decoloniality is both a theoretical stance and emancipatory practice centered on delinking from Eurocentric epistemic orders and relinking with marginalized, especially indigenous African, knowledge systems. It seeks to dismantle colonial knowledge structures and cultivate pluriversal epistemologies.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative, action-oriented approach in which community members act as co-researchers, co-designing, implementing, and interpreting research to address locally significant issues. PAR challenges extractive methodologies by centering community agency and lived expertise.

Epistemic injustice occurs when individuals or groups are wronged in their capacity as knowers, through testimonial injustice (their credibility is unfairly deflated) or hermeneutical injustice (their experiences are misunderstood due to interpretive gaps). This concept highlights systemic knowledge inequities.

Cognitive justice demands recognition and equitable coexistence of multiple knowledge systems, particularly indigenous methodologies, alongside dominant Western paradigms. It emphasizes harmonious dialogue and knowledge pluralism.

Methodology and Political Science Research Databases: A Critical Postcolonial Perspective

The methodology used in this study incorporated document analyses and critical assessment of the numerous on-line political science research databases so as to explore the use and impact of political science research data in Southern Africa (see Table 1 below). While these methods provide valuable insights, a critical postcolonial lens reveals deeper concerns regarding the epistemic foundations and contextual applicability of the databases that underpin political science research and teaching in the region.

Methodological Limitations in a Postcolonial Context

The reliance on databases such as Polity V, Freedom House, and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) reflects the dominance of knowledge systems rooted in the Global North. These databases, while comprehensive and influential, are often shaped by Western epistemological frameworks and positivist methodologies that may not fully capture the socio-political nuances of Southern Africa. Postcolonial scholars argue that such frameworks can perpetuate epistemic dependency, reinforcing hierarchies in global knowledge production (Grosfoguel, 2007; Chilisa, 2012).

For example, the metrics and criteria used by Freedom House to measure democracy and political rights have been critiqued for their Eurocentric bias, which may inadequately address the historical and cultural contexts of African societies (Zeleza, 2005). Similarly, datasets like Polity V and the Vanhanen Index of Democracy prioritize quantitative indicators of governance and democracy, often neglecting qualitative aspects such as indigenous governance systems and the lived experiences of local populations. These methodological choices risk reducing complex political realities into abstract numerical representations, which may be misinterpreted or misapplied in Southern African contexts.

Table 1: Political science research databases and their funding sources

Database	Description
Polity V: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2018, 195 countries (funded by Center for Systemic Peace, US government)	Polity V contains coded annual information on regime and authority characteristics for all major independent states (with greater than 500,000 total population) in the global state system.
Freedom House, 1973 to date, 195 countries (funded by U.S. State Department and other government grants, various semi-public and private foundations, and individual contributions)	Freedom House measures the degree of civil liberties and political rights in every nation and significant related and disputed territories around the world.
Adam Przeworski *et al.* (funding from various sources)	Adam Przeworski *et al.* present a classification of political regimes as democracies and dictatorships for a set of 141 countries between 1950 or the year of independence and 1990.
Tatu Vanhanen Index of Democratization (funding from various sources)	The Polyarchy dataset compiled by Tatu Vanhanen covers 187 countries over the period 1810 to 2000.
José Antonio Cheibub, Type of Regime – Presidentalism, Parliamentarism, Democracy - 1945-2002 (funding from various sources)	José Antonio Cheibub categorizes democracy as: (a) presidential democracies; (b) parliamentary democracies. Cheibub argues that democracies born from military dictatorships are more prone to lapse into dictatorship, whether they are presidential or parliamentary.
Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index 167 countries since 2006 (funded by the EIU)	The EIU Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories. The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation, and; political culture.
Ibrahim Index of Africa Governance (IIAG) 54 countries from 2007 [funded by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (MIF)]	The IIAG provides data measuring the governance performance for all 54 African countries from 2008- to date covering the following dimensions: Safety and Rule of Law; Participation and Human Rights; Sustainable Economic Opportunity, and; Human Development.

