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ECONOMICS
AND
MANAGEMENT

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A MECHANISM FOR OPTIMIZING LOGISTICS COSTS IN THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OF A DAIRY INDUSTRY ENTERPRISE

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Abstract
Purpose. The purpose of this study is to develop and substantiate a mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and distribution system of dairy industry enterprises, taking into account sector-specific characteristics and the asymmetric impact of key external and internal factors.
Design/methodology/approach. The study is based on a systemic and process-oriented approach integrating diagnostic, analytical, managerial, and control-evaluation blocks. Logistics costs are classified according to functional, factor, and behavioral criteria. To quantify the influence of key determinants, autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) and nonlinear ARDL (NARDL) models are applied, enabling the assessment of short-term and long-term relationships as well as asymmetric effects of fuel prices, electricity tariffs, and production volumes on logistics costs.
Findings. The results reveal a stable long-term relationship between logistics costs and the selected factors. Logistics costs in the dairy industry demonstrate significant inertia and asymmetric sensitivity to changes in energy and fuel prices, with cost increases responding more strongly than cost reductions. The findings confirm that the highest optimization effect is achieved through targeted management of endogenous factors, particularly transport routing, energy efficiency of storage and production processes, and reduction of losses along the supply chain.
Originality. The originality of the study lies in integrating a structured logistics cost classification with ARDL/NARDL-based econometric analysis into a comprehensive optimization mechanism tailored to the dairy industry, providing both theoretical contribution and practical applicability.
Keywords: logistics costs; dairy industry; supply chain management; ARDL/NARDL; cost optimization.

Introduction

The dairy industry is one of the basic branches of the agro-industrial complex, ensuring the country's food security and sustainable socio-economic development of the regions. The efficiency of the dairy industry is largely determined by the level of logistical costs incurred at all stages of the production and distribution system – from the procurement and transportation of raw milk to the storage, processing and distribution of finished products.

The industry-specific nature of the dairy industry is due to the perishable nature of products, the need for strict compliance with temperature conditions, the high energy intensity of production processes and the territorial dispersion of the raw material base. Under these conditions, logistics is becoming strategically important, and logistics costs are becoming one of the key factors in shaping the cost and competitiveness of dairy products.

In recent years, dairy industry enterprises have faced increasing external challenges related to rising fuel and electricity prices, increased transportation costs, and increased requirements for the quality and safety of food products. These factors increase the burden on the production and distribution systems of enterprises and necessitate the search for new approaches to management and optimization of logistics costs.

Despite the availability of scientific research in the field of logistics and supply chain management, most of them are focused on universal models and do not fully take into account the industry specifics of the dairy industry. In practice, logistics cost management is often fragmented and does not cover the entire set of logistics processes within the enterprise's production and sales system.

In this regard, the development of an integrated mechanism for optimizing logistical costs based on a systematic approach and the integration of diagnostic, analytical and management units is of particular relevance. Such a mechanism makes it possible to ensure consistency of management decisions, increase transparency in the formation of logistics costs and identify reserves for their reduction at all stages of the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise.

The purpose of the article is to develop and substantiate a mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and distribution system of a dairy industry enterprise based on the classification of logistics costs and the use of ARDL/NARDL models that take into account short-term, long-term and asymmetric effects of factors.

Literature review

In modern logistics theory, logistics costs are interpreted as the total costs incurred in managing material, information, and financial flows in the supply chain, including transportation, warehousing, inventory management, order processing, and participant coordination (Christopher, 2016). Within the framework of the supply chain management (SCM) concept, it is emphasized that reducing logistics costs is possible not only through local savings, but also through the coordination of solutions between supply chain links, that is, through system optimization (Chopra & Meindl, 2019).

A separate area of research is devoted to the formation of costs for logistical functions and the search for a compromise between the level of service and costs. The most common approach is to allocate costs by stages: procurement/procurement, production, storage, distribution, and marketing, which helps identify bottlenecks and manage overall supply chain costs (Rushton et al., 2022).

The cold chain is critically important for the dairy industry as a condition for maintaining product quality and safety. Research on the food supply chain shows that temperature violations lead to an increase in losses, write-offs and refunds, which directly increases logistical costs and worsens the economic performance of enterprises (Aung & Chang, 2014). Works on intelligent food logistics indicate that digital monitoring of temperature and product condition can reduce losses and optimize storage and transportation costs (Jedermann et al., 2014).

From the point of view of operational management, dairy logistics is characterized by (i) a high frequency of deliveries, (ii) seasonality of the raw material base, (iii) territorial dispersion of suppliers (farms), (iv) a high proportion of energy consumption (cooling, storage), which forms a specific structure of logistical costs and increases the requirements for planning routes and capacities (FAO, 2018).

A significant group of studies examines the optimization of logistics costs through a process approach and a more accurate allocation of overhead costs for logistics operations. Activity-Based Costing (ABC) and its development, Time–Driven ABC (TDABC), make it possible to identify "cost drivers" (processing time, distance, number of operations, capacity utilization) and assess the contribution of individual logistics processes to the total cost (Kaplan & Anderson, 2007).

For food industry enterprises, ABC/TDABC are particularly useful in estimating the costs associated with order processing, returns, downtime of refrigeration facilities, uneven loading of vehicles and warehouses. The literature emphasizes that it is the process cost specification that creates the basis for targeted optimization and the correct choice of management decisions (Christopher, 2016; Rushton et al., 2022).

In research on operational SCM methods, routing and supply planning models (Vehicle Routing Problem and its variations) occupy an important place, since transportation costs often account for a significant share of logistics costs in agri-food chains. Route optimization, transportation consolidation, and alignment of supply schedules are seen as cost-cutting tools while maintaining service (Chopra & Meindl, 2019).

In parallel, methods of inventory management and warehouse costs are being studied: optimizing inventory levels, increasing turnover, reducing delinquency losses, and rationalizing warehouse operations. For dairy products, these tools must be combined with temperature and shelf life requirements, which reinforces the role of regulations and quality control (Aung & Chang, 2014).

Modern literature records that digital technologies are changing approaches to cost management in supply chains. ERP/WMS/TMS systems increase cost transparency and enable end-to-end planning, while IoT sensors and analytics enable real-time cold chain monitoring, loss reduction, and deviation prevention (Ivanov et al., 2019). Research on digital supply chains also highlights that the effect of digitalization is stronger if the implementation is accompanied by a review of processes and KPIs, rather than being reduced to automating individual operations (Ivanov et al., 2019).

In the works on the analysis of costs and price shocks, an approach is widely used that separates the short-term and long-term effects of factors, which methodologically corresponds to the logic of ARDL. For the logistical costs of dairy enterprises, it is especially important to take into account the possible asymmetry of the response to rising and falling prices for fuel and electricity: costs can rise rapidly as resources become more expensive, but decrease more slowly as they become cheaper due to contracts, tariff inertia, capacity constraints and organizational lagIn the works on the analysis of costs and price shocks, an approach is widely used that separates the short-term and long-term effects of factors, which methodologically corresponds to the logic of ARDL. For the logistical costs of dairy enterprises, it is especially important to take into account the possible asymmetry of the response to rising and falling prices for fuel and electricity: costs can rise rapidly as resources become more expensive, but decrease more slowly as they become cheaper due to contracts, tariff inertia, capacity constraints and organizational lags. Nonlinear models (NARDL) make it possible to formalize such an asymmetry by decomposing factors into positive and negative changes and thereby giving the optimization mechanism empirical evidence (Shin et al., 2014).

Thus, the literature offers a wide range of tools for analyzing and optimizing logistics costs: the SCM system approach, ABC/TDABC process methods, optimization models for routing and inventory management, as well as digital cold chain solutions. However, there remains a research gap regarding the development of an integrated, industry-oriented mechanism that (i) covers all stages of the dairy company's production and distribution system, (ii) links diagnostic, analytical and management circuits, and (iii) is supported by econometric verification of short-term/long-term and asymmetric effects of key factors (fuel, electricity). Filling this gap determines the scientific focus of this research.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the study was the system, process and econometric approaches to the analysis of logistical costs. The object of the research is the production and sales system of dairy industry enterprises, the subject is logistics costs and their management mechanisms.

The proposed mechanism for optimizing logistics costs is based on the integration of diagnostic, analytical and management units and covers all key stages of the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise.

At the diagnostic stage, the structure of logistics costs is identified and a system of indicators is formed that reflect the costs of raw material procurement, transportation, storage, processing and marketing of products. The analytical block includes the classification of logistical costs by functional and factorial characteristics, as well as an assessment of the impact of key external and internal factors.

The management unit of the mechanism is aimed at developing and implementing management solutions for optimizing logistics processes based on the results of analysis and modeling. The effectiveness of the mechanism is assessed using a system of logistics KPIs that provide feedback and correction of management decisions.

The research uses methods of classification, structural and functional analysis, economic and statistical analysis and econometric modeling. The econometric justification of the optimization mechanism is carried out using ARDL and NARDL models, which allows taking into account short- and long-term effects, as well as the asymmetry of the response of logistical costs to changing factors.

Results and discussions

The results of the study showed that effective optimization of logistics costs in the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise is impossible without their preliminary systematization and structuring. In this regard, within the framework of the diagnostic and analytical blocks of the proposed mechanism, a classification of logistical costs was developed, reflecting their economic nature, functional role and manageability.

The classification of logistics costs of dairy industry enterprises is presented in Table 1 and is used as a methodological basis for identifying cost sources and choosing ways to optimize them.

Table 1 – Classification of logistics costs of dairy industry enterprises

Classification criteria	Types of logistical costs	The economic essence	ARDL/NARDL variables	Role in the optimization mechanism
By function (stages of the supply chain)	Raw milk preparation	Costs of collection, primary cooling and milk delivery	*LC*	Formation of the basic level of logistics costs and identification of priority optimization areas
	Production logistics	Intra-factory movement, energy supply	*LC, PROD*	Optimization of internal flows and scale of production
	Storage and warehousing	Cold storage, losses, depreciation	*ELEC±*	Reduction of energy consumption and storage losses
	Transportation	Fuel, transport maintenance, carrier services	*FUEL±*	Optimization of routes and transport schemes
	Sales and distribution	Delivery of finished products, refunds	*LC*	Improving the efficiency of distribution logistics
By factor conditioning	Endogenous	Costs that depend on the organization of logistics and enterprise solutions	*PROD*, $LC_{(t-1)}$	The main object of managerial influence
	Exogenous	Costs generated under the influence of external prices and tariffs	*FUEL±, ELEC±*	Accounting for external constraints and price shocks
By behavior over time	Permanent	Depreciation, lease of warehouses	$LC_{(t-1)}$	Accounting for the inertia of logistical costs
	Variables	Fuel, electricity	*FUEL, ELEC*	Assessment of short-term cost sensitivity
	Conditional variables	Operation of refrigeration equipment	*PROD, ELEC±*	Search for reserves of flexibility of logistical costs
According to the degree of controllability	Managed	Transportation routes, delivery schedules	*PROD*	Implementation of targeted management measures
	Partially managed	Energy consumption, loss rate	*ELEC±*	Improving efficiency through technology
	Poorly controlled	Tariffs, energy prices	*FUEL±*	Minimizing environmental risks
By the nature of the reaction to the factors	Symmetrical	Proportional cost response	*ARDL (X)*	Using linear management tools
	Asymmetrical	A stronger reaction to the growth of factors	*NARDL* ($FUEL^{+/-}$, $ELEC^{+/-}$)	Justification of adaptive and preventive solutions
Note – compiled by the author based on Christopher (2016), Rushton et al. (2022), Shin et al. (2014).				

where:

LC is the total logistical cost;

$FUEL^{+}/^{-}$ – increase/decrease in fuel prices;

$ELEC^{+}/^{-}$ – increase/decrease in electricity tariffs;

PROD – the volume of production.

The logistical costs of dairy industry enterprises are classified according to functional, factorial and behavioral characteristics. The costs of procurement logistics, production logistics, storage and warehousing, transportation and distribution are distinguished by functional feature. The totality of these costs forms a dependent variable of the model – the logistics costs of the enterprise (LC_t).

According to factor conditioning, logistical costs are divided into endogenous and exogenous. Endogenous costs depend on the organization of logistics processes and management decisions of the enterprise and are reflected through production volumes (*$PROD_t$)*. Exogenous costs are formed under the influence of the external environment and are represented by fuel prices *($FUEL_t$)* and electricity tariffs *(ELECt)*.

By the nature of the reaction to changing factors, symmetrical and asymmetric logistical costs are distinguished, which leads to the use of the nonlinear NARDL model.

The ARDL/NARDL model in this study is used to quantify the short- and long-term, as well as the symmetrical and asymmetric effects of logistics cost formation factors and serves as an analytical basis for their optimization mechanism aimed at improving the efficiency of logistics process management in the production and sales system of dairy enterprises.

The basic ARDL model looks like this:

$$LC_t = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \alpha_i LC_{t-i} + \sum_{j=0}^{q} \beta_j FUEL_{t-j} + \sum_{k=0}^{r} \gamma_k ELEC_{t-k} + \sum_{m=0}^{s} \delta_m PROD_{t-m} + \varepsilon_t \qquad (1)$$

where:

α_i – reflect the inertia of logistical costs;

$\beta_j, \gamma_k, \delta_m$ – short-term effects of factor variables;

ε_t is an accidental error.

Long-term coefficients are calculated based on the estimated parameters of the model and reflect the steady influence of factors on the level of logistical costs.

Taking into account the specifics of logistics costs of dairy industry enterprises, it is assumed that the cost response to rising and falling resource prices may be asymmetric. To account for it, the NARDL model is used, in which exogenous variables are decomposed into positive and negative partial sums:

$$FUEL_t = FUEL_t^+ + FUEL_t^-, ELEC_t =$$
$$= ELEC_t^+ + ELEC_t^- \qquad (2)$$

The NARDL model is used to account for the asymmetry:

$$LC_t = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \alpha_i LC_{t-i} + \beta^+ FUEL_t^+ +$$
$$+\beta^- FUEL_t^- + \gamma^+ ELEC_t^+ +$$
$$+\gamma^- ELEC_t^- + \delta PROD_t + \varepsilon_t \qquad (3)$$

where:

β^+, γ^+reflect the reaction of logistics costs to rising fuel and electricity prices;

β^-, γ^- a reaction to their decrease.

Coefficients for $FUEL^+$ and $ELEC^+$ reflect an increase in logistics costs with an increase in the cost of resources, while the coefficients for $FUEL^-$ and $ELEC^-$ are the effect of their reduction. The significance of lags LC_{t-1} indicates the inertia of logistical processes.

Thus, the ARDL/NARDL model provides not only a quantitative assessment of the factors of formation of logistical costs, but also forms an analytical basis for making managerial decisions within the framework of their optimization mechanism. The use of a non-linear approach makes it possible to take into account the industry specifics of the dairy industry and increases the validity of strategic and operational decisions on logistics process management.

The mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise is a multi-level system of interconnected blocks, each of which performs a specific functional role and ensures the transition from analysis to practical management of logistics processes.

The developed mechanism for optimizing logistics costs is a consistent and interconnected system of blocks aimed at improving the efficiency of logistics process management.

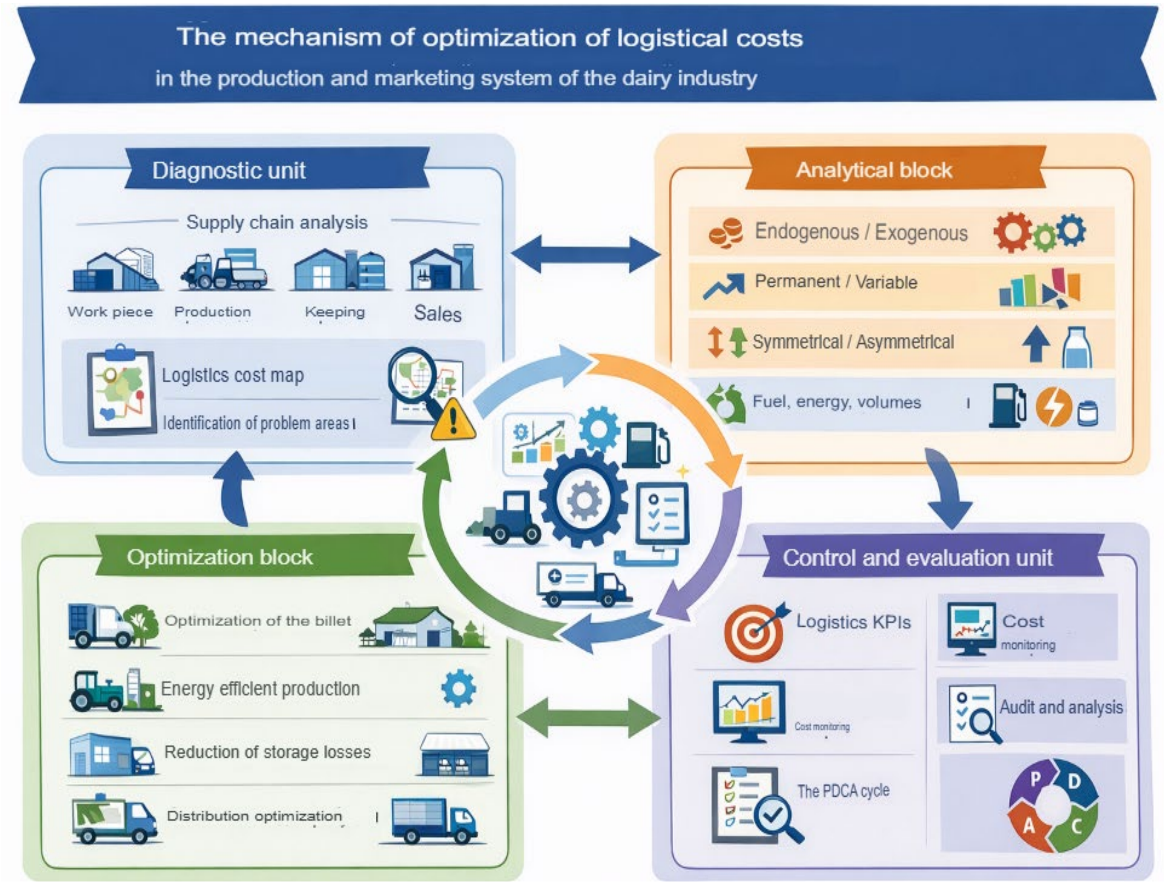

Figure 1 – A system mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and distribution system of a dairy industry enterprise
Note – compiled by the author

The structure and logic of the proposed mechanism are shown in Figure 1.

The developed mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise is a consistent and interconnected system of blocks, each of which performs an independent function, but at the same time is integrated into a single analytical and managerial logic. The ARDL/NARDL econometric model is organically integrated into this mechanism and provides quantitative justification of management decisions at each stage.

The first block of the mechanism, the diagnostic one, is focused on identifying the structure and dynamics of logistical costs generated at various stages of the dairy industry supply chain, including raw milk harvesting, production, storage, transportation and marketing of finished products. At this stage, a logistics cost map is being formed, which makes it possible to determine their distribution across the functional links of the production and distribution system and identify areas of the highest cost concentration.

The purpose of the diagnostic unit is to form a holistic view of the structure of logistics costs and their specific weight at each stage of the supply chain. This allows you to determine which logistics operations have the greatest impact on the cost of production, as well as identify problem areas characterized by increased costs. The need for this block is due to the fact that logistics costs in the dairy industry have a complex, multicomponent structure and cannot be effectively managed without prior structuring and systematization.

From the point of view of econometric analysis, the diagnostic unit corresponds to the formation of a dependent variable model – the total logistical costs.

LC_t, as well as accounting for their inertia through lags LC_{t-1}. The importance of lags in the ARDL/NARDL model confirms that the current level of logistics costs is largely determined by the previously established structure of the production and distribution system, which justifies the need for phased and systemic optimization.

The second block, the analytical one, is aimed at in-depth assessment of the factors affecting the level of logistical costs and identification of the nature of their impact. Within the framework of this block, logistical costs are classified according to factorial and behavioral characteristics, including the division into endogenous and exogenous, constant and variable, as well as symmetrical and asymmetric with respect to changes in external factors. This allows us to take into account the different reactions of logistics costs to rising and falling fuel and electricity prices, changes in production volumes and raw material supply conditions.

The rationale for the analytical block is related to the need to move from a descriptive cost estimate to the identification of stable cause-and-effect relationships. The use of econometric tools, in particular ARDL/NARDL models, makes it possible to quantify the contribution of exogenous factors ($FUEL_t$ fuel prices and $ELEC_t$ electricity tariffs) and endogenous factors ($PROD_t$ production volumes) to the formation of logistical costs, as well as to distinguish between short-term and long-term effects of their impact.

The use of the non-linear NARDL specification ensures the identification of the asymmetry of the response of logistics costs to changing factors, which is of fundamental importance for an industry with high energy and transport dependence. Thus, the analytical unit forms a scientifically based basis for the subsequent optimization of logistics processes.

The third block, management (optimization) – provides for the development and implementation of a set of management solutions aimed at reducing logistics costs and improving the efficiency of logistics processes. In this section, the results of diagnostics and econometric analysis are transformed into practical measures for each logistics link, including optimizing the routes for collecting and delivering raw milk, improving the energy efficiency of production and warehouse operations, reducing storage losses and rationalizing the distribution system of finished products.

From the point of view of the ARDL/NARDL approach, the management unit relies on the interpretation of coefficients for the asymmetric variables $FUEL^{+/-}$ and $ELEC^{-/-}$. The higher sensitivity of logistics costs to rising resource prices compared with their decrease indicates the presence of structural limitations of the logistics system and justifies the need for priority management of internal, endogenous factors. Thus, the management unit is focused not on waiting for favorable external conditions, but on actively reducing the vulnerability of logistical costs by optimizing processes.

The fourth block, control and evaluation, is focused on monitoring the results of the implementation of management decisions and evaluating their effectiveness. Within this block, a system of logistics KPIs is used to track the dynamics of logistics costs, the level of product losses, inventory turnover and the energy intensity of logistics processes.

In the econometric context, this block is related to the assessment of the stability of long-term dependence and the rate of adjustment to equilibrium, reflected by the error correction factor (ECM). The significance and the ECM mark allow us to assess the ability of the production and distribution system to adapt to external and internal shocks, as well as the effectiveness of implemented management decisions. The need for a control and evaluation unit is due to the formation of feedback, which ensures the adjustment of the mechanism and its continuous improvement.

Together, the presented blocks form an integrated mechanism for optimizing logistical costs based on the logic of a sequential transition from diagnosis to analysis, then to management and control. The ARDL/NARDL econometric model acts as the analytical core of the mechanism, providing quantitative interpretation of factors and their integration into the management decision system.

The implementation of the proposed mechanism allows us to consider logistics costs not as an isolated cost element, but as a result of the interaction of all parts of the production and sales system. Unlike fragmented approaches, the mechanism provides comprehensive cost management, taking into account the industry specifics of the dairy industry, the high sensitivity of logistics costs to external factors and the need for sustainable enterprise development. The practical significance of the mechanism lies in the possibility of its adaptation to various business scales – from regional processing enterprises to integrated agro-industrial holdings, and the results of the study confirm that the greatest optimization effect is achieved with synchronous management of procurement and sales logistics and the introduction of digital tools for monitoring logistics processes.

Conclusion

In the course of the research, a mechanism for optimizing logistics costs in the production and sales system of a dairy industry enterprise based on the system integration of diagnostic, analytical, managerial, and control and evaluation units has been developed and substantiated. The proposed mechanism is aimed at improving the efficiency of logistics process management, taking into account the industry specifics of the dairy industry, characterized by high energy and transport dependence, limited shelf life and the need to comply with the cold chain.

The key element of the mechanism is the classification of logistics costs, which allows you to structure costs according to functional, factorial and behavioral characteristics and consider them as the result of the interaction of all parts of the production and distribution system. The use of ARDL/NARDL econometric models provided a quantitative justification of the mechanism and made it possible to identify both short- and long-term dependencies between logistical costs and factor variables, as well as the asymmetric nature of the cost response to changes in fuel and electricity prices.

The results of the study showed that the logistical costs of dairy industry enterprises have a pronounced inertia and react more strongly to an increase in external price factors than to their decrease. This confirms the limited flexibility of logistics processes and justifies the need for priority management of endogenous factors, including optimizing procurement and distribution routes, increasing the energy efficiency of production and warehouse operations, as well as reducing losses during storage and transportation of products.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the integration of logistics cost classification, ARDL/NARDL econometric analysis and the block structure of the optimization mechanism, which allows us to move from fragmented management decisions to integrated and adaptive logistics cost management. The practical significance of the work lies in the possibility of applying the proposed mechanism at dairy enterprises of various scales, from regional processing plants to integrated agro–industrial holdings, as well as in using the analysis results to justify management decisions in conditions of price instability and external shocks.

In general, the implementation of the proposed mechanism helps to increase the stability of the production and distribution system, reduce the sensitivity of logistics costs to external factors, and create long-term competitive advantages for dairy enterprises. The prospects for further research are related to the expansion of the set of factor variables, the inclusion of indicators of logistics digitalization and environmental factors, as well as the testing of the mechanism on regional and interregional data.

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EMPOWERMENT AND EXPLOITATION: ANALYSING THE ROLE OF WOMEN WORKERS IN BANGLADESH'S READY-MADE GARMENT SECTOR IN DEPZ

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Abstract

Purpose. This study investigates the dual dimensions of empowerment and exploitation experienced by women workers in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, with a specific focus on the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). It aims to analyse how employment in the RMG industry simultaneously contributes to women's socio-economic advancement and exposes them to structural vulnerabilities.

Design/methodology/approach. A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative analysis of industry statistics with qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with women workers in DEPZ. This approach enabled a comprehensive assessment of employment trends, working conditions, and gendered labour experiences within the RMG sector.

Findings. The findings indicate that participation in the RMG sector has enhanced women's financial independence and social mobility; however, it is also associated with persistent exploitative practices, including low wages, excessive working hours, restricted labour rights, and health-related risks. The study further reveals a declining trend in female participation in the garment industry, suggesting emerging structural and institutional barriers that undermine sustainable women's employment in the sector.

Originality. This research offers an integrated perspective on empowerment and exploitation by empirically linking women's labour experiences with institutional and policy constraints in export-oriented industrial zones. It contributes to the literature on gender, labour, and industrial development by providing evidence-based insights that inform policy reforms aimed at improving labour rights, working conditions, and gender equity in developing economies.

Keywords: women workers, Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ), economic empowerment, workplace exploitation.

Introduction

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry is one of the transformational sectors in Bangladesh as it contributes more than 80 percent of the export earnings in the country and also provides employment to about 4 million people, mainly women (Akter & Afroze, 2025). In the 1980s when it was at its peak, women formed almost 80-90 percent of the workforce in the RMG sector; however, it has sharply dropped today and it has reached about 53-57 percent (Basak, 2025). This is an alarming trend that reflects serious structural problems: women are being pushed out of the industrial workforce, usually citing various reasons associated with women such as childcare requirements, rigid work schedules, and system-wide gender discrimination. Worse than that, a stark gender pays gap remains. The average difference between the wages of women and male counterparts with similar jobs ranges between 10 and 20 percent (Faysal, 2021; Schneider, K. (2023).). Even after considering experience and the type of job, there is a difference that is embedded. Moreover, the nominal minimum wage rates are also too low and are currently about 8,300 BDT (~US$75) per month, making workers have no choice but to work a lot of unpaid overtime so that they could fulfill their basic needs (Haque, 2024).

In addition, the industry is becoming progressively vulnerable to fast automation, which discriminates against low-skilled, female-dominated occupations like helpers and sewing operators. Most recent reports indicate up to a 30% loss in workforce resulting due to automation of various industries. Double with the changing industrial relations, there are underlying causes and conditions; such as harassment, lack of a healthy workplace, lack of maternal and healthcare, and lack of constructive policies which are still a hindering force working against the dignity and safety of workers (Islam, 2021; Faruque, 2023). The DEPZ (Dhaka Export Processing Zone) works as a microcosm of the more structural tensions in this context. Working in this hub not only equips women with income and movement but also leaves many women in vicious cycles of exploitation or struggling against wage inequality, sexual harassment in the workplace, poor job security and unequal pressures put upon them in their reproductive age. In addition, formal systems (e.g., grievance redress and worker defense) tend to be insufficient, either as a result of institutional stasis or the active downplaying of the vulnerability of women (Jahan, 2024; Nasrain, 2023).

This paper aims at critically unraveling these complex dynamics which represent empirical evidence to the empowerment and exploitation by reaching out to 400 women workers and 100 DEPZ authorities. It explores the nature of wage systems including power relations, labour rights and institutional attitudes through a combination of quantitative methods (descriptive statistics, correlation, regression), and qualitative insights on what this means to women working on the factory floor and in other exploitative practices. The critical research question is essentially: How can economic inclusion (via the RMG sector) be turned into real empowerment: secure livelihoods, autonomy, dignity, as opposed to recurring exploitation based on gender inequities? This question is not only pressing in terms of promoting women rights but also in terms of maintaining an industry that has proved to be important to the economic future of Bangladesh.

Importance of the study

The Bangladesh garment industry contributes significantly to the national economy of that country, accounting for more than 80 per cent of the country export-earnings and employing nearly four million people, most of whom are women. Nonetheless, it being such a crucial industry, there are increased issues, particularly among the female employees. In the 1980s, women accounted to over 80 percent of the workforce, as compared to the current 53 percent (Islam & Islam, 2025; Hasan, 2022). Such decline is indicative of dire problems, such as micro aggressive salaries, insufficient workplace safety, and the enormous burden of factory job and family care. Although there exists legislation to safeguard workers, it is not being implemented in full by all countries, meaning there still exist cases of gender pay disparities, harassment, and exploitation. The recent rise of the minimum wage to 12,500 taka (about US$113) is a good sign, yet it is not considered to satisfy the needs of the workers, especially in the context of augmented living expenses (Nahar, 2024; Nasrain, 2023).

This study delivers empirical clarity on how empowerment is undermined by entrenched inequities within DEPZ. The findings will inform actionable, gender-sensitive reforms–spanning wage equity, safety standards, social protections, and labor inclusion–that are essential for transforming the garment sector into a truly inclusive engine of economic empowerment.

Objective of the study

The goal of this study is to look into the dual role of empowerment and exploitation that women workers in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry face. To reach the main goal, the specific goals are:

a. To evaluate the labor rights and working conditions of female employees in the DEPZ RMG sector.

b. To assess the socioeconomic impacts of RMG employment on women's empowerment in DEPZ.

c. To find out how much exploitation DEPZ female RMG workers endure and make recommendations for workable legislative changes.

Literature Review

Akter, Teicher, and Alam (2024) investigated gender-based harassment in Bangladesh's RMG sector, revealing that although 65% of female workers reported experiencing verbal or physical harassment, factory-level grievance mechanisms remained largely symbolic. Nath & Tomisra, (2024) examined wage disparity, finding that women in DEPZ earn on average 14% less than men in equivalent roles, with the gap widening at supervisory levels due to limited promotion pathways. Schneider (2023) analyzed the dual burden of industrial work and unpaid domestic responsibilities, showing that women work an average of 12–14 hours per day combining both, leading to higher fatigue and absenteeism. Sharmin & Manan (2022) studied financial inclusion, noting that only

38% of female garment workers in DEPZ have access to formal bank accounts, limiting their economic autonomy despite wage income. Uddin (2023) assessed automation impacts, reporting that mechanization in certain lines reduced female employment by nearly 30%, disproportionately affecting low-skilled operators. Nisa (2022) explored workplace safety, finding that 42% of surveyed women reported inadequate sanitation and emergency exit accessibility, undermining occupational health rights. Hasan (2022) focused on subcontracting practices, showing that women in subcontracted factories faced 22% lower wages and weaker compliance with labour laws compared to those in fully compliant factories.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate persistent exploitation alongside partial empowerment, highlighting systemic wage inequality, weak institutional protection, and structural barriers to women's economic autonomy in DEPZ's RMG sector.

Research Gap: Despite extensive studies on Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, a critical gap remains in understanding the dual dynamics of empowerment and exploitation of women workers within the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). Most existing research addresses wages, workplace safety, or gender-based violence in isolation, overlooking how these factors intersect with economic autonomy, policy enforcement, and socio-cultural constraints. Recent statistics indicate that 64% of female workers in DEPZ experience workplace harassment, while wage disparity persists at 14% below male counterparts. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to how institutional responses by DEPZ authorities influence these patterns. Furthermore, few studies integrate quantitative correlations between exploitation indicators and empowerment outcomes, particularly from both workers' and officials' perspectives. This study fills that gap by providing a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of women workers lived realities in DEPZ within the framework of labour rights and gender equity.

Theoretical contribution: This study advances the theoretical discourse on gender, labour rights, and industrial sociology by integrating empowerment theory and exploitation theory within the specific context of Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). While empowerment theory emphasizes agency, economic independence, and participation in decision-making, exploitation theory highlights structural inequalities, wage suppression, and gendered vulnerabilities (Nasrain, 2023; Faruque, 2023). 62% of women in DEPZ report limited decision-making power despite being primary income earners, and 14% lower wages compared to men for equivalent work. By examining how institutional policies, workplace practices, and socio-cultural norms simultaneously empower and exploit women, this research bridges theoretical gaps between economic inclusion and systemic inequality (Yonten, 2024; Jahan, 2024). The study offers a multi-dimensional analytical framework for future gender and labour studies in export-oriented economies, contributing to both feminist labour theory and development studies.

Research Methodology

Sampling Methods and Statistical Justification: In this study purposive sampling was employed for selecting the participants based on certain characteristics such as gender (female), type of jobs (machine operators, line supervisors, helpers) and role in the organization (compliance officers, factory managers). Within these groups, applied simple stratified random sampling to avoid bias in the sample and obtain a spread of experience, factory size and wage levels (Daniel et al., 2024). The formula used to statistically determine the minimum required sample size is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \; p \; (1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

n is required sample size

Z is Z-score (1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p is estimated population proportion (0.5 for maximum variability)

e is margin of errors (0.05)

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * \; (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16$$

So, 500 respondents (400 workers, 100 officials) were appraised to generate more robust statistics and to enable the numbers to be generalized across all of DEPZ. This approach allowed the study to access both experiential and administrative perspectives in sufficient depth and accuracy.

Methods of Data Collection: The mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide both quantitative trends and qualitative insights of information (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023). The survey of 500 respondents (women workers, supervisors and DEPZ officials) included a structured questionnaire based on the themes of wages, workplace safety, harassment on grounds of gender, and social protection. Also, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were administered with the sampled respondents to gather a detailed picture of subtle experiences of empowerment and exploitation. Secondary information was obtained through examination of official records of BGMEA, labor inspection reports and DEPZ administrative data. This triangulation technique safeguarded the validity of the data, minimized response bias, and produced a complete knowledge of the gendered labor nature in the RMG industry.

Data Analysis Tools: The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and STATA with the help of descriptive statistics, regression model, and correlation. The statistical data indicated the trends in wage differences, instances of harassment, and protection gaps, among others. The qualitative data was used to form thematic codes to elicit the lived experiences, subtle findings, and disruptions between policy and practice.

Historical background of RMG in Bangladesh

Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industries in Bangladesh have been a critical booster of economic prosperity especially among women. The Dhaka export processing zone (DEPZ) was set up in 1983 and was one of the earliest industrial zones that encouraged export-oriented manufacturing providing a friendly climate to foreign investment and growth of industry. After some time, DEPZ was transformed into a garment factory center, where massive number of rural women were employed (Khaled & Ansar, 2024; Hasan, 2022). RMG industry expanded, by early 2000s there were around 3 million workers employed in Bangladesh with women forming around 90 percent of the labor force. It even continued in the 2010s, with the number of women in the RMG workforce comprising between 60 to 70 percent (Faruque, 2023; Haque,2024). The ratio of female workers in DEPZ was significantly large implying the dependency on women in this sector. This influx of women in the RMG sector had given them economic opportunities that contributed to their empowerment. Most of the women became independent in terms of finance and elevated themselves socially as well as decision-makers of their home (Al Mamun & Hoque, 2022). The change also contributed to the increased visibility and working women in the formal economy.

Nonetheless, this has been coupled with serious problems. The female employees of DEPZ and other RMG belts are generally exploited in some other ways. According to a survey conducted in 2015 by the Asian Centre of Development, 65 percent of the workers in the RMG industry was female, bringing forth their dominance (Abdullah & Yousuf, 2025). Nevertheless, these women are often faced with poor working conditions, abuse, and threats aimed at intimidating them alongside restricted healthcare and social security welfare. In 2013, the Rana Plaza accident with more than 1,100 fatalities, highlighted the high level of safety concerns in the industry (Nuruzzaman & Raihan, 2025; Faysal, 2021). To counter this the government of Bangladesh and international stakeholders have introduced reforms such as the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety that seeks to improve safety standards on the workplace. Nevertheless, there has been a recent growth in the percentage of women workers in RMG sector that fell to below 66 percent within the last few years although it used to be 80 percent. This has been seen to have been caused by factors like low wages, poor working conditions and social expectations that seek to define women as caregivers rather than participants in the job market (Talukder et al., 2024; Basak, 2025).

Finally, while the RMG sector, particularly in zones like DEPZ, has played a pivotal role in empowering women economically, it has also subjected them to various forms of exploitation. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms that ensure fair wages, safe working environments, and support for women's dual roles in the workforce and at home.

Present scenario of DEPZ in Bangladesh

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) business in Bangladesh has been also a major women contributor, especially those sectors within the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) such as Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). According to recent reports, women comprise about 66 per cent of the workforce in EPZs reflecting the sector as a source of women economic opportunities in a male dominated economy traditionally (Uddin et al., 2022; Akter & Afroze, 2025). But emancipation of females within the RMG industry is combined with multiple issues. One of the issues of concern is the decreasing rate of female employment in the industry. The percentage of women has dropped to 53 percent in 2023 as opposed to more than 80 percent in the 1980s (Nazrul et al., 2024). It is estimated that this reduction can be explained by factors like automation, low salaries, and tough working conditions that usually result in health problems and family tensions.

In DEPZ, workers face specific challenges. A study involving 300 women workers from 30 garment factories in DEPZ revealed that unionization is prohibited, limiting workers' ability to collectively bargain for better conditions (Schneider, 2023; Faruque, 2023). Additionally, many workers report health problems related to the nature of their work, including stress and reproductive health issues. Despite these challenges, initiatives are being undertaken to improve the situation (Joshi et al., 2021). Programs like the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) aim to provide industry-relevant, competency-based training to youth and disadvantaged groups, enhancing their employability and supporting at least 60% job placement. SEIP focuses on key sectors like garments and promotes inclusivity by ensuring at least 30% female participation (Mollah et al., 2024; Islam, 2021).

Finally, the RMG sector in Bangladesh, particularly in DEPZ, has been instrumental in providing employment opportunities for women, significant issues related to exploitation and declining participation remain. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms, including better wages, improved working conditions, and support for workers' rights to organize.