Afrobarometer – (37 countries in Africa) 10 surveys from 1999 (funded by European Commission, GIZ, IDRC, MIF, Kingdom of the Netherlands and other foundations)	Afrobarometer is a non-partisan, Pan-African research institution conducting public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy and society in 30+ countries repeated on a regular cycle.
Global Integrity (GI) 54 countries since 2013 (funded through philanthropic contributions)	GI provides empirically supported information that analyses corruption and governance trends. It also produces the Global Integrity Report that analyses the institutional framework underpinning countries' corruption and accountability systems (ranging from electoral practices and media freedom to budget transparency and conflict-of-interest regulations).
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) covering 202 countries from 1900 (funded by University of Gothenburg, Swedish Research Council, European Research Council and other foundations)	V-Dem Institute provides a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of rule that goes beyond the simple presence of elections. The V-Dem project distinguishes between five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian, and collects data to measure these principles
Quality of Government (QoG) from 1946 (funded by University of Gothenburg, Swedish Research Council, European Commission and other foundations)	The QoG Institute has 30 researchers who conduct and promote research on the causes, consequences and nature of Good Governance and the Quality of Government (QoG) - that is, trustworthy, reliable, impartial, uncorrupted and competent government institutions.
Transparency International (TI) since 1993 in over 100 countries (funded by TI)	TI aims to take action in order to combat global corruption with civil societal anti-corruption measures and to prevent criminal activities arising from corruption. Its most notable research outputs covering over 100 countries include the Global Corruption Barometer and the Corruption Perceptions Index.
Worldwide Governance (WGI) Indicators – 200 countries from 1996 (funded by the World Bank)	WGI project reports aggregate individual governance indicators for over 200 countries and territories on six dimensions of governance: Voice and Accountability; Political Stability and Absence of Violence; Government Effectiveness; Regulatory Quality; Rule of Law, and; Control of Corruption.

Source: Adopted and adapted from Mate (2024)

Knowledge Production and Power Dynamics

The prominence of Global North-produced datasets in Southern African political science education reflects a broader postcolonial challenge: the marginalization of local knowledge systems and research traditions. These databases often dominate curricula and research agendas, sidelining indigenous methodologies and epistemologies that could provide more contextually relevant insights (Mbembe, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). For instance, while Afrobarometer incorporates local knowledge and expertise in its survey design and implementation, its adoption of standardized survey methodologies still reflects broader global norms that may not fully align with the diversity of political cultures in Africa.

The integration of these databases into teaching and research practices in Southern Africa raises questions about the autonomy of local academic institutions. Dependence on externally produced datasets can constrain the ability of Southern African scholars to define their research priorities and methodologies, perpetuating what Mamdani (1996) describes as the "coloniality of knowledge." This dynamic not only limits intellectual

sovereignty but also reduces the potential for political science in Southern Africa to contribute effectively to global debates on democracy, governance, and development from a distinctively African perspective.

Toward Decolonial Methodologies

A postcolonial critique of the methodology highlights the need for decolonial approaches in political science research. Decolonial methodologies emphasize the co-creation of knowledge with local communities, the use of indigenous epistemologies, and the prioritization of context-specific research questions (Chilisa, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). For instance, the development of Southern African-specific datasets that integrate qualitative and participatory research methods could provide richer and more nuanced understandings of political phenomena in the region.

Furthermore, training programs for Southern African political scientists should focus not only on technical skills for data analysis but also on critical engagement with the assumptions and biases embedded in existing datasets. By fostering a pluralistic and context-sensitive approach to research, Southern African scholars can challenge the dominance of Global North frameworks and contribute to the decolonization of political science as a discipline.

The description of prominent political science research databases, including the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), Afrobarometer, Global Integrity (GI), V-Dem, and the Quality of Government (QoG), underscores their impressive breadth and methodological rigor. However, a postcolonial perspective invites a critical interrogation of the assumptions underlying these databases, their production processes, and their applicability to the Southern African context.

Epistemological Foundations and Colonial Continuities

A common thread among these databases is their conceptualization and operationalization of political phenomena, democracy, governance, corruption, and rule of law, using frameworks largely developed in the Global North. These frameworks often reflect Eurocentric epistemological priorities, which may not adequately account for the historical, cultural, and socio-political realities of Southern Africa.

For example, the EIU Democracy Index emphasizes electoral processes, political participation, and civil liberties, drawing from liberal democratic traditions. While these indicators are valuable, they risk marginalizing alternative governance systems rooted in African traditions, such as consensus-based decision-making or communal resource management. Similarly, the IIAG's focus on governance through standardized metrics, despite its regional specificity, can inadvertently privilege neoliberal developmental paradigms over indigenous knowledge systems and practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Chilisa, 2012).

The dominance of quantitative indicators in these databases further reflects a positivist bias that can obscure the qualitative dimensions of governance and democracy. The subjective assessments incorporated in V-Dem, for instance, highlight an attempt to address these gaps. However, V-Dem's reliance on expert ratings, often drawn from academic and policy circles, raises questions about whose voices are amplified and whose are excluded (Coppedge et al., 2020).