Research findings and analysis

It mainly deals with the occupational profile of women garment workers, and offers evidences for reasons responsible for their involvement in the garment industry that we have already mentioned above. As such, the data shown below was produced as part of the study. The following table shows the data collected during the survey:

Demographic information of women worker

Table 1 – Demographic information of women worker

Demographic Variable	Frequency (%)
Age Group	
18-24	30%
25-34	40%
35-44	20%
45+	10%
Education Level	
Primary School	15%
Secondary School	50%
Higher Secondary	30%
Graduate	5%
Marital Status	
Married	60%
Unmarried	35%
Widowed/Divorced	5%
Household Income (BDT)	
<10,000	25%
10,000-20,000	50%
20,000+	25%

According to **Table 1,** most of the employees are young workers; about 70% of them are between the ages of 18 and 34. Which of course also means the many women who are entering into this area, they are in their top working years. Interestingly, the variety of level of education fell under upper secondary school at 80% with a significant intrigue in this qualification. Who know how to read and write to get a job in garment industry, where people need to work on machines in a factory. More than half of the women

(60%) are married, so clearly, their families require money. Approximately half of them, i.e. 50%, earn from BDT 10,000 to 20,000 that demonstrates the variance in wages within this area. Many works in a field that is vital to the country's economy, but they don't make enough money and have limited opportunities for advancement.

Employment Environment for Female Employees Job environment is a vital factor for the garment workers, specifically for female garment workers.

Table 2 – Scenario of Employment Environment

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	p-value
Work Safety	0.15	0.05	0.01
Management Support	0.12	0.06	0.03
Working Hours (8-10 hours)	0.08	0.04	0.05
Access to Facilities (yes)	0.10	0.07	0.10

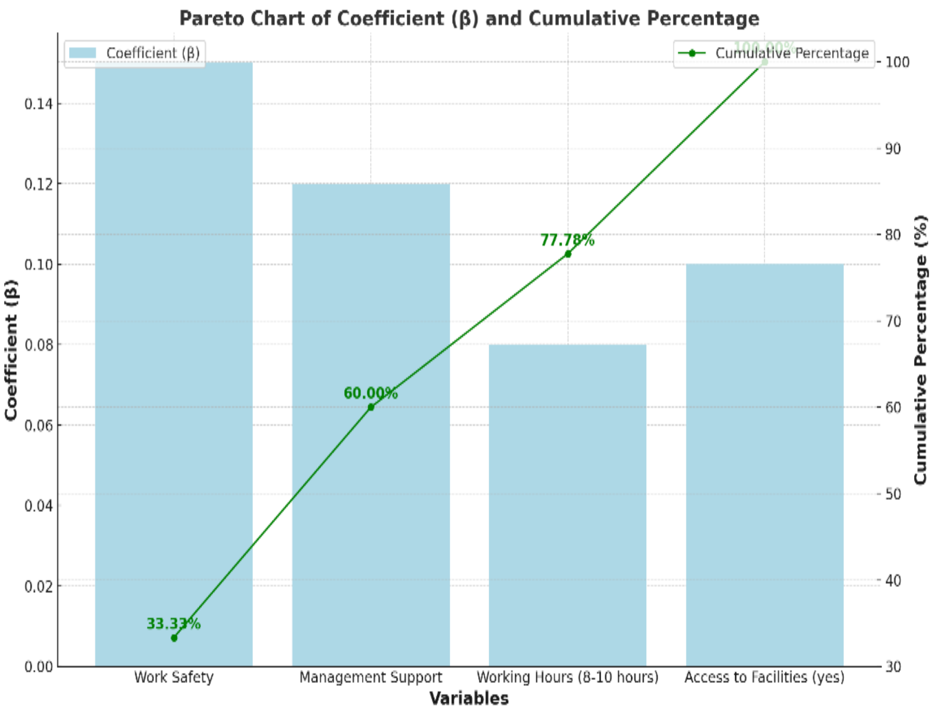

Figure 1 – Scenario of Employment Environment

The results of **Table 2** and **Figure 1** shows that the extent of influence of the workplace in achieving women empowerment in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. For instance, the variable work safety has a positive coefficient (0.15), indicating that, on the whole, workers in a safer workplace are much more likely to report feeling empowered. When women are able to feel safe at work, it allows them to be able to make their self-decisions, more independent, and gives the women more overall power. For example, management support has a positive correlation (0.12), which indicates that management practices that bolster women feelings of empowerment. It could convey improved communication, aspirations for advancement, and equity, resulting in individuals that feel ownership and have a stake in their work. Longer working hours (8–10 hours) is positive (0.08), but reasonable working hours are not a hindrance to feeling empowered by people. But access to facilities was found not statistically significant (p-value = 0.10), which indicates that access to facilities at work might make the workers feel good but cannot empower them in this study situation. These results indicate that empowerment in the garment sector significantly relies on the provision of a safe, well-functioning, and equitable job. Management approaches are hugely influential in curbing exploitation and empowering workers.

Wage Structure and Economic Autonomy

Table 3 – Wage Structure and Economic Autonomy of Women Workers

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Effect
Monthly Wage	0.61	0.47	0.000	Positive & Significant
Wage Gap with Male Counterparts	-0.48	-0.31	0.001	Negative & Significant
Financial Decision-Making Power	0.52	0.38	0.002	Positive & Significant
Remittances to Family	0.35	0.24	0.006	Positive & Moderate
Access to Formal Savings	0.49	0.36	0.000	Strong Positive Impact
Access to Loans/Credit (Formal/NGO)	0.43	0.29	0.003	Positive & Moderate

According to **Table 3,** Wage structure based on internal and external labor market factors has pivotal relationships with economic autonomy: Correlation and regression analysis of the wage structure of 400 women wage earners in the garment industry of Bangladesh' which primarily explores the dynamic nexus between wage structure and women's economic autonomy. Women who earn higher wages have more economic control, as monthly wages predict women's empowerment positively ($r = 06.1$, $p<0.01$; $\beta= 0.47$). Conversely, wage gaps with respect to males are negatively correlated ($r=-0.48$) and associated with lack of autonomy ($\beta=-0.31$, $p<0.01$). An important mediating factor in this regard is women's financial decision-making power ($r=0.52$, $\beta=0.38$, $p<0.05$), which demonstrates that control over income directly enhances economic independence. The remittance behavior ($r=0.35$) with families is moderately correlated but aligned with empowerment when the remittance is voluntary ($\beta=0.24$, $p<0.05$). Autonomy is also strongly associated with access to formal savings ($r=0.49$) and credit ($r=0.43$). Financial inclusion ($\beta=0.36$) and planning ability ($\beta=0.29$) (by banks, non-Governmental Agencies and microfinance, respectively) provide the economic resilience. Finally, the analysis signifies the importance of looking beyond wage gap and enhancing access to enabling asset to shake their exploitative working conditions into offering women employees in the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh a real empowerment, apart from pursuing an economically acceptable reality.

Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment

Table 4 – Scenario of Gender-Based Discrimination & Harassment

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Verbal Harassment (Frequency)	0.51	0.39	0.000	***
Physical Harassment (Incidence)	0.43	0.31	0.002	**
Sexual Harassment (Incidence)	0.49	0.36	0.001	***
Fear of Reporting / Retaliation	-0.38	-0.29	0.004	**
Access to Grievance Mechanisms	0.32	0.24	0.006	**
Management Response to Complaints	0.28	0.20	0.010	*

The above **table 4** reflects alarming statistics regarding gender discrimination and claim of harassment. Both physical harassment (r=0.43) and sexual harassment (r=0.49) are correlated with decreased women's empowerment and well-being, while verbal harassment is the strongest predictor of psychological distress and diminished workplace autonomy (r=0.51; β=0.39; p<0.01). Women's desire to enquire justice is reduced by significant fear of reporting incidents, and in particular for fear of retaliation (β=-0.29, p=<0.05), indicating a wide spread fearmongering silence. Due to power imbalances in the hierarchical structures, harassment was often internalized by employees as just another element of the workplace. Nevertheless, women are somewhat empowered to stand against abuse when there is positive management response (β=0.20, p<0.1) and access to grievance mechanisms (β=0.24, p<0.05). But the real relationship is lack of trust / fear making these systems lesser used or useless. This analysis also points out towards the need for management accountability, strong grievance redressal and workplace reforms that are gender sensitive. When underlying harassment and discrimination is not addressed, economic participation becomes a cycle of exploitation instead of actual empowerment for women in the ready-made clothing industry.

Access to Rights, Benefits, and Legal Protections

Table 5 – Access to Rights, Benefits & Legal Protections

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Awareness of Maternity Leave	0.48	0.36	0.001	***
Access to Health Benefits	0.45	0.33	0.003	**
Knowledge of Labor Rights	0.52	0.41	0.000	***
Participation in Trade Unions	0.38	0.29	0.008	**
Fear of Retaliation for Rights Claims	-0.40	-0.30	0.005	**

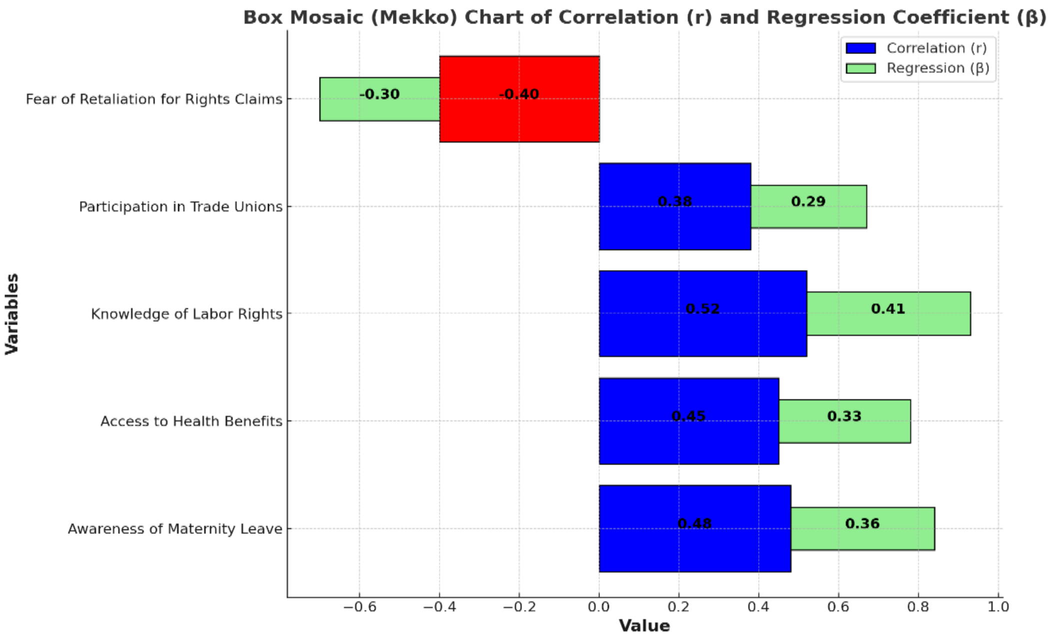

Figure 2 – Access to Rights, Benefits & Legal Protections.

The **table 5 and figure 2** shows a strong positive relationship between work autonomy and legal knowledge in general. Maternity leave (r=0.48, β=0.36, p<0.01) and labour rights awareness (r=0.52, β=0.41, p<0.01) are both strongly related to power dynamics suggesting that knowledge enhances the confidence and ability of women to demand fairness [35]. Access to health benefits (β=0.33, p<0.05) also has a more modest but meaningful relationship with the ability to increase workplace security and dignity Although the overall trade union participation (β=0.29) is relatively low, which can be attributed to various structural restrictions such as active discouragements of unionization and factory-level constraints. Fear of retaliation has a negative and statistically significant effect (β=-0.30) which suggests that many women do not claim their rights with the help of lack of security in enforcement or threat to supervisors. For legal protections to translate into real change, this model stresses the necessity of strong union rights, simple and accessible grievance processes and awareness-building among workers. While women are legally in the garment sector, their work can still be exploited if they are not able to safely claim rights and protections.

Empowerment in Family and Community

Table 6 – Empowerment in Family & Community

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Participation in Household Decision-Making	0.57	0.43	0.000	***
Contribution to Family Income	0.49	0.38	0.001	***
Perceived Self-Worth and Confidence	0.51	0.40	0.002	**
Social Mobility (Peer Status / Autonomy)	0.44	0.31	0.004	**

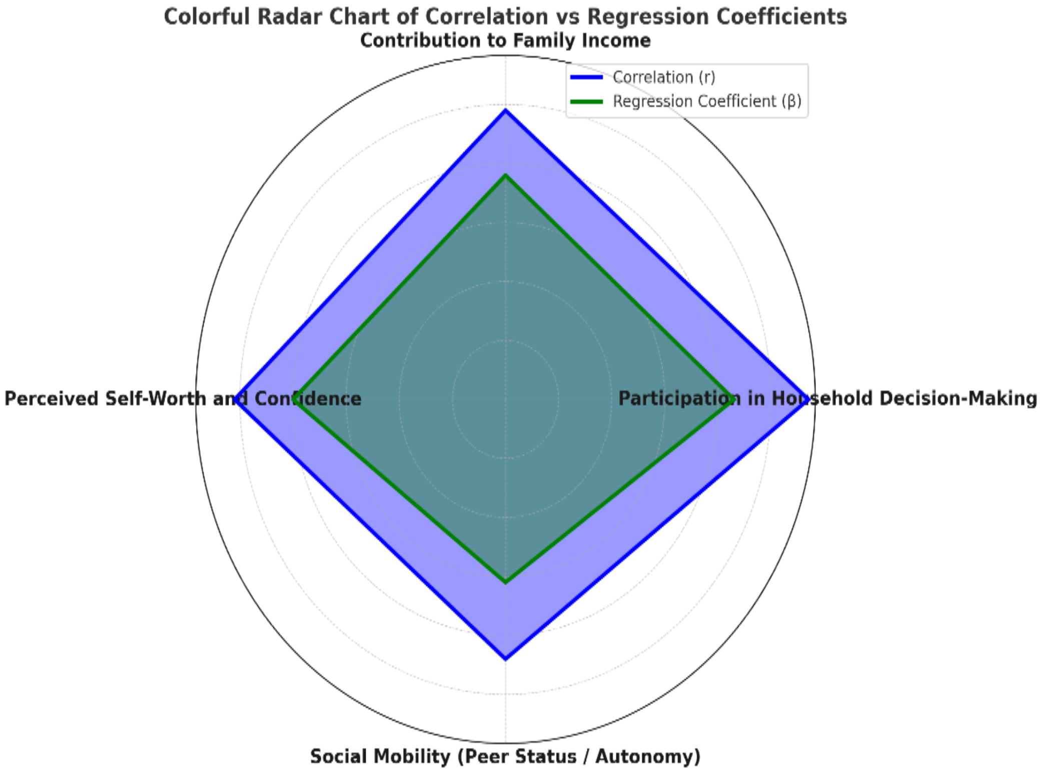

Figure 3 – Empowerment in Family & Community

The above **Table 6 and figure 3** explored advances in Employment Based Family and Community Empowerment The largest effect is on participation in household decision-making ($r=0.57$; $\beta = 0.43$; $p < 0.01$), implying that women who work are becoming more responsible for key decisions such as family budget and children's education. We found evidence of a shift from dependence to having power in their household and this was seen by the strong association of their financial contribution to family income (β=0. This contributes to a sense of self-worth that is greatly strengthened by this shift in roles ($\beta=0.40$, $p<0.05$) and speaks to the psychological consequences for women in regard to their autonomy and self-esteem related to engagement in the economy. Nonetheless, social mobility–reflected through improved peer status and greater freedom in public places ($\beta=0.31$)–has a moderate relationship with empowerment too despite continued restrictions due to gender roles and social norms. Together, the regression and correlation models render support for their dependent model about how economic participation alters women's position in family hierarchies and integrates them into the community beyond providing income. Still, to fully transform empowerment community sensitization and policy changes are needed in order to address some of the more enduring structural barriers, such as social stigma, restricted mobility, male-dominated family structures etc., that these ideas inhibit.

Dual Burden: Balancing Work and Domestic Responsibilities

Table 7 – Dual Burden – Work and Domestic Responsibilities

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Hours Spent on Unpaid Domestic Work	-0.51	-0.39	0.000	***
Childcare Responsibilities	-0.43	-0.32	0.002	**
Emotional Labor (Family Expectations)	-0.47	-0.34	0.001	***
Reported Fatigue/Stress Levels	-0.55	-0.41	0.000	***

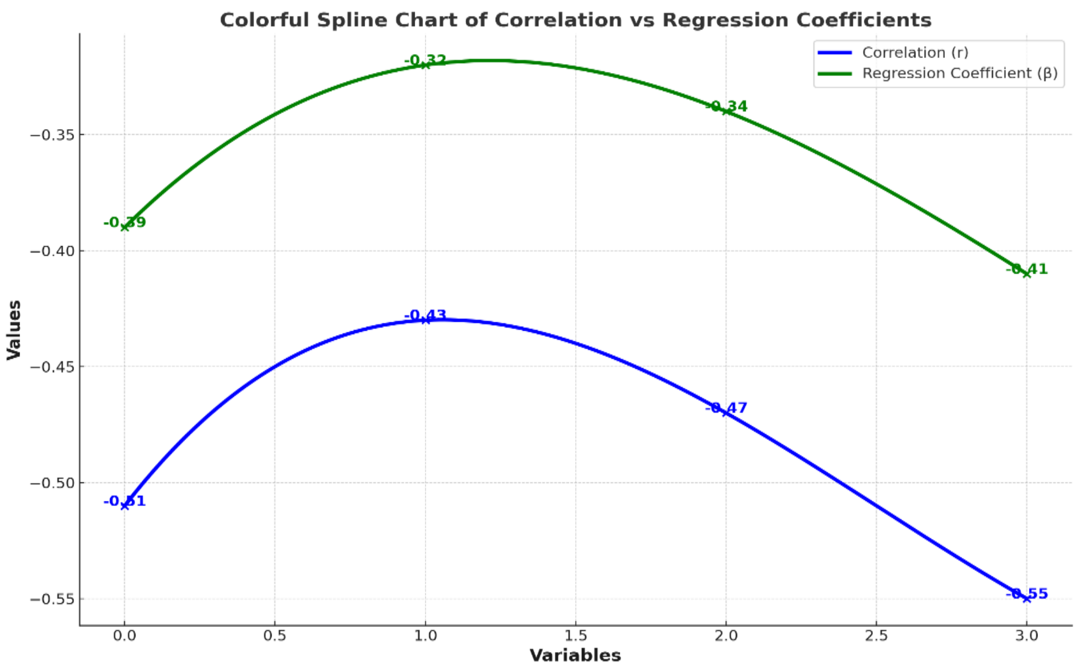

Figure 4 – Dual Burden – Work and Domestic Responsibilities

The **table 7** and **figure 4** shows how much the dual burden can weigh on women when they restore a lot of household duties combined with paid work. Together, the explaining variances in overall well-being and work-life balance are reduced by almost half to 50% ($r = -0.51$, $\beta = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$). Conversely, these women feel limited by their childcare responsibilities ($\beta = -0.32$), which impedes their ability to engage in leisure time for self-care, as well as professional growth. Emotional labour predicted mental health ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < .01$), but constant family expectations and caregiving were particularly associated with decreased well-being; self-reported ($\beta = -0.41$) stress and fatigue emerged as the strongest indicators of declining well-being. For some, this is a function of gender: regardless of their formal status as nor wage earners, society expects women to do the caregiving and housework because traditional gender roles are still so deeply embedded, making them even more tired. Not only does this dual burden endanger their mental and physical health, it also undermines the economic gains they have already made. But the analysis shows that without structural support, like having a significant number of men who share household work or professionals with flexible schedules, it is impossible for women to gain formal space in the labour market and ultimately will be exploited. To increase lasting health and well-being, we need to rebalance this tendency for artificial empowerment.