Data Production and Power Dynamics

The production of these datasets is primarily led by institutions, researchers and funders in the Global North, such as the University of Gothenburg for V-Dem and the EIU in London (see Table 1). This centralization of knowledge production perpetuates global power imbalances, wherein Southern African scholars often serve as data providers rather than agenda-setters. Afrobarometer stands out as a Pan-African initiative that seeks to reverse this dynamic, yet even it operates within broader structures of international funding and scholarly validation that may constrain its autonomy.

These dynamics contribute to what Mamdani (1996) describes as "academic dependency," whereby Southern African universities rely on externally produced datasets that reflect external priorities. This dependency not only limits the region's capacity to define its research questions but also reinforces a form of "data colonialism," where the region's political realities are mined for data to advance the interests of institutions in the Global North (Mbembe, 2015).

Implications for Teaching and Research

The widespread use of these databases in teaching political science in Southern Africa reinforces the dominance of Global North frameworks within the curriculum. While these tools provide valuable empirical resources, their integration into teaching practices often comes at the expense of local epistemologies and methodologies. This dynamic risks alienating students from their own histories and governance traditions, perpetuating what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) terms the "colonization of the mind."

Moreover, the socio-economic and infrastructural barriers that characterize many Southern African universities exacerbate these challenges. Access to these databases often requires significant financial resources, stable internet connections, and specialized analytical skills, which are unevenly distributed across the region. As a result, the promise of these datasets to democratize knowledge production remains unfulfilled.

Toward Decolonized Data Practices

A decolonized approach to political science research and teaching in Southern Africa would involve reclaiming epistemic agency by developing locally grounded databases that prioritize the region's unique political, social, and historical contexts. This could include participatory research methodologies that engage local communities in data collection and interpretation, as well as efforts to incorporate oral histories and indigenous knowledge systems into formal datasets.

Additionally, fostering regional collaborations among Southern African universities and research institutions could help build the technical and institutional capacity needed to produce and manage such databases. Initiatives like Afrobarometer, from its founding in 1999, offer a model for how Pan-African cooperation can challenge global knowledge hierarchies while remaining attentive to local realities. As an African-led, cross-national survey of public opinion in 20 sub-Saharan countries – Afrobarometer takes democratic governance as its main subject matter and consistently tried to discover what ordinary Africans think about the way they are governed using survey data. The data generated has been used explain the evolution and performance of Africa's democratic and governance institutions. Because the project is based in Africa and directed by Africans, the Afrobarometer surveys may even contribute to "rule by the people" since they convey public opinion to policy actors, thus creating the potential to express a collective voice in the policy process for the African man in the street and the woman in the fields (Afrobarometer, 2010).

Another reliable Pan-African dataset, in terms of policy implications similar to Afrobarometer, is the IIAG, which provides a biannual statistical assessment of governance performance in 54 African countries from 2007. Data from diverse sources are combined into composite governance scores – an Overall Governance score, categories, sub-categories, clustered indicators, as well as clustered sub-indicators. Refinements may be methodological, or based on the inclusion or exclusion of indicators. When new historical data are made available, or the structure of the IIAG is strengthened, and, the entire dataset is updated for the whole time series (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024).

Postcolonial Critique: Transparency International (TI) and the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)

Transparency International (TI) and the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) are widely regarded as authoritative sources on corruption and governance. However, their methodologies, epistemological assumptions, and global influence must be scrutinized from a postcolonial perspective to understand their implications for Southern African political science research and governance.

Eurocentrism and Conceptual Frameworks

TI's mission to combat corruption and the WGI's governance indicators rest on a universalist understanding of corruption and governance that may not align with the socio-political realities of postcolonial societies. Both frameworks define corruption and governance through lenses that emphasize legal-institutional and procedural norms, rooted in liberal democratic ideals. This approach risks obscuring culturally specific practices and governance traditions in Southern Africa, such as informal networks of accountability or community-based decision-making structures.

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), TI's flagship publication, heavily relies on perceptions rather than objective measures of corruption. This reliance introduces significant subjectivity and reflects the perspectives of elites, businesses, and experts, often from the Global North. These perspectives may perpetuate stereotypes of African countries as inherently corrupt, ignoring the historical legacies of colonialism and the structural inequities imposed by global economic systems that contribute to governance challenges (Mbembe, 2015; Grosfoguel, 2007).

Similarly, the WGI's six dimensions of governance, while comprehensive, derive their validity from aggregate data drawn from diverse sources that often prioritize Global North epistemologies. For example, concepts such as "regulatory quality" and "government effectiveness" presuppose a normative state structure that aligns with Western models, sidelining alternative governance paradigms rooted in African contexts.