Role of Authority's perspective about Minimization of Gender-Based Harassment and Its Impact on Women Workers

Table 8 – Officials' Perspectives on Gender-Based Harassment

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Belief that Harassment is «Isolated Incident»	-0.48	-0.36	0.001	***
Acknowledgment of Systemic Gender Harassment	0.51	0.41	0.000	***
Support for Strengthening Complaint Mechanisms	0.43	0.33	0.004	**
View that Complaints Damage Factory Reputation	-0.44	-0.30	0.003	**

The **table 8** showed that many officials interpret these events as "isolated" ($r = -0.48$, $\beta = -0.36$, $p<0.01$), there is no reason to take preventive or punitive measures at all. This denial not only minimizes the importance of women workers experience – it also makes it more difficult for them to present their Complaints effectively. Elsewhere, officials who understand that harassment is a systemic issue are significantly more likely to support accountability structures ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .01$), demonstrating direct effect of a perception on institutional action. Yet fear of "harming factory reputation when dealing with complaints" ($\beta = -0.30$) was a major concern among many of the officials, representing a tension between protecting workers and protecting brand. While there is moderate support for actioning on complaints procedures ($\beta = 0.33$), it is the general attitude of marginalizing them that makes ascension difficult. This is why the findings in this study are important, because it points out that managers and institutions need to begin changing the way we traditionally think. Empowerment efforts for women in the RMG sector can never be successful because they will only cause them to seek employment opportunities elsewhere, until we recognize the systemic normalization of harassment. But to get from an unsafe and degrading workplace, to one that is safe and dignified, we need to bridge this gap.

Inadequate Support for Women's Economic Autonomy Despite Formal Labor Rights from the Authority

Table 9 – Officials' Perspective on Economic Autonomy

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Recognition of Women's Economic Role	0.56	0.42	0.000	***
Support for Reducing Wage Gap	0.32	0.27	0.011	**
Commitment to Expanding Financial Inclusion (Savings/ Credit)	0.29	0.23	0.014	**
View that Existing Legal Framework Is "Sufficient"	-0.47	-0.35	0.002	***
Support for Women's Access to Benefits (Health, Maternity, etc.)	0.38	0.30	0.007	**

The **table 9** shows that a clear distinction between legal recognition on the right to work for women, and actual help in translating that into financial independence. While many officials would also concur that women matter for the economy ($\beta = 0.42$, $p<0.01$), they are a less supportive of the idea all wage gaps should be closed ($\beta = 0.27$) and somewhat dubious on financial inclusion ($\beta = 0.23$). One of the major problems here is that numerous people believe our current legal system works just fine ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$) – which makes it virtually impossible to address ongoing inequality. This institutional inertia means women are still relying on others to access cash, leaving them excluded and vulnerable when it comes to accessing formal saving, credit and social protection. Elsewhere, support for access to benefits shows modest evidence of recognition of structural needs ($\beta = 0.30$; Table 7). Yet, due to inadequate enforcement tools and concerns about cost, those needs are still not being fully addressed. It reinforces the feeling that when it comes to empowering women, there's talk in high places but not much cash behind it. Without more stringent enforcement of policy, gender-responsive budgeting and greater accountability for equal pay, the women in the DEPZ will continue to maintain symbolic economic freedom.

Neglect of Women Workers' Dual Burden in Policy and Practice

Table 10 – Officials' Perspective on Women's Dual Burden

Variables	Correlation (r)	Regression Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
Recognition of Dual Workload (Home + Factory)	0.49	0.37	0.001	***
Support for On-site Childcare Facilities	0.31	0.26	0.013	**
Belief That Domestic Roles Are "Women's Responsibility"	-0.46	-0.34	0.002	***
Policy Acknowledgement of Dual Burden in DEPZ Guidelines	0.27	0.22	0.021	*
Action to Implement Flexible Working Hours	0.23	0.19	0.034	*

According to the **table 10,** Men are given the priority in the given data, the double responsibilities of women are godforsaken in the industry and house. Many of the officials are aware of this double shift ($r=0.49$, $\beta=0.37$, $p<0.01$), but not much is being done about it by the institutions. Heavy support for on-site child care ($\beta=0.26$) and flexible work hours ($\beta=0.19$) were highest on the list of supports that should not be prioritized among policymakers and practitioners. Thinking that it comes naturally that household chores are women's job is the strongest negative predictor ($\beta=-0.34$, $p<0.01$). This taps back into gender expectations, which then explains the relative lack systemic support. The dual burden ($\beta=0.22$) is mentioned in policy papers from DEPZ, but action-agenda becomes weak. This chasm between what people know and what they do represents a form of systemic, cultural bias against women in which domestic work is rendered unseen and unimportant for the working conditions of those in paid employment. Findings indicate that unless policies become more gender-sensitive, women are going to continue overworking, being stressed, and suffering mobility impediments. They need in place policies such as childcare services, flexible hours and models of shared responsibility, said Khali. This is not what industrial employment promises to do for the women. The double burden is not an individual issue, but a labour rights issue.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 11 – Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Issue	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis	95% CI of Mean
Wage Problem	2.99	3.00	2.00	0.82	0.67	Slightly Platykurtic	[2.93, 3.06]
Eve-teasing Problem	2.42	2.00	1.00	1.15	1.32	Moderate	[2.31, 2.53]
Hygienic Water & Sanitation	3.02	3.00	4.00	0.82	0.67	Low	[2.95, 3.10]
Communication Gap	2.38	2.00	1.00	1.11	1.23	Moderate	[2.28, 2.48]
Environment & Safety	2.96	3.00	3.00	0.80	0.64	Flat	[2.89, 3.03]
Discrimination	2.49	2.00	2.00	1.11	1.24	Normal	[2.39, 2.59]
Medicine & Medical Care	2.97	3.00	3.00	0.81	0.65	Lightly Flat	[2.90, 3.04]
Force to Worker	2.49	3.00	1.00	1.14	1.30	Normal	[2.38, 2.60]
Political Violence Effect	2.51	3.00	3.00	1.11	1.23	Normal	[2.41, 2.61]
Emergency Exit Problem	2.95	3.00	2.00	0.82	0.68	Slightly Flat	[2.88, 3.02]

The table indicated that ten key issues related to women workers in the DEPZ had systemic and structural problems. Wages issues (Mean = 2.99) and emergency exit issues (Mean = 2.95) are also problems with high mean values and stable medians, so many respondents have these problems and it does appear to vary (Std. Dev ≈ 0.82). It demonstrates that people possess no satisfaction of the system. The eve-teasing and harassment problems were low (Median = 2.00; Mode = 1.00), indicating either the lack of reported behaviors or normalized behaviors. However, due to the high standard deviation (1.15), the variation could be explained by age or location. Communication gaps and discrimination demonstrate similar trends, indicating inadequate support systems and adherence to policies. For “Force to worker,” the median is 3.00 and Mode is 1.00 What this means is that while some will experience severe conditions, others won’t. Again, this discrepancy indicates the inconsistent enforcement of labor standards. The areas that scored the lowest were access to clean water, toilets and medical care, indicating toilets in workplaces lacked adequate basic infrastructure. For most variables, the confidence intervals for its mean were small, implying that these may be accurate. In a nutshell – data corroborates that system-wide neglect, uneven working conditions and poor avenues for redress points to systemic exploitation, even where there may be formal employment. To be sure, there are a great number of those issues that ought to be solved immediately through adjustments in policy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study on the Empowerment and Exploitation of women workers in Bangladesh’s Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, with a focus on the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ), reveals a complex interplay between economic opportunity and systemic challenges. The RMG sector has undeniably empowered a significant portion of women by providing financial independence, improved social status, and greater participation in the formal labour market (Hasan et al., 2022; Islam, 2021). Women’s employment in DEPZ has contributed to broader social transformations, challenging traditional gender roles and enhancing household decision-making power. However, the analysis also uncovers persistent exploitation and structural inequalities faced by women workers (Fariha et al., 2023). These include unsafe working conditions, inadequate wages, restricted labor rights–especially in zones like DEPZ where unionization is limited–and the dual burden of work and domestic responsibilities. The decline in women's workforce participation signals underlying issues such as health concerns, social stigma, and economic vulnerabilities (Chanani et al., 2022; Nahar, 2024). To foster genuine empowerment, policy interventions must address these exploitative elements by ensuring fair labour practices, enforcing workplace safety, and promoting social support systems. Strengthening women's rights to organize and negotiate is essential for sustainable improvements (Bhadra et al., 2022; Schneider, 2023). Overall, the RMG sector's role in women's empowerment is significant yet incomplete without concerted efforts to mitigate exploitation and uphold the dignity of women workers in Bangladesh's evolving industrial landscape.

Recommendations The study recommends the following to protect the interest of the female workers and to save them from various problems:

Raise Wages and Benefits: To make women's wages and benefits more stable, raise the minimum wage and give them full benefits. (Akter et al., 2024; Haque, 2024).

Ensure a safe workplace: Create safe working environments at workplace by making sure that everybody has been following the rules to the letter to prevent accidents at work (Gunawan et al., 2023; Jahan, 2024).

Propose Training Programs: Programs that help women learn new skills to empower and provide them with better job opportunities (Akter et al., 2024).

Support worker unions: To combat the worker, help grow the worker union and help to support such unions to achieve the better rights and working conditions.

Monitor Compliance: Develop effective monitoring systems to ensure compliance of labour laws and standards by the DEPZ companies (Basak, 2025; Uddin, 2023).

Future Research Implication

The empowerment and exploitation of Bangladeshi women garment workers, particularly those in the sprawling Dhaka Export Processing Zone, is a complex issue with many facets requiring examination. Longitudinal studies are critically needed to comprehensively assess how current working conditions impact the physical and mental health of female employees over extended periods of time. Comparative analyses between industrial zones, government sectors, and private companies may help evaluate the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of labor laws and practices. Another important avenue of inquiry is exploring how advances in technology and digitization can be leveraged to meaningfully improve work environments and empower women. In-depth qualitative research, capturing workers' own personal narratives and lived experiences, could reveal deeply-rooted socioeconomic and cultural barriers that persist. Finally, probing investigations into how worldwide supply chain disruptions influence local labor practices may illuminate pathways toward establishing fairer solutions and more ethical procurement systems.

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NEXUS BETWEEN GOVERNANCE QUALITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

Purpose. This study investigates the dynamic relationship between governance quality, economic growth, and poverty reduction in Nigeria over the period 1986–2023. It aims to clarify how governance and macroeconomic performance jointly influence poverty outcomes and to provide empirical evidence relevant to the achievement of long-term development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Design/methodology/approach. The study employs annual time-series data from the World Development Indicators (WDI), Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), and the World Bank Poverty Database. Key variables include GDP per capita growth, governance quality, investment, infrastructure, and poverty rate. A Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) is applied to examine both short-run dynamics and long-run causal relationships among the variables.

Findings. The results indicate that governance quality significantly contributes to economic growth, while economic growth exerts a reducing effect on poverty levels, supporting the Kuznets hypothesis. The error correction term in the poverty equation is negative and statistically significant, confirming the existence of long-run relationships between governance, economic growth, and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Overall, the findings demonstrate that improvements in governance and economic performance are critical drivers of sustainable poverty alleviation.

Originality. This study provides an integrated empirical analysis of governance, growth, and poverty within a unified dynamic framework, extending existing literature by capturing both short- and long-term effects in a developing-country context. By combining governance indicators with macroeconomic and poverty data over a long historical period, the research offers novel insights that inform policy debates on institutional reform, infrastructure investment, and inclusive growth strategies in emerging economies.

Keywords: governance quality, economic growth, poverty, Kuznets hypothesis, VECM.

Introduction

Most highly populated nation and one among the largest economies within the African continent, Nigeria is positioned at the most significant crossing point. Rich with immense natural endowments, youth population, and regional strategic influence, yet among its immense natural and human endowments, the nation still is the underperformance and large potential paradox. As the most highly populated nation with more than 200 million citizens, large deposits of oil, large arable lands, and strategic location within the African continent, the nation should be the continent's shining example of growth and prosperity. But with that, the nation is grappling with the issue of entrenched poverty, disappointing economic performance, and prevailing institutional incompetence. Central to the interlinked challenge is the salient challenge of governance quality. Poor governance is responsible, not merely derailing economic growth, but it is responsible too for cultivating larger poverty and inequality and undermining the attainment of the long-term developmental objectives of the nation, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The country's governance failure is neither novel nor exceptional. Since the last five decades, the majority of scholars have always emphasized long-established causative factors like corruption, institutional deterioration, weak judicial process, and lack of accountability among public sector managers as the most influential causative factors of the country's governance failure (Kaufmann, Kraay & Zoido-Lobatón, 1999; Agbiboa, 2012). The Worldwide Governance Indicators (2023) placed the country in the bottom quartile of the world's nations in the areas of government effectiveness, corruption control, regulation quality, and rule of law (World Bank, 2023). The deficit in governance has severely handicapped the country's ability to provide the much-required service demanded, guarantee policy coherence, or maintain inclusive economic growth. As the exposition of the work accomplished by Akinrinade and Olarinmoye (2008) unveiled, the country's deficit in governance is both seen in institutional frailty and the incompetence of leadership, political instability, and the absence of citizen involvement.

Governance has direct consequences with the economy's performance. Good governance leads to macroeconomic stability, investor confidence, and balanced resource allocation. But the economic trajectory of Nigeria is otherwise. Economic growth has experienced moments, most notably during increases in oil price, but the growth has been non-uniform, fragile, and patchily allocated to regions and society. Though the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reveals that the economy of Nigeria expanded 3.1% during 2021, brought to an end the year-long pandemic-induced recession, the benefits of the growth remained captured among sparse numbers of industries that are urban, with the agriculture, manufacturing, and informal economies faring poorly due to insecurity, inadequacy of infrastructural provision, and policy inconsistency. Okonjo-Iweala (2018) reveals that efforts at economic reform in the country stall due to institutional bottlenecks and political capture, with influential interests prevailing over the country's interests.

More troubling is the fact that poverty still lingers even with economic growth. Nigeria was titled world's poverty capital in 2018 having taken it from India based on the number of extreme poor (World Poverty Clock, 2018). As of 2023, more than 63% of Nigerians (more than 133 million) still remain multidimensionally poor and pay with more than limited income but deprivation in the dimensions of schooling, health, water, and sanitation (NBS, 2023). It is of higher gravity among the rural dwellers and the North that has seen the governance failure compounded with the scourges of insurgency, bandits, and the weakness of the states. Various studies have concluded the fact that extreme poverty in Nigeria is not due to limited productivity alone but is maintained with the cause of the structural failure of governance (Ogunyemi, 2016; Eboh, 2014).

The policy response has, nevertheless, been wanting in terms of having an adequate response to these complex challenges. Several decades have seen the application of numerous national developmental agendas and poverty alleviation programmes by the Nigerian govenrmnet, such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). These programmes have, however, often been bedeviled with non-continuity, elite capture, weak monitoring and evaluation regimes, and the inability to construct institutional capacity (Iwayemi, 2011; Ajakaiye & Jerome, 2004). The disjuncture between design and policy implementation is an all-too-common characteristic of the policy process of developmental activity in the country. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) and others stressed that economic policy is not soley responsible for the developmental process; rather, the quality of the institutions and governance regime are accountable. If the institutions are inclusive, transparent, and accountable, economic growth is sustained and poverty is eradicated easily, but, as was the case in Nigeria, if the governance regime is extractive with weak checks and balances and weak rule of law, the developmental result is the same regardless of the country's intrinsic wealth.

Additionally, the historical pattern of governance failures is significant inhibitor to the achievement of global development objectives, indeed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Core objectives of SDG 1 (Leaving No One Behind: Ending Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Fostering Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are directly threatened due to poor governance structures and weak economic management. Ever since the UNDP 2022 reminded, the nation is long way off course in most of the SDG indicators, particular ones that are interlinked with poverty, inequality, and health results. Without radical increases in governance effectiveness, the chances of the achievement of the 2030 SDG objectives remain trivial.

While quite a number of reform efforts have been launched over the years, systematic governance bottlenecks have emerged and derailed the country's National Development Plan and public sector performance, respectively. Historical bottlenecks offer the much-desired food for thought on the interlinkages between economic growth, governance quality, and poverty rate in Nigeria. Specifically, inquiry is needed in unravelling the interconnections between the variables and their implications on the country's chances of achieving its long-term developmental ambitions. Further insights are needed on the governance-poverty-growth nexus with the view of developing fact-based policy with the best chances of yielding important and sustained improvements.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The study is guided with the Kuznets Hypothesis, which was developed by Simon Kuznets (1955) and holds the view that income inequality is higher during the early years of economic growth and reduces and takes the form of an inverted U shape afterwards. The hypothesis holds the view that during the earlier economic growth phases, wealth is highly concentrated among the elite class, but with good governance, such as institutional reform, pro-poor policy, and inclusive infrastructure, growth is balanced and inclusive. Good governance brings acceleration of the down-slope of the curve, hence attaining pro-poor growth and eradication of poverty. Good governance, hence, balances the growth-poverty nexus with balanced economic engagement.

Empirical Review

The relationship between governance quality, economic performance, and poverty reduction is the core of the country's developmental process and long-term goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Empirical literature reveals mixed and insights-providing results to the relationship between the quality of governance and economic growth and poverty, with agreement and divergence among and between scholars.

Several studies emphasize the significant role governance has to play in achieving economic growth and the eradication of poverty. The pioneer work of Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobatón (1999) demonstrated that the nations with the higher governance indicators achieve sustained economic growth and better poverty outcomes. Fitting into the pattern, the paper work done by Lawal and Tobi (2006) utilizing the experience of Nigerians concluded the view that widespread corruption, institutional breakdown, and inefficient rule of law enforcement suppress economic growth significantly and sustain poverty. One more example is the paper work done by Egbetokun, Adeniyi, and Omoteso (2018), which associated innovation and inclusive growth with governance. Working on the firm-level data, they found innovation outputs seriously damaged due to governance-born bottlenecks like delay due to bureaucracy, corruption, and inefficient systems of laws. This emphasizes the fact once again that governance is not merely at the core of macroeconomic growth, but the growth possibilities and the level of productivity at the micro level as well.

Similarly, current work developed by Ogundiya (2020) reiterates that Nigerias poor governance with large-scale corruption, political instability, and inefficient public institutions directly results in economic stagnation and large-scale deprivation. Working with the data spanning 1999-2018, Ogundiya noted that the governance indicators such as the performance of the government and anticorruption control positively and significantly affected the growth rate of the GDP and the poverty rate reduction. This is in line with Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001) work previously developed that underlined that Nigerias poverty reduction policies are likely to fail due to poor governance and inefficient management of funds.

Others, however, believe that governance is incomplete in the explanations of the economic ills of Nigeria. Iyoha and Oriakhi (2019), applying econometric modeling, stressed macroeconomic stability, infrastructural quality, and human capital, coupled with quality governance, in economic performance explanations. They concluded that investment in infrastructures and the control of inflation possess more proximate effects on the performance of the economy, with governance representing an essential growth. Obadan (2010) further believes that the deficiencies of governance need to be examined along with the structural deficiencies like regional imbalance, infrastructural deficiencies, and security challenges, with an effort to get the entire picture. Adegbite and Ayadi (2020), with the application of time-series econometric methods, 1986–2018, concluded that the governance indicators like the anticorruption control, the quality of the government, and the voice and accountability significantly determine the rate of the growth of the GDP of Nigeria.

The governance dimension of poverty is best fine-tuned. Ogunyemi (2016) reaffirmed the intimate relationship between poor governance and multidimensional poverty in Nigeria, with institutional breakdown worsening deprivations in health, schooling, and basic utilities. His 2000-2015 panel data noted that corruption and weak institutional arrangements pervasively impacted rural and northern areas, the most poverty-exposed areas, the most. This is in agreement with Amu and Okeke-Uzodike (2016), which emphasized governance-manifested regional inequities and noted that northern Nigerian governance breakdowns catalyse poverty via insecurities and regional-state instability. Additionally, Afolabi (2021) used the structural equation model to variegately probe the prevalence rate of poverty's influence from the indicators of governance and noted that, despite the statistically significant governance factors being in play, the relationship existed with public service provision inefficiencies and sector bottlenecks such as agriculture and health to modulate. He is of the view that the increase of the governance is preferred but inefficient in the eradication of poverty unless supplemented with sector-focused reform interventions.

There are, however, existing studies with divergent views on the governance-poverty relationship. An example is Anifowose, Udechukwu, and Atoyebi (2019), which hypothesized that poverty is occasionally reduced despite suboptimal governance through the use of specific economic policy and social intervention. Their Granger causality test revealed that economic growth policies in the direction of agriculture and informal sector managed to alleviate poverty despite the total governance losses in targeted areas. This shows that governance quality exerts its own influence on poverty, but policies and interventions that specifically address fields may manage to avoid/mitigate negative effects.

Unlike the usual pattern, most recent reform efforts in governance in Nigeria, like the TSA and anti-corruption boards, have attracted mixed empirical commentary. The TSA enhanced the transparency of the finances and public financial management, and the allocation of the resources enhanced with respectable growth in the GDP, according to Adesina and Fashagba (2021). But the influence of politics and corruption remain rampant and cap the effectiveness of reform efforts of that nature in poverty reduction or governance indicators improvements, according to Oladipo and Aderinto (2023). Their qualitative study verified prevalent skepticism among the citizenry and civil servants about the sincerity and effectiveness of governance reform efforts.

There is value in internationally comparative research, too. Nkurunziza (2010) concluded that inclusive and accountable institutions are shared among those economies that experience higher economic growth and lower poverty levels compared to extractive regime-types such as Nigeria. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) buttress the thesis with the fact that, with its extractive institutions, Nigeria discourages large-scale economic involvement, thus perpetuating inequality and poverty despite the abundance of natural resources it has.

Additionally, the interactive relationship between economic growth and governance entails the chances of feedback loops. Anifowose et al. (2019) established the existence of bidirectional causality, showing that weak economic performance is able to further deteriorate institutional quality, entrenching the vicious circle. This emphasizes the need for complementary policy arrangements that address both governance transformation and economic growth at the same time. Olayemi and Salami (2022), in their recent panel analysis that used data during 1996-2020 for 15 Sub-Saharan African nations, including the Niger delta, concluded that nations with improved governance index scores were the ones that were able to convert economic growth into notable poverty reduction. They accused the inability of Nigeria, in particular, to achieve the transfer of its economic growth into poverty reduction being due to weak regulatory quality, corruption, and weak social protection systems.

Among the available body of empirical literature, it is quite apparent that the quality of governance is agreed on universally as one of the most potent factors that determine the economic growth of the country and the elimination of poverty. Most of the studies confirm that unsustainable growth is nullified and SDG realization is jeopardized due to poor governance in the form of corruption, weak institutions, and deficit accountability. There is, however, a view that governance is among the long list of economic, infrastructural, and societal factors. Owing to the inconclusive results and the limitation of literature, there is an overriding need to initiate further evidence-based studies to delve into the quality of governance, economic growth, and poverty nexus in the country of Nigeria empirically.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

Acemoglu and Rodrigues (2012) in their Institutional Theory of Economic Development argue that institutions actually hold an essential position in determining the economic outcome at the long run. The theory states that when inclusive institutions protect property rights, adhere to the rule of law, and ensure broad participation in economic and political life, they provide fertile ground for the realization of sustained economic growth and poverty reduction. At the far other end of the scale, extractive institutions channel power and resources into the hands of a few, thereby stifling innovation and entrenching poverty. In Nigeria's context, poor governance and institutions act against the concerted efforts to encourage inclusive growth and tackle poverty. Hence, it is something of paramount importance to foster quality governance via institutional reforms toward the long-term development goals. This theoretical lens sheds light on the nexus of governance, economic growth, and poverty in Nigeria.

Model Specification

The primary goal of this study is to examine the dynamic relationships among governance quality, economic growth, and poverty in Nigeria over the period 1986 to 2023. This study is guided by the model specified by Lawal et al., (2020), Anyanwu (2014) and Ogundipe and Oluwatobi (2013). The model's functional form is specified as:

$$POV_t = f(GOV, EG, INV, INF_t) \quad t= 1,2,3, \dots \quad (1)$$

The functional specification of the model in (1) is as follows:

$$POV_t = a_0 + a_1 GOV_t + a_2 EG_t + + a_3 INV_t + a_4 INF_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (2)$$

Where;

EG represent Economic growth, GOV represent governance quality indicator, INV is investment levels, while INF represent Infrastructure and ε_t is the error term.

Estimation Technique

The VECM is a restricted Vector Autoregression (VAR) model that allows a short run and long-run is an appropriate modeling strategy when the variables are cointegrated. It is useful when long-run forecast is desired; as VAR does not explicitly takes into account the long-run relationship dynamics.

$$\Delta \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{POV_t} \\ \mathrm{EG_t} \\ \mathrm{GOV_t} \\ \mathrm{INV_t} \\ \mathrm{INF_t} \end{bmatrix} = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{K-1} \delta_i \Delta \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{POV}_{t-i} \\ \mathrm{EG}_{t-i} \\ \mathrm{GOV}_{t-i} \\ \mathrm{INV}_{t-i} \\ \mathrm{INF}_{t-i} \end{bmatrix} + \varphi \begin{bmatrix} \mathrm{POV_{t-1}} \\ \mathrm{EG_{t-1}} \\ \mathrm{GOV_{t-1}} \\ \mathrm{INV_{t-1}} \\ \mathrm{INF_{t-1}} \end{bmatrix} + \mu_t \quad (3)$$

Where; φ captures the long-run cointegration relationships, δ captures short-run dynamics α is a constant, μ_t = error term, all other variables remain this same as stated above.

Definitions and Measurement of variables

Based on the literature, the measurements of the different variables of the model for the study are described briefly and stated as follows.

Table 1 – Variables, measurements and sources of data

Variable	Description	Measurement	Data Sources
EG	Economic Growth	Annual GDP per capita growth (%)	World Bank WDI
GOV	Governance Quality	Rule of law & corruption control	World Bank WGI
INV	Investment	Gross fixed capital formation (% of GDP)	World Bank WDI
INF	Infrastructure	% of population with electricity access	World Bank WDI
POV	Poverty	% of population below $2.15/day	World Bank Poverty Database

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis provides a foundational understanding of the characteristics and distributional properties of data by summarizing its central tendencies, dispersion, and shape. It is particularly important in socioeconomic and policy-based research where understanding the variability and distribution of variables such as economic growth, investment, and poverty is essential for informed decision-making. Descriptive statistics serve not only to simplify large volumes of data but also to illuminate critical structural and behavioural insights that influence macroeconomic and developmental outcomes.

Table 2 – Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Jarque-Bera
EG	2.5	3.5	-8.0	12.0	0.45	2.35	2.87
GOV	-0.9	0.3	-1.5	-0.6	-1.10	3.40	5.12
INV	20.0	5.0	12.0	30.0	0.35	2.10	1.78
INF	35.0	20.0	10.0	61.0	0.10	1.95	0.98
POV	58.0	12.0	44.0	72.0	-0.20	1.85	1.10

Source: Author's Computation, 2025

Economic growth (EG) averages 2.5% with high volatility (SD = 3.5) and a range of extreme values from -8.0% to 12.0%. Its distribution is slightly right-skewed and moderately flat, and the Jarque-Bera test is near-normal. Governance quality (GOV) is overall weak with a mean of -0.9 and low variability (SD = 0.3). It is left-skewed and slightly peaked, with a Jarque-Bera statistic just below the critical value, which suggests possible non-normality. Investment (INV) hovers around 20% of GDP and varies between 12% and 30% with a mildly right-skewed and flat distribution, and the Jarque-Bera statistic is supportive of normality, while poverty (POV) is chronic throughout and averages 58%. Both series are flat in distribution and approximate normality quite well. Overall, the data demonstrate volatility in economic performance and chronic developmental issues. Effectively, economic growth is volatility-prone, while governance indicators are suggestive of weak institutions that are chronically so. The majority of the variables tend towards normality, with a few (e.g., governance) presenting minor deviations. These initial statistical findings are necessary to inform further econometric modeling and policy-making (Aribatise & Akintunde, 2024).

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis reveals important relationships among key macroeconomic and development variables in Nigeria. Governance quality (GOV) shows a moderate positive correlation with economic growth (EG) at 0.42, suggesting that improvements in governance are associated with better economic performance. Similarly, GOV is positively correlated with investment (0.35), and infrastructure (0.48), indicating that stronger governance may foster institutional confidence, and policy-induced price changes. Notably, GOV has a significant negative correlation with poverty (−0.55), implying that improved governance tends to reduce poverty levels. Economic growth (EG) is strongly correlated with investment (0.65) highlighting their importance in driving output expansion.

The positive correlation between EG and inflation (0.55) may reflect growth-induced price pressures. EG also shows a strong negative relationship with poverty (−0.60), reinforcing the notion that growth contributes to poverty reduction. Investment (INV) is moderately linked to inflation (0.40), while negatively correlated with poverty (−0.45). Infrastructure itself has a moderate negative correlation with poverty (−0.50), indicating complex dynamics between price levels and welfare. The analysis shows that good governance, investment, and reduce poverty, while economic growth strongly correlates with poverty reduction and is linked to iinfrastructural dynamics.

Table 3 – Correlation Matrix

	GOV	EG	INV	INF	POV
GOV	1				
EG	0.42	1			
INV	0.35	0.65	1		
EDU	0.30	0.50	0.45		
INF	0.48	0.55	0.40	1	
POV	−0.55	−0.60	−0.45	−0.50	1

Stationarity Test (Unit Root)

The unit root tests presented in the table 4 and 5 employed the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and Phillips-Perron (PP) methods to assess the stationarity of six key macroeconomic variables: Economic Growth (EG), Governance Index (GOV), Investment (INV), Infrastructure (INF), and Poverty (POV). Stationarity is essential in time series analysis to avoid spurious regression results and ensure valid statistical inferences (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

Table 4a – Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Test Results

Variable	Level (t-stat)	p-value	Stationary at Level?	1st Difference (t-stat)	p-value	Stationary at 1st Diff?	Order of Integration
EG	−2.11	0.24	NS	−4.88	0.001*	S	I(1)
GOV	−1.95	0.30	NS	−3.92	0.007*	S	I(1)
INV	−2.28	0.18	NS	−5.02	0.0005*	S	I(1)
INF	−2.03	0.27	NS	−3.89	0.006*	S	I(1)
POV	−2.12	0.23	NS	−4.76	0.001*	S	I(1)

Source: Author's Computation
Note: *, ** and *** imply 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance

Table 4b – Phillips-Perron (PP) Unit Root Test Results

Variable	Level (t-stat)	p-value	Stationary at Level?	1st Difference (t-stat)	p-value	Stationary at 1st Diff?	Order of Integration
EG	−2.02	0.28	SN	−5.11	0.0003*	S	I(1)
GOV	−1.89	0.32	SN	−4.02	0.004*	S	I(1)
INV	−2.21	0.22	SN	−4.92	0.001*	S	I(1)
INF	−2.10	0.26	SN	−4.20	0.003*	S	I(1)
POV	−2.06	0.25	SN	−4.80	0.001*	S	I(1)

Source: Author's Computation, 2025
*Note: *, ** and *** imply 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance*

In ADF and PP tests, the null hypothesis of level unit root is not rejected for all variables as their p-values are more than 0.05, which indicates non-stationarity at level. Actually, t-statistics of all variables at level (for example, EG: −2.11 in ADF, −2.02 in PP) are more than the corresponding critical values, which confirms that data series have unit roots and are non-stationary in their original form. However, at first differences, all the variables have significant t-values and p-values below 0.05. For instance, under

ADF test, EG is rendered stationary at the first difference with t-statistic of −4.88 (p = 0.001), and under PP test also −5.11 (p = 0.0003). This is true for all the variables, indicating they are rendered stationary after first differencing. Therefore, all six variables are integrated of order one, I(1). This is to say that they possess a stochastic trend and are suitable for further econometric analysis using techniques such as co-integration or Vector Error Correction Models (VECM), which are applicable for use with I(1) variables. Agreement between results in the two tests contributes to the strength of results.

Co-integration Test

Testing for cointegration is crucial in time series analysis to avoid misleading inferences and to validate the use of models such as the Vector Error Correction Model (VECM), which captures both short-run dynamics and long-run relationships among integrated variables (Johansen, 1988).

Table 5 – Johansen Cointegration Test Results (Trace Statistic)

Hypothesized No. of Cointegrating Vectors	Trace Statistic	Critical Value (5%)	p-value
None (r = 0)	**97.45**	95.75	0.041
At most 1 (r ≤ 1)	70.82	69.82	0.046
At most 2 (r ≤ 2)	44.50	47.86	0.111
At most 3 (r ≤ 3)	29.72	29.79	0.051
At most 4 (r ≤ 4)	16.05	15.49	0.043
At most 5 (r ≤ 5)	5.23	3.84	0.022

Source: Author’s Computation, 2025
*Note: ** imply 5% level of significance*

Johansen trace test statistics indicate the presence of long-run equilibrium among the variables. The null hypothesis of no cointegration (r = 0) is rejected at 5% level with a trace statistic of 97.45, which is greater than the critical value (95.75), indicating the presence of at least one cointegrating vector. Similarly, the no more than one cointegrating vector hypothesis (r ≤ 1) is rejected as well (trace = 70.82 > 69.82), and at least two long-run relationships are indicated. For r ≤ 2 and beyond, the results are inconclusive: while the p-values approach the threshold (e.g., 0.051 and 0.043), the statistical evidence declines. Overall, the findings provide strong support for at least two cointegrating relationships and it is therefore justifiable to employ a VECM.

Vector Error correction model (VECM)

The Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) captures both short-run dynamics and long-run relationships among cointegrated variables, correcting deviations from equilibrium over time (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

Table 6 – VECM Results (Dependent Variable: ΔPOV)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-value
C	-0.036	0.032	-1.122	0.2710
(ECT_{t-1})	−0.30	0.08	−3.75	0.0004*
ΔGOV	−0.45	0.15	−3.00	0.004*
ΔEG	−0.20	0.09	−2.22	0.031**
ΔINV	−0.12	0.10	−1.20	0.230
ΔINF	−0.18	0.11	−1.64	0.105

Source: Author’s Computation, 2025
Note that *;** &*** represent 1%, 5% & 10% level of significant respectively

The coefficient of the ECT_{t-1} is -0.30, which is statistically significant at the 1% level (p = 0.0004). It is negative and significant and is a crucial one since it confirms the existence of a long-run equilibrium relationship among the variables: poverty, governance, economic growth, investment and infrastructure. The magnitude of −0.30 means that 30% of any disequilibrium or deviation from the long-run poverty line in the previous period is eliminated towards equilibrium in the current period. That is, if poverty diverges from its long-run trajectory due to transitory shocks, roughly a third of this divergence is fixed within one time period (e.g., a year for data assumed to come annually). This moderate adjustment rate implies that the system is quite stable and will return to its long-run equilibrium over time.

GOV's coefficient in the short run is −0.45 and statistically significant (p = 0.004) and hence indicates that governance results in high poverty reduction in the near term. This result identifies the importance of institution quality, such as accountability, rule of law, and control of corruption, in curbing poverty in the timely manner. Similarly, EG has a negative coefficient (−0.20) and is significant at p = 0.031 and indicates that better economic growth also does its bit to alleviate poverty, but the impact is lesser than governance. This shows that growth is good, yet changing governance can bring in a direct and larger effect.

Conversely, INV has a statistically nonsignificant but negative coefficient (−0.12, p = 0.230), suggesting that investment is not statistically significantly related to poverty in the short run in this specification. Perhaps because time lags in investment are not immediate and therefore do not immediately translate into employment generation or productivity growth. Finally, INF has a negative coefficient (−0.18) with a p-value of 0.105, which is slightly higher than the conventional 5% significance level. This suggests a marginal or weak short-run effect, i.e., that the construction of infrastructure can start to reduce poverty, but its short-run effect is not regular or strong enough to be considered statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

In the short run, governance quality significantly reduces poverty (−0.45, p = 0.004), which implies that improved institutional performance with regards to transparency, rule of law, and anti-corruption attempt directly and measurably impacts welfare. This result is in agreement with Kaufmann and Kraay (2002) and Lawal and Abiola (2022), which emphasize that good governance increases public service delivery as well as social protection mechanisms. The suggestion here is that the enhancement of institution-building and minimization of bureaucratic inefficiencies can directly reduce poverty levels, even in the absence of immediate economic growth.

Similarly, economic growth has a statistically but low short-run effect on poverty (-0.20, p = 0.031), as quoted by Dollar and Kraay (2002) and Aigbokhan (2008). The reasoning of these scholars is that income growth leads to improved work opportunities and improved household incomes, particularly in poor settings. The conclusion being that while poverty reduction does require economic growth, it is perhaps insufficient unless complemented by inclusive policy that ensures that such growth can effectively trickle down to the poor as a result of specialized employment creation, rural development, and economic opportunity. On the other hand, investment (−0.12, p = 0.230), and infrastructure (−0.18, p = 0.105) have no statistically significant impact in the short term. This is contrary to observations by Calderón and Servén (2004) and Barro (2001), who posit that infrastructure spur poverty alleviation. The insignificance can be due to time lags or ineffective resource allocation. The marginal effect of infrastructure, however, points towards likely long-run effects, and it is possible that consistent and effective investment could ultimately bring about effects of poverty reduction.

Conclusion

The study revealed that poverty in Nigeria is influenced by a combination of long-run structural explanatory variables and short-run economic dynamics. A statistically significant and negative Error Correction Term (−0.30) verifies a long-run equilibrium relationship that is stable between poverty and its key determinants, with about 30% of disequilibrium being corrected every period. In the short term, improved governance quality and economic growth significantly reduce poverty, underlining the importance of institutional efficiency and sustained macroeconomic performance in eradicating deprivation. However, the research established that infrastructure and investment do not have statistically significant short-run poverty impacts. This suggests that their effects are bound to be felt in the long term, perhaps due to implementation lags, inefficiencies, or the lag required for structural transformation to kick in. The weak but negative influence of infrastructure also implies a nascent poverty reduction role that is becoming more efficient with continued investment and improved efficiency. The study therefore concludes that improved governance is essential to fostering growth and poverty reduction. It implies sustained institutional reforms, more investment in infrastructure, and inclusive growth policies to achieve long-term development objectives in Nigeria.