Production and Ownership of Data

Both TI and the WGI are products of institutions based in the Global North, specifically Berlin (TI) and Washington, D.C. (WGI). The location of these institutions reflects a broader power imbalance in global knowledge production, where Southern African voices and perspectives are underrepresented. This dynamic perpetuates a form of "epistemic dependency" on external frameworks and metrics that often fail to capture the complexities of governance and corruption in postcolonial contexts (Chilisa, 2012).

In the case of TI, the focus on civil society advocacy and public accountability may seem empowering. However, the emphasis on "naming and shaming" through metrics like the CPI risks alienating governments and stakeholders in Southern Africa, who may view such measures as externally imposed judgments rather than collaborative tools for reform.

The WGI, by aggregating data from over 30 sources, presents itself as an objective, global standard. Yet, this aggregation process masks the disparities in data collection capacities and resources between industrialized and developing countries, further entrenching global inequalities. For Southern Africa, this means that data about governance often reflects externally defined priorities and methodologies rather than local needs and insights.

Impact on Governance and Policy in Southern Africa

The widespread adoption of TI and WGI metrics in policy and academia has profound implications for governance in Southern Africa. International donors and financial institutions frequently tie aid and investments to performance on these indices, pressuring governments to prioritize reforms that improve their rankings rather than address local governance challenges.

For instance, efforts to reduce corruption as defined by the CPI may lead to the adoption of Western-style anti-corruption agencies or legal frameworks that fail to address the systemic roots of corruption tied to historical inequities and neoliberal policies. Similarly, Southern African governments may focus on improving WGI scores in areas like regulatory quality and rule of law to attract foreign investment, potentially sidelining more contextually relevant priorities such as inclusive economic development or traditional governance systems.

Toward Decolonized Metrics

To decolonize governance metrics, in addition to Afrobarometer and IIAG, Southern African scholars and policymakers must advocate for alternative approaches that prioritize local realities and epistemologies. To transition from critique to praxis, we propose the establishment of Pan-African Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) repositories, co-governed by national universities, community-based organizations, and language boards. These repositories should integrate governance structures with community representation on advisory councils, metadata frameworks rooted in local epistemologies, and distributed curation responsibilities to ensure ongoing stewardship (SADiLaR-Wikipedia-PanSALB SWiP Project). A notable exemplar of this model is the SWiP Project in South Africa, which brought together the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources, Wikimedia ZA, and PanSALB to train 483 participants across six regions in two-day 'train-the-trainer' workshops. Within a year, isiNdebele moved from the Wikipedia Incubator to the main platform: participants created 638 new articles, made over 2,730 edits, added nearly 291,000 words, uploaded 1,830 references and 122 photos, and collectively generated more than 22.9 million views, shifting linguistic knowledge authority toward indigenous speakers.

To sustain this infrastructure, modular capacity-building workshops are essential. Co-designed and delivered by academic researchers, IT specialists, and language activists, these workshops should cover orthography, digital editing, citation norms, metadata design, and repository administration, effectively embedding technical sovereignty within communities (SWiP technical training model).

We align this model with the African Data Ethics framework (Barrett et al., 2025), which articulates principles such as data self-determination, investment in local institutions and infrastructure, and centering marginalized communities in data governance. By integrating community-governed repositories with ethical oversight and sustainable resource models, this approach fosters epistemic self-determination across educational, linguistic, and cultural domains in Africa

Use of Databases in Teaching

Political science research databases provide opportunities for more interactive and evidence-based teaching of courses such as research methods, democracy, and governance. However, through a postcolonial lens, their adoption raises concerns about the persistence of epistemic dominance by the Global North, where most of these databases originate. Scholars such as Achille Mbembe (2001) and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argue that the legacies of colonialism have deeply influenced knowledge production systems, creating a hierarchy in which African epistemologies are often sidelined in favor of Western frameworks. This is evident in the metrics and methodologies of prominent databases such as V-Dem, IIAG, and Polity, which are rooted in liberal democratic paradigms that may inadequately capture the socio-political realities of postcolonial Southern Africa.

Although Afrobarometer incorporates local experts to contextualize its data, as noted by Mate (2024), its broader framing is still influenced by external funding priorities and conceptual frameworks. This aligns with critiques by Zeleza (2005), who argues that African scholarship is frequently shaped by global research agendas rather than local needs. To mitigate this, Southern African universities must prioritize creating and integrating locally developed datasets that reflect indigenous governance models and political experiences.