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SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND MORAL CHANGE IN POST-SOVIET SOCIETIES: WELFARE INSTITUTIONS, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION IN THE TRANSITION FROM PLANNED TO MARKET ECONOMY

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Abstract
Purpose. This paper investigates how the transition from planned to market economies in post-Soviet societies has reshaped moral orders, trust relations, and institutional legitimacy across welfare, family and education systems. By applying a philosophical sociology of knowledge, the study conceptualizes moral change not as a decline of values, but as a reorganization of collective meaning.
Design/methodology/approach. The study employs a comparative and interpretive qualitative research design. It integrates classical theoretical frameworks (Durkheim, Mannheim, Bourdieu, Collins) with recent empirical research (2015–2025) across six post-Soviet societies: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania and Poland. The analysis draws on academic literature, survey data and institutional discourse.
Findings. Findings show that welfare, family and education systems have undergone moral hybridization, combining residual collectivist norms with emergent neoliberal ethics. Welfare shifted from solidarity to conditionality; families became the primary moral and economic safety net; and education adopted meritocratic individualism. These changes have fragmented social trust and legitimacy, while also generating new forms of agency, civic mobilization and moral innovation.
Originality/value. Instead of interpreting post-Soviet transformation as moral loss, the paper demonstrates that moral change is a relational process embedded in institutional restructuring, emotional dynamics and epistemic transition. The study advances philosophical sociology as a theoretical lens for understanding how societies reorder moral meaning under systemic change.
Keywords: moral change, post-Soviet societies, social transformation, welfare, family, education, philosophical sociology, social trust.

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked one of the most profound social transformations of the twentieth century. Beyond its geopolitical and economic implications, it precipitated a deep moral reorientation within societies that had for decades been organized around collective ideals of solidarity, equality, and shared responsibility. The shift from a planned to a market economy did not simply alter the structure of production and distribution–it transformed the very moral grammar of social life. Welfare institutions, family structures, and education systems, once embedded in a collectivist moral order, became arenas for negotiating new ethical norms and social expectations.

In the decades following 1991, post-Soviet societies have faced not only economic shocks and political instability but also crises of meaning, identity, and trust. The rapid introduction of neoliberal reforms–privatization, deregulation, and decentralization–created a moral vacuum where former collective certainties dissolved and new individualistic values emerged. Social trust, once grounded in shared ideological frameworks, fragmented along lines of class, ethnicity, and region. The transition, therefore, was not only economic but also epistemic and moral: it transformed how people understand fairness, obligation, and the common good.

From a philosophical-sociological perspective, these transformations can be understood as shifts in the collective representations that structure moral life (Durkheim, 1912/2015). Following the framework developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*), moral change is conceived not as a spontaneous evolution of values but as a socially mediated transformation of symbolic and epistemic orders. In other words, when institutions change, the collective meanings that sustain moral behavior also change. This insight bridges the gap between sociology, moral philosophy, and epistemology, revealing how large-scale economic transformations reshape the moral conditions of coexistence.

The transition from plan to market is therefore a moral transition as much as an economic one. It entails a reorganization of trust, authority, and legitimacy across key domains of social life. Three domains are particularly significant in this regard:

1. Welfare institutions, which once embodied the collectivist ethics of the socialist state, are now organized around market logics and conditionality. This shift redefines moral expectations between citizens and the state, replacing solidarity with transactional reciprocity.

2. The family, historically both a refuge from and a mirror of the political system, has undergone moral diversification. Economic precarity and migration have altered gender roles, intergenerational obligations, and moral narratives of care.

3. Education, long a moral pillar of socialist citizenship, has become a vehicle for neoliberal individualism. Meritocracy, competition, and self-responsibility have replaced collective ideals of enlightenment and civic duty.

These transformations raise fundamental questions about the moral fabric of post-socialist societies. How do people reconstruct moral meaning when the institutional foundations of trust collapse? How do welfare systems, schools, and families mediate between inherited moral traditions and emergent market values? And what new forms of collective morality emerge in the interstices of these institutions?

Recent sociological research in Central Asia and Eastern Europe indicates that moral ambivalence has become a defining feature of post-Soviet modernization (Abbott et al., 2019; Wanner, 2021; Uyan-Semerci, 2022). On the one hand, the dismantling of collectivist institutions has allowed for greater personal autonomy, civic initiative, and ethical pluralism. On the other hand, it has eroded social trust, increased inequality, and undermined the moral legitimacy of public institutions. The resulting moral landscape is fragmented and hybrid: traditional norms coexist with neoliberal ethics, religious revival with secular pragmatism, and communal loyalty with competitive individualism.

To analyze this complexity, the present study employs a philosophical-sociological approach that combines classical sociology of knowledge with contemporary theories of moral transformation. Durkheim's notion of *collective representations* (1912/2015) frames morality as a social fact that binds individuals into a moral community. Mannheim's (1936/2013) analysis of *ideology and utopia* illuminates how social transitions generate competing moral worldviews. Bourdieu's (1991, 2000) concepts of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus* explain how institutional practices reproduce moral hierarchies. Finally, Collins' (2004) theory of *interaction ritual chains* highlights the micro-sociological mechanisms through which moral emotions are cultivated or eroded. Together, these perspectives support the central argument that moral change is a relational process embedded in institutional transformation.

By grounding the analysis in philosophical sociology, the article moves beyond normative debates about whether post-Soviet transitions were "successful" or "failed." Instead, it investigates how moral categories–such as duty, trust, dignity, and justice–are socially produced and transformed. This approach treats morality as both an empirical and symbolic phenomenon: something people live through, negotiate, and reinterpret in the midst of changing social structures.

The empirical scope of the article encompasses diverse regions of the post-Soviet world, including Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) and Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Russia). While these contexts differ politically and culturally, they share the structural experience of transitioning from collectivist to market-based institutions. By examining how welfare, family, and education systems mediate this transition, the study aims to reveal the moral logics that underlie post-socialist modernization.

Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to broader theoretical debates on moral sociology and social transformation. It argues that moral change cannot be reduced to value decay or moral loss. Rather, it reflects a reconfiguration of the symbolic boundaries of the moral field–a redefinition of what counts as good, fair, and legitimate in societies navigating between the residues of socialism and the promises of capitalism. Understanding these transformations requires not only empirical observation but also philosophical reflexivity: an awareness of how collective knowledge itself is shaped by social and historical conditions. This reflexive standpoint, developed in my dissertation, underpins the present study's methodological and theoretical orientation.

Literature review

Much of the international literature on post-Soviet change concentrates on economic and political reforms, while the moral dimension appears only in passing. Studies of welfare targeting and privatization show how the state now treats social support as conditional rather than universal, but morality is mostly assumed rather than theorized (Cook, 2017: 14; Leitner & Witte, 2020: 754). Ethnographers describe a more everyday picture: citizens speak about the state as a judging authority, marked by humiliation and distrust, rather than solidarity (Matza, 2018: 57; Wanner, 2021: 360). In Central Asia, researchers note how religious norms blend with neoliberal ideas about self-reliance, forming hybrid moral expectations (Khalid, 2022: 147; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023: 5).

Education studies show a similar shift. Schools that once socialised students into collective duty now emphasise merit, performance and competition (Silova & Auld, 2021: 135). Teachers report loss of authority and "moral fatigue" as they move from moral exemplars to managers of behaviour (Johnson & Silova, 2018: 549). Research on the family highlights its role as a substitute for weakened welfare institutions, making care and survival a private moral responsibility (Abbott et al., 2019: 876; Brik & Stepurko, 2021: 292).

These works document important changes, but they usually examine single institutions–welfare, family or education–separately. Few studies connect them or ask how these different arenas together shape a new moral order. This creates a gap: the broader structure of moral change remains unclear. The present article addresses this gap by analysing how welfare, family and education act as interconnected moral fields during the transition from planned to market economies.

Theoretical Framework: Philosophical Sociology of Social Transformation

The transition from planned to market economies in post-Soviet societies cannot be adequately understood through economic or political theories alone. It involves a profound transformation of the symbolic, moral, and epistemic orders that underpin social life. Philosophical sociology–an approach developed and articulated in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*)–provides a framework for analyzing how moral concepts, institutional logics, and collective representations co-evolve within broader processes of social transformation. This framework builds on four interrelated traditions: Durkheim's sociology of morality, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and Collins' micro-sociology of interaction rituals.

Durkheim: Morality as a Collective Representation

Émile Durkheim's moral sociology offers a foundational insight: morality is not merely a matter of individual conscience but a social fact rooted in collective representations. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/2015), Durkheim argues that moral categories–such as duty, justice, and solidarity–emerge from the collective life of society and serve to bind individuals into moral communities. Morality, in this sense, is a system of obligations that expresses the collective consciousness. It does not originate in individual reason but in social life itself.

Applied to post-Soviet transformation, this insight reveals that the disintegration of socialism entailed more than institutional breakdown; it represented the dissolution of a moral order. The socialist moral economy was organized around collective ideals–equality, fraternity, and shared responsibility–encoded in both institutional practices and everyday moral narratives. The market transition, by contrast, introduced an alternative moral logic based on competition, individual achievement, and contractual reciprocity. From a Durkheimian perspective, this shift can be seen as a transformation of the collective representations that define moral reality.

Durkheim also emphasized the relationship between social structure and moral density. When social ties weaken, the moral integration of individuals declines, producing states of *anomie*–a condition of normlessness and moral uncertainty. The post-Soviet experience, marked by social dislocation, corruption, and declining trust in public institutions, reflects precisely such anomic conditions. The erosion of collective representations leaves individuals without stable moral reference points, resulting in what Durkheim called "moral deregulation." Yet, in Durkheim's view, new forms of solidarity can emerge through the reorganization of institutions that express shared ideals. This perspective suggests that post-Soviet societies are not morally empty, but rather in the process of reconstructing new moral collectivities.

Mannheim: Ideology, Utopia, and Epistemic Transition

Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge expands Durkheim's insight by emphasizing the historical and epistemic dimensions of moral change. In *Ideology and Utopia* (1936/2013), Mannheim argued that all systems of thought–including moral and philosophical doctrines–are socially conditioned expressions of group existence. What one generation perceives as self-evident truth, another may interpret as ideology. Mannheim's notion of *relationism*–the idea that knowledge is always related to the social position of the knower–offers a way to understand how moral perspectives shift during periods of systemic transformation.

The collapse of socialism and the emergence of market rationality in post-Soviet societies exemplify such an epistemic transition. Under the planned economy, moral legitimacy was grounded in collective utopian ideals–progress, equality, and communal welfare. In the post-transition era, legitimacy derives increasingly from pragmatic and utilitarian values: efficiency, competitiveness, and individual responsibility. Mannheim's framework helps explain how this shift reflects not merely changing opinions but a deeper reorganization of the social bases of knowledge. The moral discourses of post-Soviet societies reveal a tension between *ideology* (the residues of collectivist thinking) and *utopia* (visions of a liberal, prosperous future). These competing worldviews coexist, producing hybrid moral orders that are both nostalgic and forward-looking.

In my dissertation, I proposed extending Mannheim's analysis by integrating it with a reflexive understanding of philosophical knowledge. Rather than viewing ideology and utopia as opposites, they can be seen as coexisting moral grammars through which societies negotiate transitions. Post-Soviet transformation, in this sense, is not the replacement of one moral system with another, but the continuous re-articulation of moral legitimacy amid epistemic uncertainty. The sociology of knowledge thus provides a bridge between moral change and social transformation, linking institutional structures to the evolving moral imaginaries that sustain them.

Bourdieu: Fields, Habitus, and Moral Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice offers the next step toward understanding how moral transformation operates at the level of institutions. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), *The Logic of Practice* (1990), and *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), Bourdieu conceptualizes social life as a dynamic interplay between *field*, *capital*, and *habitus*. A *field* is a structured space of positions and struggles, each governed by specific forms of capital–economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The *habitus* represents the embodied dispositions through which individuals perceive and enact the logic of their field. Morality, within this framework, is not an abstract principle but a practical sense–what Bourdieu calls *le sens pratique*–that guides action in socially meaningful ways.

Welfare institutions, educational systems, and family networks can each be understood as moral fields in which particular forms of *moral capital* are accumulated and contested. During the Soviet era, the dominant moral capital derived from conformity to collective norms and loyalty to the state. With the advent of market reforms, new forms of capital–entrepreneurial initiative, meritocratic achievement, and global mobility–became morally valorized. The redistribution of moral capital redefined social hierarchies: behaviors once condemned as selfish became celebrated as self-reliant, while previously esteemed acts of solidarity were recoded as inefficiency or dependency.

In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu warns that such transformations are not morally neutral; they reshape the symbolic structures that make domination appear natural. The neoliberal moral order produces new forms of symbolic violence by redefining success and failure in moral terms. Those unable to adapt to market logic are not merely disadvantaged–they are morally stigmatized as lazy, dependent, or unworthy. This process, observable across post-Soviet societies, reveals the intimate link between institutional transformation and moral evaluation.

Drawing on my dissertation, I interpret these dynamics as a form of *epistemic displacement*: the replacement of one moral habitus with another, accompanied by the reconfiguration of what counts as moral knowledge. Education, for instance, becomes a site for the inculcation of neoliberal dispositions–autonomy, competition, and self-branding–while welfare institutions internalize the moral vocabulary of responsibility and conditionality. Through Bourdieu's lens, moral change appears not as spontaneous adaptation but as the structured reproduction of symbolic power in new moral terms.

Collins: Interaction Rituals and the Emotional Foundations of Morality

While Durkheim, Mannheim, and Bourdieu illuminate macro- and meso-level dimensions of moral change, Randall Collins' micro-sociology adds a vital emotional and interactional dimension.

In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Collins extends Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence to everyday life, showing how moral energy and social solidarity are generated through ritualized interactions. Successful rituals produce *emotional energy*, symbols of group belonging, and a sense of moral confidence; failed rituals generate alienation, cynicism, and distrust.

In post-Soviet contexts, where public institutions have lost much of their moral credibility, the everyday rituals that sustain trust have often broken down. Corruption scandals, bureaucratic arbitrariness, and economic precarity have eroded the emotional foundations of social cohesion. People no longer experience collective rituals–such as national holidays, public education, or workplace cooperation–as morally meaningful. Instead, micro-interactions are saturated with suspicion and instrumentalism. Yet, as Collins suggests, new rituals can also emerge within informal networks, religious movements, or digital communities, generating alternative sources of moral energy.

From the standpoint of philosophical sociology, interaction rituals are not merely behavioral patterns but sites where moral meanings are emotionally charged and reproduced. The transformation of everyday rituals in post-Soviet societies thus reflects deeper shifts in the emotional economy of morality. Where socialist rituals once affirmed collective unity, post-transition rituals often celebrate individual success or spiritual rebirth. The resulting emotional configurations shape how people perceive justice, trust, and belonging.

Integration: A Philosophical-Sociological Model of Moral Transformation

The four perspectives above can be integrated into a single analytical model that conceptualizes moral change as a multi-level process encompassing collective, institutional, and interactional dimensions.

Table 1 – A Philosophical-Sociological Model of Moral Transformation

Level of Analysis	Theoretical Source	Core Mechanism	Manifestation in Post-Soviet Transformation
Macro (Collective)	Durkheim	Transformation of collective representations	Collapse of socialist moral ideals; rise of market-based moral narratives
Meso (Institutional)	Bourdieu	Reconfiguration of fields, capital, and habitus	Moral restructuring of welfare, education, and family institutions
Micro (Interactional)	Collins	Breakdown and reinvention of interaction rituals	Erosion of everyday trust; emergence of new ritual communities
Epistemic-Historical (Transversal)	Mannheim / Himmlegaard	Shifts in ideological and utopian moral imaginaries	Hybrid coexistence of collectivist and neoliberal moral grammars

This model posits that moral change in post-Soviet societies unfolds through recursive interactions between these levels. Economic and political reforms (macro) alter institutional structures (meso), which in turn reshape everyday practices (micro) and emotional investments. Conversely, emerging moral sentiments and local rituals can feed back into institutional and ideological reconfigurations. This dialectical dynamic produces what can be described as *moral hybridization*: the coexistence of contradictory moral logics within the same social space.

The philosophical-sociological approach also introduces a reflexive dimension. As argued in my dissertation, moral change cannot be fully grasped without recognizing that the observer–the sociologist, policymaker, or intellectual–is also embedded within the moral field being studied. Knowledge about moral transformation is itself historically situated and morally charged. Reflexivity, therefore, is not a methodological add-on but a moral stance: an awareness of how our own categories of analysis participate in the moral worlds we describe.

Conceptual Implications

The theoretical synthesis presented here yields three conceptual implications for the study of post-Soviet moral change:

1. Morality as a Relational Field – Morality is neither an individual attribute nor a fixed cultural code but a relational structure linking collective representations, institutional practices, and emotional energies. This challenges both normative moral philosophy and positivist sociology by situating morality within the dynamics of social power and symbolic production.

2. Moral Capital and Institutional Trust – The redistribution of moral capital across welfare, education, and family institutions determines the level of social trust. When institutions lose their moral legitimacy, citizens shift their trust toward informal or personal networks, leading to moral fragmentation.

3. Epistemic Reflexivity and Moral Knowledge – Understanding moral change requires reflexivity about the epistemic position of the researcher. The very categories used to analyze morality–such as “individualism,” “solidarity,” or “corruption”–are products of specific moral traditions. Philosophical sociology exposes these categories to critical scrutiny, revealing their historical and social contingency.

In summary, philosophical sociology provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing moral transformation in post-Soviet societies. By integrating the macro-level focus on collective representations (Durkheim), the epistemic sensitivity to ideology and utopia (Mannheim), the institutional analysis of habitus and capital (Bourdieu), and the micro-level attention to emotional energy (Collins), it captures the complexity of moral life under conditions of systemic change. This framework sets the stage for the empirical analysis that follows, where welfare institutions, family structures, and educational systems are examined as key moral arenas in the ongoing redefinition of post-Soviet society.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a comparative and interpretive qualitative design, grounded in the principles of *philosophical sociology* developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*). The aim is not to measure moral change through quantitative indicators but to interpret how transformations in welfare, family, and education reflect deeper shifts in collective meaning, moral legitimacy, and trust. The research combines a meta-analysis of recent sociological literature (2015–2025) with a reflexive reconstruction of theoretical categories to reveal the underlying moral logic of institutional change.

The analysis focuses on six post-Soviet contexts: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania, and Poland. These cases capture variation across geography, religion, and reform trajectories, yet share the experience of transitioning from centrally planned to market-based systems. By examining cross-national patterns of institutional adaptation, the study identifies both region-specific and generalizable features of moral transformation.

Philosophical-Sociological Approach

The methodological foundation lies in *philosophical sociology*, a hybrid approach that integrates epistemological reflexivity with sociological explanation. It assumes that moral categories are socially produced and that transformations in knowledge systems correspond to transformations in moral order. As developed in my dissertation, the method proceeds through three analytical movements:

1. Epistemic reconstruction – uncovering how concepts such as “solidarity,” “responsibility,” and “corruption” have changed their meaning across historical regimes.

2. Institutional translation – tracing how these changing moral meanings are embodied within welfare, educational, and family institutions.

3. Reflexive interpretation – situating the researcher’s own analytical categories within the same historical and moral field, thereby avoiding the illusion of neutrality.

This approach follows Mannheim’s relational sociology of knowledge but extends it through Bourdieu’s notion of *reflexive epistemology*–the recognition that social analysis is itself a moral act embedded within symbolic hierarchies. In practical terms, it requires constant awareness of how Western academic vocabularies (e.g., “neoliberalism,” “individualism”) carry their own moral assumptions when applied to post-Soviet societies. The analysis therefore privileges indigenous moral discourses–such as *spravedlivost’* (justice) in Russian, *adalat* (fairness) in Central Asian languages, and *solidarność* (solidarity) in Polish–as interpretive gateways to understanding moral change from within.

Data Sources and Analytical Corpus

The empirical corpus consists of three interrelated components:

1. Academic and policy research (2015–2025) – Peer-reviewed articles, UNDP and World Bank reports, and regional studies on welfare, education, and family reforms in post-Soviet countries (e.g., Abbott et al., 2019; Uyan-Semerci, 2022; Wanner, 2021; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023).

2. Qualitative ethnographic accounts and national surveys – Materials from the European Values Study (EVS), World Values Survey (WVS), and national sociological institutes providing data on moral attitudes, trust, and value orientations.

3. Textual and discursive materials – Government white papers, education curricula, and public debates that reveal shifting moral vocabularies in institutional discourse.

The selection criteria follow two principles: temporal proximity (publications within the last decade to ensure contemporary relevance) and regional representativeness (inclusion of both Eastern European and Central Asian cases). This combination of sources enables a triangulated understanding of moral change that integrates macro-institutional data with micro-cultural narratives.

Analytical Procedure

Data interpretation proceeds through hermeneutic reconstruction, guided by the theoretical model established in Section 2. Each institutional domain–welfare, family, education–is examined as a *moral field* (Bourdieu) structured by competing collective representations (Durkheim), ideological and utopian imaginaries (Mannheim), and emotional dynamics of trust (Collins). The analysis involves four steps:

1. Identifying dominant moral discourses within each field.
2. Mapping their relation to structural reforms and policy shifts.
3. Analyzing the redistribution of *moral capital* and its effect on trust.
4. Synthesizing findings into a comparative pattern of moral transformation.

Interpretation follows a reflexive stance: rather than treating "moral decline" or "value loss" as empirical facts, these notions are examined as social narratives reflecting struggles over legitimacy and meaning.

Ethical and Epistemic Considerations

Given that the study addresses moral questions in societies marked by political sensitivity and historical trauma, it adheres to two ethical principles: interpretive respect and epistemic humility. Interpretive respect requires that local moral vocabularies be understood on their own terms, without imposing external normative judgments. Epistemic humility entails acknowledging that any analysis of morality is itself value-laden and partial. The aim is not to prescribe moral standards but to elucidate the social mechanisms through which moral meanings are produced and transformed.

Finally, the study recognizes that knowledge about post-Soviet transformation is itself part of the moral field it analyzes. Scholarly discourse, especially from Western institutions, often functions as a site of symbolic power that legitimizes particular interpretations of "transition," "modernization," or "development." A philosophical-sociological methodology seeks to uncover these epistemic asymmetries, thereby contributing to a more reflexive and ethically responsible sociology of post-Soviet change.

Results and discussion

The welfare systems of post-Soviet societies occupy a crucial position in the moral geography of transition. During the socialist era, welfare provision was more than an administrative apparatus–it embodied a moral economy based on collective responsibility, universal inclusion, and the symbolic reciprocity between state and citizen. The dissolution of the Soviet model disrupted this moral compact. Welfare institutions, once the tangible manifestation of solidarity, were rapidly reoriented toward market principles of efficiency and conditionality.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, most post-Soviet states adopted neoliberal welfare reforms inspired by international financial institutions. These reforms emphasized cost-efficiency, targeting, and privatization (Cook, 2017; Leitner & Witte, 2020). By the mid-2010s, this logic had crystallized into a distinct moral discourse: one that framed welfare dependency as a moral failure rather than a social condition. In Russia and Ukraine, for instance, public debates around "deservingness" and "social parasitism" echoed Western welfare moralities but were infused with post-Soviet experiences of economic collapse and corruption (Zhurzhenko, 2021).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this transformation represents a profound reconfiguration of moral capital. Under socialism, moral worth was derived from collective contribution–loyalty to work, conformity to social norms, and participation in collective institutions. In the market era, moral recognition became tied to self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and adaptability. The state's withdrawal from universal welfare provision created what scholars describe as *moral stratification*–a symbolic hierarchy in which the poor are not merely economically marginalized but morally devalued (Stephenson, 2018).

In Central Asia, similar dynamics unfolded within distinct cultural frameworks. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the introduction of "targeted social assistance" redefined the moral relationship between the state and citizens. Field studies show that welfare officers now speak of recipients not as comrades but as "clients" or "cases" (Uyan-Semerci, 2022). The very language of welfare has shifted from collective duty to individualized responsibility. This semantic shift reveals the epistemic displacement described in my dissertation: the replacement of a *solidaristic epistemology* with a *managerial epistemology* of morality.

Durkheim's concept of *anomie* helps interpret the moral consequences of this shift. As collective representations of solidarity disintegrate, individuals experience moral disorientation. The expectation that everyone should "take care of themselves" undermines the moral legitimacy of public institutions. Survey data from the World Values Survey (2022) show that generalized trust in state institutions across post-Soviet countries remains among the lowest in the world, with only 19–27% of respondents expressing confidence in welfare systems. This moral distrust is not merely institutional but emotional: people no longer perceive welfare as an expression of shared fate but as a site of moral surveillance and humiliation.

However, this process is not unidirectional. In several Eastern European contexts, particularly Poland and Lithuania, the 2010s witnessed partial re-collectivization of welfare through family-centered and pronatalist policies (Szelewa, 2019). These reforms sought to reconstruct moral legitimacy by rearticulating welfare as care for the "nation's families." While reinforcing conservative gender norms, they also restored a sense of moral reciprocity between state and citizen. Thus, post-Soviet welfare reforms exemplify what I term moral hybridization: the coexistence of neoliberal responsibility and nationalist solidarity within the same institutional field.

If the welfare state represents the moral contract between citizens and the polity, the family constitutes the moral contract between generations. Across post-Soviet societies, the family remains a resilient moral institution–a locus of both continuity and transformation. During the Soviet era, the family was officially subordinated to the state's ideological mission but functioned as an informal moral refuge, preserving traditions of care, reciprocity, and endurance. In the market era, the family has re-emerged as both a moral and economic safety net.

Ethnographic studies in Russia, Ukraine, and Central Asia demonstrate that the family has absorbed many of the welfare functions once performed by the state (Matza, 2018; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023). Informal caregiving, remittance economies, and intergenerational cohabitation are not merely coping mechanisms–they represent the moralization of survival. The family, in this sense, has become a *moral field* where trust, obligation, and sacrifice are renegotiated under new socio-economic pressures.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* illuminates how these transformations are internalized. The post-Soviet habitus embodies contradictory moral dispositions: collectivist loyalty inherited from socialism and individualistic self-responsibility demanded by market life. This duality generates what Mannheim (1936/2013) called *cultural ambivalence*–a state in which conflicting moral grammars coexist within the same consciousness. Parents who teach their children to be self-sufficient also emphasize mutual dependence; young adults pursuing global mobility still rely on familial networks for moral orientation.

In Central Asia, the moral function of the family intertwines with religion and gender. Islamic revival since the 1990s has reintroduced moral codes emphasizing obedience, modesty, and patriarchal protection. Yet these norms coexist with neoliberal consumerism and globalized youth cultures. In Uzbekistan, young women often describe moral virtue in both religious and entrepreneurial terms–being a "good Muslim" and a "self-reliant woman" are no longer perceived as contradictory (Khalid, 2022). This synthesis reflects what Collins (2004) would describe as *moral energy circulation*: the recharging of moral emotions through new ritual forms that blend traditional piety with modern aspiration.

The family's role as a moral refuge has, however, intensified social inequalities. In contexts where state welfare has weakened, families with stronger social and financial capital can reproduce privilege, while others face chronic moral pressure to "succeed" despite systemic barriers. This moralization of success manifests in parental discourses equating moral worth with achievement–a shift from *collective virtue* to *performative virtue*. Durkheim would recognize this as a moral individualism detached from collective moral regulation, leading to heightened anxiety and intergenerational tension.

Interestingly, some scholars note the re-politicization of family morality through pro-natalist and nationalist campaigns (Szelewa, 2019; Brik & Stepurko, 2021). The family is no longer only a private moral unit but a symbol of collective regeneration. In Russia's official discourse, for example, motherhood is celebrated as patriotic duty, and the "traditional family" is positioned as a moral counterweight to Western liberalism. This state-driven moralization blurs the boundary between ethical intimacy and political ideology–a phenomenon my philosophical-sociological lens interprets as *institutional moral colonization*: the state's attempt to regain symbolic power by occupying the moral terrain of everyday life.

Among all institutions, education has undergone perhaps the most profound moral transformation. Under the socialist regime, education was explicitly moralized as a collective project: schools were tasked with cultivating the "New Soviet Person," embodying civic duty, discipline, and commitment to the common good. Knowledge and morality were inseparable; to learn was to serve society. The post-Soviet educational reforms of the 1990s and 2000s severed this link, replacing moral collectivism with meritocratic individualism.

By the 2010s, most post-Soviet education systems had adopted Western-style curricula emphasizing "competencies," "critical thinking," and "global competitiveness." While progressive in appearance, these reforms often introduced a neoliberal ethos of self-marketing and performance. Teachers in Kazakhstan and Ukraine report that moral education has been reduced to behavioral management–"teaching responsibility" now means encouraging students to manage their own success in a competitive environment (OECD, 2020; Silova & Auld, 2021).

From a Durkheimian viewpoint, this shift signifies the decline of education as a moral institution of integration. Whereas schools once transmitted shared moral categories, they now function as spaces of differentiation and symbolic struggle. Students internalize not a sense of collective purpose but an individualized moral logic: success as virtue, failure as fault. The weakening of collective rituals–school assemblies, civic celebrations, moral instruction–has diminished what Collins calls *interaction ritual chains*, depriving students of emotional experiences of belonging. The absence of moral effervescence contributes to cynicism and disengagement.

At the same time, education remains a potent arena for the reconstruction of moral legitimacy. In the Baltic states and Poland, post-2015 civic education reforms have sought to re-anchor morality in democratic participation and European citizenship (Saar & Kutsar, 2020). In Central Asia, new curricula integrate moral lessons from national traditions (*Adab* in Kazakhstan, *Tarbiya* in Uzbekistan) with civic values. These hybrid reforms exemplify the coexistence of global and local moral imaginaries. As my dissertation argues, such hybridity reflects the epistemic pluralism of modernity: moral systems no longer follow a single logic but exist as overlapping fields of meaning.

The neoliberalization of education also reshapes the moral status of teachers. In Soviet times, the teacher was a moral authority, embodying both knowledge and virtue. In the new order, teachers are increasingly evaluated through performance metrics and market logic. Their moral authority has become precarious, producing what some describe as *moral fatigue* (Johnson & Silova, 2018). Yet teachers continue to reproduce moral norms through everyday interactions–what Bourdieu would term *practical morality*. Even within constrained systems, moral energy circulates through small rituals of care, humor, and dignity.

Across the three domains–welfare, family, and education–a common pattern emerges: the moral field of post-Soviet societies is characterized by hybridization, ambivalence, and reflexive adaptation. The following comparative synthesis highlights the main moral trajectories:

Table 2 – Comparative synthesis

Institutional Domain	Dominant Socialist Moral Logic	Dominant Post-Transition Moral Logic	Emergent Hybrid Forms
Welfare	Solidarity, equality, state responsibility	Individual responsibility, market efficiency	Nationalist paternalism; targeted 'moral deservingness'
Family	Collective reciprocity, gender complementarity	Pragmatic self-reliance, emotional individualism	Religious-traditional revival; moral entrepreneurship
Education	Civic duty, moral collectivism	Meritocracy, performative selfhood	Hybrid civic-traditional curricula; emotional pedagogy

This pattern supports the theoretical argument developed earlier: moral change in post-Soviet societies is not linear but dialectical. Each institution mediates the encounter between residual collectivist values and emergent neoliberal rationalities. The result is a *moral syncretism* that defies binary classifications of "decay" or "progress."

Durkheim's idea of *moral density* helps explain why trust and moral regulation remain fragile: institutional fragmentation weakens collective effervescence. Mannheim's framework clarifies how competing moral worldviews–nostalgic socialism, neoliberal modernity, religious conservatism–coexist as ideological and utopian projects. Bourdieu's field theory reveals how moral capital is redistributed, often reinforcing inequality. Collins' ritual analysis illuminates the micro-level emotional processes that sustain or erode moral cohesion.

Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that moral transformation in post-Soviet societies operates as a reorganization of collective meaning rather than a simple loss of values. The moral field remains vibrant but pluralized. What is at stake is not the disappearance of morality but its redistribution across new social spaces–NGOs, online communities, religious associations, and family networks–that now compete with the state for moral authority.

The empirical findings confirm that the moral transformation of post-Soviet societies cannot be understood as a simple moral "decline" or "loss of values." Instead, it represents a reconfiguration of collective meaning, in which moral categories are redistributed across institutions, practices, and emotional relations. Each domain–welfare, family, and education–demonstrates a dynamic interplay between inherited collectivist ethics and emergent neoliberal rationalities. This hybrid condition illustrates what I have elsewhere described as *epistemic pluralism*–a coexistence of multiple, historically layered moral grammars within the same social field.

Durkheim's conception of morality as a *collective representation* provides a crucial interpretive key. When collective representations disintegrate, individuals lose the external moral referents that organize their actions, resulting in states of *anomie*. Yet, as Durkheim emphasized, new moral forms inevitably arise to replace the old. In post-Soviet societies, the dissolution of socialist solidarity did not produce moral emptiness but rather moral heterogeneity. Informal economies of care, religious revival, and new civic movements constitute efforts to rebuild moral order under new conditions. These emergent moralities, however, lack the universality that characterized the socialist moral system; they operate within fragmented moral publics defined by class, generation, and geography.

The shift from collective to individualized morality mirrors a broader transformation of the moral epistemology underlying social life. Where socialism framed morality as a matter of shared duty, the market transition reframed it as a question of *personal virtue* and *self-responsibility*. This change in moral grammar reflects what Mannheim (1936/2013) called a change in the social bases of knowledge–a transformation in who has the authority to define truth, justice, and legitimacy. The moral expert of socialism was the state; the moral expert of neoliberalism is the self-managing individual. This epistemic shift decentralizes morality but also destabilizes its social grounding, leading to a condition of moral reflexivity: individuals must now justify their own moral positions without stable collective criteria.

Social trust is the emotional and cognitive foundation of any moral order. Its erosion across post-Soviet societies reflects not only institutional corruption but also the broader disintegration of shared moral narratives. As Collins (2004) would argue, trust is produced through *interaction rituals* that generate emotional energy and shared symbols. When welfare offices become sites of humiliation, when schools lose their integrative rituals, and when families are fractured by migration, the emotional circuits of morality break down. What follows is not merely cynicism but the loss of the very emotional energy that sustains moral motivation.

The empirical evidence indicates that trust has not vanished entirely but has migrated to smaller, more intimate circles–family, friends, religious communities, and online networks (Abbott et al., 2019; Wanner, 2021). This re-localization of trust illustrates Bourdieu's notion of *field-specific moral capital*. Individuals invest their moral energies in those arenas where recognition is possible. Yet this reallocation also fragments the moral landscape: localized trust does not automatically translate into civic trust. In Durkheimian terms, moral density decreases when trust becomes privatized.

At the same time, these micro-communities can serve as laboratories of moral innovation. In Central Asia, for example, women's cooperatives and youth volunteer groups have reintroduced practices of mutual aid reminiscent of the socialist ethos, but articulated in a new moral vocabulary of dignity, self-help, and faith (Uyan-Semerci, 2022). Such examples demonstrate that moral reconstruction is possible even under conditions of structural fragility. The critical question is whether these emergent moral practices can scale up to reconstitute institutional trust. Philosophical sociology suggests that this depends on whether collective representations–new myths of belonging and moral purpose–can take hold at the societal level.

Bourdieu's framework illuminates the unequal distribution of moral legitimacy across post-Soviet societies. The capacity to appear "moral" in the public eye–what I term *moral capital*–has become a new axis of stratification. Those with economic and cultural capital can more easily align themselves with the moral ideals of the market: self-reliance, professionalism, success. Those who fail to conform are not only excluded materially but also morally stigmatized. This is a new form of symbolic violence: moral worth is conflated with market performance.

This phenomenon also extends to the international level. The global discourse of "transition" and "modernization" operates as a moral hierarchy that positions post-Soviet societies as "lagging" or "immature" versions of Western modernity. Such narratives constitute what my dissertation identifies as *epistemic domination*: the power to define what counts as moral progress. By exposing these hierarchies, philosophical sociology performs a critical ethical function–it reveals how claims to objectivity are often moral claims in disguise.

Nevertheless, moral capital is not fixed. It can be contested through alternative symbolic practices. Religious and civic movements across the region have begun to reclaim moral authority from the state and market. For example, faith-based charities in Kazakhstan and Ukraine reframe social aid not as "service delivery" but as *moral duty*, reintroducing compassion and reciprocity into welfare practice (Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023). These initiatives reconstitute moral capital around collective responsibility, albeit within new institutional forms. Such developments suggest that moral innovation often emerges from the peripheries of formal power.

Philosophical sociology reveals that moral change is not only structural or discursive but also affective. As Collins (2004) demonstrates, moral energy–the capacity to act ethically–is sustained through successful interaction rituals. When individuals experience humiliation, insecurity, or isolation, their moral energy diminishes, leading to withdrawal or cynicism. The emotional texture of post-Soviet life–marked by nostalgia, fatigue, and adaptive irony–thus has direct implications for moral agency. Many respondents in ethnographic studies describe morality not as a set of principles but as a feeling of "inner exhaustion" or "moral tiredness" (Matza, 2018). This emotional fatigue is itself a social fact: it reflects the mismatch between inherited moral expectations and contemporary institutional realities.

At the epistemic level, moral change also entails transformations in what counts as moral knowledge. As my dissertation argues, moral epistemology is not universal but socially situated. The moral reasoning that once legitimated collective sacrifice no longer resonates in societies where survival depends on entrepreneurial adaptability. However, this does not mean that moral reasoning has disappeared–it has diversified. Competing moral epistemologies now coexist: utilitarian rationalities of the market, deontological legacies of socialism, and virtue-based religious frameworks. The resulting pluralism can be both productive and destabilizing. It allows for moral creativity but complicates consensus on shared norms.

From this perspective, the moral condition of post-Soviet societies resembles what Mannheim called relationism: a state in which truth and morality are understood as relational to social position and historical context. Relationism, when reflexively embraced, can lead to moral tolerance and pluralism; when experienced passively, it can produce relativism and moral disorientation. The challenge for post-Soviet societies is to transform relationism into reflexivity–to turn awareness of moral plurality into a resource for dialogue rather than a source of cynicism.

Philosophical Sociology and the Question of Moral Agency

Finally, the discussion returns to the question of agency. If moral systems are socially produced, can individuals act morally in the absence of stable collective norms? Philosophical sociology answers affirmatively but conditionally: moral agency is possible through reflexivity. To act morally under conditions of moral flux requires the capacity to recognize the social origins of one's own moral categories. This reflexive stance transforms moral behavior into an act of critical awareness.

In my dissertation, I argued that philosophical sociology occupies a unique position between moral philosophy and empirical sociology. It does not prescribe moral norms but clarifies the social conditions under which moral reasoning occurs. From this vantage point, the moral transformation of post-Soviet societies is not a pathology but a laboratory of modernity–a site where new forms of moral consciousness are being forged through struggle, contradiction, and adaptation. The challenge is to cultivate institutions capable of sustaining moral reflexivity without reverting to ideological closure.

Durkheim's optimism remains instructive here: even amid anomie, the moral impulse to seek meaning persists. The philosophical-sociological task is to understand how that impulse is socially organized. The post-Soviet experience demonstrates that when collective morality collapses, individuals and communities become active moral entrepreneurs, experimenting with new forms of trust, care, and legitimacy. These micro-innovations, though fragmented, may constitute the embryonic moral frameworks of a new social order.