Use of Databases by Students

From a postcolonial perspective, the challenges faced by students in accessing and utilizing databases are indicative of structural inequalities tied to colonial histories. Limited internet access, outdated computer facilities, and a lack of statistical training reflect the underdevelopment of African higher education systems, a legacy of extractive colonial policies (Mkandawire, 2011). For example, Afrobarometer is widely used in research but remains inaccessible to many students due to insufficient infrastructure and training at universities.

This dependency on externally funded databases raises concerns about epistemic dependency. Scholars such as Grosfoguel (2007) argue that the Global South must transition from being mere consumers of Northern-produced knowledge to producers of locally relevant, decolonized knowledge. To achieve this, institutions need not only technical resources but also a pedagogical shift that incorporates critical reflections on the origins, assumptions, and applicability of datasets. This aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) call for the decolonization of the African mind, emphasizing the need to center African epistemologies in education.

Impact of Databases

Political science databases have made it easier to conduct comparative and longitudinal analyses of political phenomena, but their methodologies often embed assumptions that align with Global North perspectives. For instance, democracy indicators like those in the Polity or V-Dem databases prioritize liberal democratic values over other governance systems, sidelining indigenous practices and hybrid political systems found in Africa. Scholars such as Zeleza (2003) and Bjørnskov and Rode (2020) caution against applying universal metrics without accounting for local contexts, as these can distort the understanding of African political realities.

Nevertheless, Afrobarometer, which involves local experts in data collection, offers a model for incorporating contextual knowledge. However, to fully decolonize political science databases, African researchers must be involved not only in data collection but also in setting research agendas and developing methodologies that reflect regional priorities and values. This resonates with Mbembe's (2015) call for African scholarship to challenge epistemic hierarchies and reclaim intellectual sovereignty.

Availability of Infrastructure, Resources, and Capacity

The infrastructural deficits in Southern African universities reflect the broader economic and structural inequalities that persist in postcolonial states. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) notes, the historical underdevelopment of African education systems was a deliberate colonial strategy to limit African self-determination. Today, these legacies are evident in the inadequate capacity of many universities to support the effective use of databases, from insufficient computer laboratories to poor internet connectivity.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Regional bodies such as the African Union, Southern African Development Community (SADC), Organization of Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), and the African Association of Political Science (AAPS) must prioritize investment in higher education, while international research organizations must shift from extractive partnerships to equitable collaborations that empower local institutions. Programs such as those by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) offer examples of capacity-building initiatives that align with decolonial goals. These programs emphasize not only skill development but also the importance of producing locally grounded knowledge (Mkandawire, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Despite the proliferation of political science databases, including those produced by Polity V, Freedom House, and Afrobarometer, their utility in Southern Africa remains constrained by systemic challenges. A persistent lack of local capacity, resources, and contextual alignment with Southern African realities has limited the effective use of these tools (Zeleza, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These datasets, predominantly developed in and for contexts of the Global North, often reinforce epistemic marginalization by failing to adequately represent the unique historical and socio-political dynamics of African nations (Mamdani, 1996; Mbembe, 2015). While Afrobarometer and IIAG have been relatively well-utilized due to their integration of local knowledge, the limited use of other databases among scholars and students highlights the enduring inequities in access to and production of knowledge.

The dominance of quantitative datasets shaped by positivist traditions underscores a broader challenge. Such methodologies often marginalize qualitative and indigenous approaches, which could offer richer, more

contextually relevant insights into the political phenomena of Southern Africa (Grosfoguel, 2007; Chilisa, 2012). Reliance on externally developed datasets perpetuates a dependency on knowledge frameworks that frequently misalign with the lived experiences and historical trajectories of African societies (Zeleza, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

This article underscores that decolonizing political science research and education in Southern Africa demands deliberate, multifaceted efforts. Governments and universities must prioritize funding for capacity-building in research, infrastructure improvement, and the development of locally relevant datasets (Mkandawire, 2005). Such initiatives would enable the region to create knowledge systems that address its unique challenges and aspirations. Furthermore, international and regional political science associations should reimagine their roles by moving beyond training in dominant methodologies to fostering pluralistic and context-sensitive approaches to knowledge production (Gyimah-Boadi et al., 2018).

Collaborative efforts must focus on empowering Southern African scholars to challenge and redefine global political science paradigms. Programs offered by Afrobarometer, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, OSSREA, and CODESRIA offer a useful starting point by emphasizing technical skills alongside the incorporation of decolonial methodologies (Mkandawire, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). By investing in the intellectual autonomy of Southern African political scientists, the region can contribute to a more equitable global knowledge economy, ensuring that political science research reflects the diversity and richness of human political experiences (Mbembe, 2015).

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