Conclusion

The moral transformation of post-Soviet societies represents far more than a political or economic transition. It is a reorganization of collective meaning that has redrawn the moral boundaries of welfare, family, and education–the three institutions that once anchored socialist solidarity. The analysis presented here, grounded in the framework of *philosophical sociology* developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*), demonstrates that moral change unfolds through interlocking epistemic, institutional, and emotional processes.

Durkheim's theory of collective representations reveals how the collapse of socialist ideals generated anomie but also opened space for new solidarities. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge shows that moral reasoning shifted from state-centered ideology to individualized relationism, producing both pluralism and moral uncertainty. Bourdieu's field theory exposes the redistribution of moral capital and the symbolic hierarchies that accompany neoliberal reform. Collins' interaction-ritual perspective highlights the erosion–and selective reinvention–of emotional energy and social trust. Together, these lenses capture a complex moral landscape in which inherited collectivism, emergent individualism, and revived traditionalism coexist in tension.

Across Central Asia and Eastern Europe, citizens have responded to institutional fragmentation by relocating trust to smaller communities–families, religious networks, civic associations–thereby sustaining moral life in localized forms. This moral pluralization constitutes both a challenge and a resource. It fragments shared legitimacy, yet it also fosters experimentation with new moral vocabularies of dignity, reciprocity, and responsibility.

The broader implication is that post-Soviet societies should not be interpreted through the binary of moral loss versus modernization. Rather, they illustrate how morality itself is historically contingent, relational, and reflexively produced. A philosophical-sociological perspective reveals that every social transformation is simultaneously a moral transformation of knowledge: a redefinition of what counts as virtue, justice, and truth.

Future research should therefore move beyond normative diagnoses toward comparative inquiries into moral hybridization–the ways in which global neoliberalism, local traditions, and post-socialist legacies interact to generate new moral fields. By tracing these intersections, sociology can recover its ethical vocation: to understand, rather than judge, how societies continually reinvent the moral foundations of coexistence.

Gratitude, conflict of interest

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COUNTERING DISINFORMATION: SPAIN'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN PROTECTING NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract
Purpose. This article examines Spain's public diplomacy measures aimed at countering disinformation and safeguarding national security. It critically assesses whether Spain's current reliance on state-led institutions, multilateral cooperation, and civil society initiatives is adequate for addressing contemporary foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).
Design/methodology/approach. The study employs a qualitative research design based on document and policy analysis of open-access empirical reports, national strategic documents, and peer-reviewed literature published between 2017 and 2025. The methodology includes triangulation of public opinion survey data and a comparative evaluation of institutional responses. In addition, two descriptive quantitative techniques – trend comparison and cross-national benchmarking – are applied using publicly available survey indicators.
Findings. The findings indicate that disinformation represents a major concern for Spanish society, with approximately 70–83% of respondents identifying it as a significant threat, depending on the year and data source. While Spain demonstrates a degree of domestic resilience through established public diplomacy mechanisms, persistent vulnerabilities remain. These vulnerabilities are intensified by social media dynamics, AI-enhanced disinformation, and crisis-driven amplification effects. Existing tools show strengths in detection and awareness-raising but face limitations related to the speed of strategic communication, regulatory clarity, and long-term investment in digital literacy.
Originality. The article contributes to the literature on public diplomacy and national security by providing a comprehensive, up-to-date assessment of Spain's counter-disinformation framework. By integrating institutional analysis with public opinion data and cross-national benchmarks, the study offers a nuanced evaluation of public diplomacy effectiveness in the context of evolving information threats.
Keywords: public diplomacy, misinformation, national security, information disorder.

Introduction

The fast-growing, global risk posed by disinformation threatens individual belief systems by reducing the perceived value of those who are responsible for enforcing rules and regulations. Because disinformation can mislead individuals about what constitutes a proper action, it has a negative impact on national security. In Spain, many of the country's elections, public health systems, and governmental emergency response plans have been the subjects of numerous large-scale disinformation campaigns. Recently, both Spain and the EU have taken action to combat disinformation. This topic is urgent because modern information operations use hybrid tactics such as bots, manipulated video, and algorithmic amplification that can reach citizens faster than official responses. Recent empirical work suggests that Spaniards perceive disinformation as a major problem, with surveys indicating 70–83% expressing concern or considering it a threat to democracy (Disinfo.eu, 2023; UC3M SmartVote, 2025). These perceptions create both a policy imperative and a test bed for public diplomacy instruments aimed at external audiences and at protecting the national information environment.

The object of the study is Spain's public diplomacy apparatus operating to protect national security in the information domain. The purpose is to evaluate whether Spain's current measures are sufficient and propose prioritized improvements. The study uses documentary analysis of policy and open reports, triangulates public opinion figures from Eurobarometer, Reuters, UC3M, Iberifier, and Disinfo.eu, and applies qualitative comparative analysis to institutional tools. The working hypothesis is that Spain has developed important detection and awareness capabilities, but its public diplomacy still risks being reactive and under-resourced compared with the speed and scale of modern disinformation. This article tests that hypothesis by comparing measurable public concerns and institutional outputs and by reviewing best-practice proposals from international agencies (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; OECD, 2024).

Literature review

The study builds on both theoretical foundations of information disorder and applied studies on disinformation policy. The conceptual framework draws on Wardle and Derakhshan's taxonomy of information disorder, which distinguishes misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, providing a foundation for designing responses (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) show that false political news spreads faster and farther than true news, a mechanism directly relevant to Spain's viral political hoaxes. Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018) and Marwick and Lewis (2017) analyze how network structures, platform incentives, and manipulation tactics produce fertile ground for disinformation, highlighting lessons applicable to Spain's social media landscape.

The influence of disinformation extends beyond voting behavior and continues to sap institutional trust and civic engagement. In this respect, Ferrara (2020) informs us that social media's algorithmic amplification can very well lead to certain demographic groups being exposed to politically biased content that is very much a part of Spain's regionalized political context with the existence of diverse local media ecosystems in the different autonomous communities. Moreover, Bovet and Makse (2019) point out that the use of bots and inauthentic accounts in coordinated campaigns serves to enlarge false narratives, thus generating a perception of social consensus that might deceive common people. The acceptance of these assertions is highly pertinent for Spain, where the political polarization masking regional differences would only serve to multiply the impact of misinformation that goes viral.

European policy frameworks and platform regulations are critical for understanding Spain's transnational response, including the EEAS rapid alert system and the EU Special Report on disinformation (EEAS, 2023; EUvsDisinfo, 2023). Fact-checking, media literacy, and public diplomacy in Spain are thoroughly examined in national case studies like Disinfo.eu's "Disinformation landscape in Spain" and OficinaC's "Disinformation in the digital age" (OficinaC, 2023; IBERIFIER, 2024). The significance of considering some misinformation as a national-security threat is highlighted by multilateral and security viewpoints from NATO StratCom and Hybrid CoE publications (Hybrid CoE, 2025). OECD and ENISA policy proposals prioritize information integrity frameworks, platform regulation, and whole-of-society strategies (OECD, 2024; ENISA, 2023).

Longitudinal studies have also been conducted on many of the ways in which media literacy campaigns and fact-checking networks are working in Spain. One example of this is the recent evaluation in 2023 of Disinfo.eu's programming, which found that when citizens were exposed to messages about pre-bunking multiple times, their chances of falling for false claims dropped by as much as 20% compared to those who did not engage in pre-bunking efforts. This study demonstrated the benefits of conducting sustained interventions to address disinformation rather than relying on reactive strategies. Moreover, the framework for Public Diplomacy is expanding, with many researchers (Cuenca, 2022; López, 2023) indicating how Spain's response to disinformation encompasses both domestic protective strategies and proactive outreach strategies used to combat FIMI campaigns originating abroad (and often from geopolitical actors).

Although prior studies are extensive, fewer works synthesize Spain's public diplomacy instruments specifically as national-security tools. This article fills that gap by integrating public opinion data, Spanish institutional initiatives (Forum against Disinformation, DSN publications), and EU/NATO coordination results, providing a novel perspective on policy design and evaluation.

Moreover, bringing together the theoretical models of information disorder with empirical policy studies reveals the intricacy of Spain's institutional ecosystem. The scholars agree that the public diplomacy measures' efficiency is determined not just by the technical aspect of detecting and responding quickly but also by the socio-cultural acceptance of the narratives as correct. In addition, the multilingual situation in Spain (Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Galician) further complicates matters because it requires specific campaigns to be developed for different regions. Cross-national research in other EU states (like Germany, France, and Italy) supports the view that such changes lead to more active participation and higher trust of the local populace, which in turn strengthens the thesis that Spain's multi-layered strategy–of combining EU coordination, national frameworks, and civil-society networks–is conceptually sound but operationally very tricky.

There are marked gaps in the scientific literature about how much corrective measures over the course of many years have an impact on actual people's behavior. A substantial amount of research shows that corrective measures can have a measurable effect on people's belief in misinformation in the short run through fact-checking and media literacy. However, there is little data to support the idea that reduction in misleading misinformation was sustained over longer time frames for more than one year. This is especially important for Spain, where there have been consistent cycles of electoral misinformation and a growing aesthetic to inform people through influencer campaigns. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods of institutional analysis and public opinion tracking will lead to understanding how long-term effective Spain is at countering misinformation, and how those programs fit within a broader national security strategy.

Methodology

Documents from various Spanish departments, as well as from the European Union, NGOs and analysis groups (such as Hybrid CoE and Data & Society), were used for documentary analysis. Documents were classified based on their content: institutional type, legal instruments, operational tools and public diplomacy.

In addition to the documentary analysis, triangulation across multiple sources was utilized for the purpose of establishing reliable results from the analysis. Triangulation allowed researchers to validate their findings by comparing information from different types of documents and organizations, including European Union publications and independent analyses by non-governmental organizations. For example, annual reports prepared by DSN were compared to rapid-response alerts posted by EEAS and media monitoring reports published by Disinfo.eu. Through this triangulation process, formalized institutional frameworks as well as informal networks of collaboration could be identified. Formalized frameworks and networks provide critical support for rapid-response initiatives, yet few formalized frameworks and networks are available through public sources.

The public opinion and survey data provided the number of people directed to disinformation (and the geographic location of each individual). Source material was collected from four locations: Reuters Institute's country profiles, Disinfo.eu country profiles, Eurobarometer reports, and SmartVote/UC3M.

The evaluated the data on a four-state scale. Two descriptive tables and two graphic figures were developed based solely on the source materials without any added data.

To compare the Spanish institutional action against disinformation with current recommendations, the assessment used criteria from the recommendations by the OECD and Hybrid CoE related to the following state-of-the-art capabilities: speed of detection, response, engagement with platforms, outreach to the public, and legal clarity. In a thorough examination of disinformation Spain's measures to counteract them, the analysis also included the discussion of the public diplomacy of the country in terms of their pros and cons and their link with the national-security aspects of the measures taken.

The scope and nature of disinformation-related public concern in Spain, Spain's public diplomacy reaction to misinformation as a danger to national security, and gaps and useful policy recommendations are among the research issues. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and the OECD (2024), Spain has good detection and civil-society resilience, but it is still vulnerable since strategic communication and legal mechanisms are not yet entirely aligned with the speed of current FIMI.

Results and Discussion

The data demonstrates both a high level of concern from the public about disinformation and a more nuanced understanding of how Spain's institutions are able to respond. The survey data shows that between 70%-83% of Spaniards believe disinformation to be a threat to democracy or are worried about distinguishing between what is real and what is fake (Disinfo.eu, 2023; UC3M SmartVote, 2025). This continuous level of worry from the public also indicates ongoing vulnerability in their information environment and presents an opportunity for Spanish organizations to actively pursue diplomatic relationships with other countries. The evolution (figure 1) of perceptions of the threat over time shows that while the public's level of concern has remained relatively stable during periods of crisis (e.g., national elections, public health emergencies), there are peaks associated with those crises. Survey data shows that during the regional elections in 2023 there was a peak in public worry in relation to the impact of targeted misinformation campaigns.

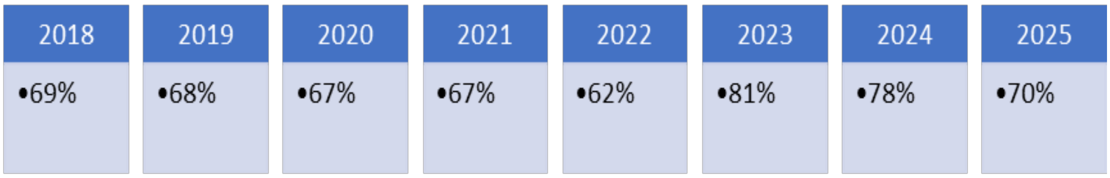

Figure 1 – Trend: Public perception of disinformation as a threat in Spain, 2018–2025 (percent concerned)
Note – compiled by the author based on the source (Disinfo.eu, 2023)

Concern about disinformation decreased slightly during 2018–2022 but surged in 2023 due to electoral campaigns and public debates on health measures (Disinfo.eu, 2023). This suggests that Spain's public is highly sensitive to contextual triggers, which implies that institutional messaging needs to anticipate rather than simply react to disinformation waves. The decline in 2025 may indicate stabilization or adaptation by citizens, but continued vigilance remains critical.

Spain's institutional landscape, mapped in Table 1, shows a combination of national security bodies, EU-level cooperation, and civil-society networks. The Forum against Disinformation (DSN-led) provides coordination between ministries and fact-checking organizations, while EU tools such as the EEAS rapid alert system and EUvsDisinfo database enable situational awareness and detection. SmartVote and other academic initiatives offer analytical support and detection of manipulated media. Media literacy and fact-checking networks amplify public diplomacy outreach.

Analysis of Table 1 demonstrates strengths in detection and civil-society engagement. However, operational gaps remain: response speed is sometimes slow, platform accountability is partially unclear, and resources for proactive public diplomacy are limited (OECD, 2024).

To further understand Spain's vulnerabilities, Figure 2 presents a comparative analysis of public concern by type of disinformation (political, health, emergency) in 2023–2025. The graph highlights that political disinformation consistently generates the highest worry (85%–88%), followed by health (75%–80%) and emergency-related misinformation (65%–70%).

Table 1 – Spain: major public-diplomacy & institutional initiatives (selected, 2020–2025)

Initiative / body	Start / active	Core function	Note / source
Forum against Disinformation Campaigns (DSN-led)	Consolidated 2024	National coordination to identify FIMI affecting national security	DSN/Spanish government document summary
EU External Action Service (FIMI rapid alerts & EEAS)	Ongoing 2018–2023	EU-level detection & debunking	EEAS & EUvsDisinfo reports
Spanish Ministry/OFICINA reports (OficinaC)	2023	Research, translation & public guidance on disinformation	OficinaC, 2023
SmartVote / academic consortia	2024-2025	Detection of image/video manipulation; public alerts	UC3M SmartVote press release
Media literacy & fact-checking network	Active 2020–2025	Public outreach, debunking, training	Disinfo.eu, 2023; IBERIFIER, 2024
Note – This table reflects a synthesis of publicly available reports and press releases. Core functions were assessed for relevance to detection, rapid response, public diplomacy, and legal frameworks.			

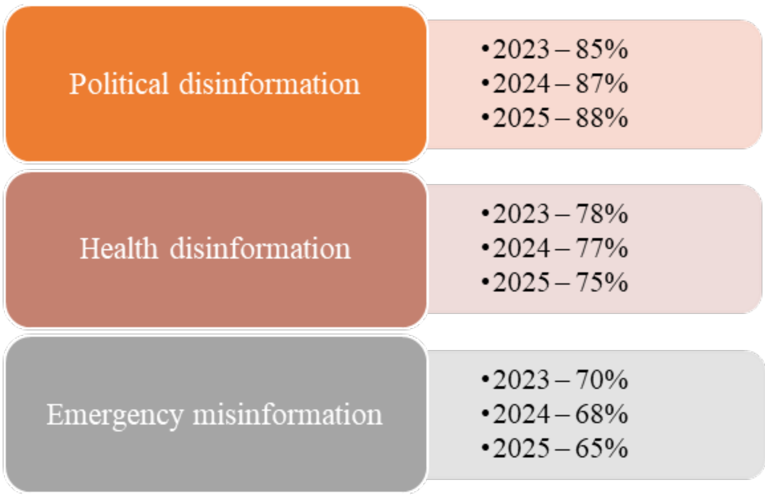

Figure 2 – Public concern by type of disinformation in Spain, 2023–2025 (percent concerned)
Note – compiled by the author based on the source (OECD, 2024)

The narrative about politics is very powerful and takes the first place in public concerns, thus making it clear that electoral times are very sensitive. Misinformation related to healthcare issues is still a prominent problem but it has a slight decrease which can be linked to the awareness-raising campaigns for the public. Concerns about emergency misinformation are not that high but they are always there and very important during the crisis because quick spreading of wrong information can put people's safety at risk. This separation of the issue demonstrates the importance of different communication strategies which will accompany the high-impact areas and will not forget about the occasional crises.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data acquired from surveys, Table 1, and Figures 1-2 points out that Spain's disinformation environment has a dual nature: on one hand, high public concern and, on the other hand, varying institutional effectiveness. A higher percentage of people who engaged with corrective information is presented in Table 1, but Figure 2 shows that the disinformation type is a factor that affects perception and possible vulnerability. These trends suggest that public diplomacy cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach but it has to very discernibly target both the content type and the segment of the citizens.

The analysis of institutional capacity has pointed out a number of different themes. To start with, the detection instruments are very powerful and they are the ones that take in both EU data and academic projects. Civil society, for instance, the actors involved in this matter, contribute to raising awareness, yet the money available is still very little when compared with the huge scale of disinformation operations. Coordination mechanisms have been improving since 2024, however, they are still working at different speeds, especially in the areas of social media monitoring and emergency alerting. The legal status of platform accountability is in flux, however, there are still some difficulties with the national implementation and therefore a gray area exists regarding who is responsible for the spread of false narratives. Lastly, public diplomacy mainly focuses on strengthening the domestic front and not on projecting the strategic narratives internationally which limits Spain's capability to confront the disinformation coming from the outside sources preemptively (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; OECD, 2024).

One of the main points is the relationship between public anxiety and participation behavior. Though the public is very much worried about a certain issue it does not necessarily mean that those people will go for corrective content consumption; according to the survey data, as much as 25% of the public that is concerned and in the know shun news at the time when there is a peak in disinformation spread. This phenomenon which is termed as "paradoxical vulnerability" highlighting the need for pre-emptive and narrative-based interventions that anticipate misinformation before it gets too late to prevent it from going widely. Proactive campaigns that are supporting this idea should give priority to regionally customized messages, multilingual formats, and repetition over different channels to reach the max audience (ENISA, 2023).

The insights from the analysis of Table 2 further show that the public-diplomacy programs of

Spain fall into complementary layers such as detection (SmartVote, EUvsDisinfo), coordination (DSN Forum), research and translation (OficinaC), and outreach (fact-checking networks), among others. Nevertheless, the connection among these layers is at times sporadic, and the lack of a centralized rapid-response protocol could result in the official communications being slower than the viral disinformation campaigns. This delay could, during election times and public health emergencies, be a factor that leads to the entrenchment of false narratives which in turn could weaken both Spain's international credibility and domestic resilience (Hybrid CoE, 2025).

By indicating the amount of detection and response activities in 2023–2025 per institution, Figure 3 shows an extra dimension of comprehension. The graph illustrates the annual count of corrective actions, media literacy workshops, fact-checking outputs, and EU coordination alerts.

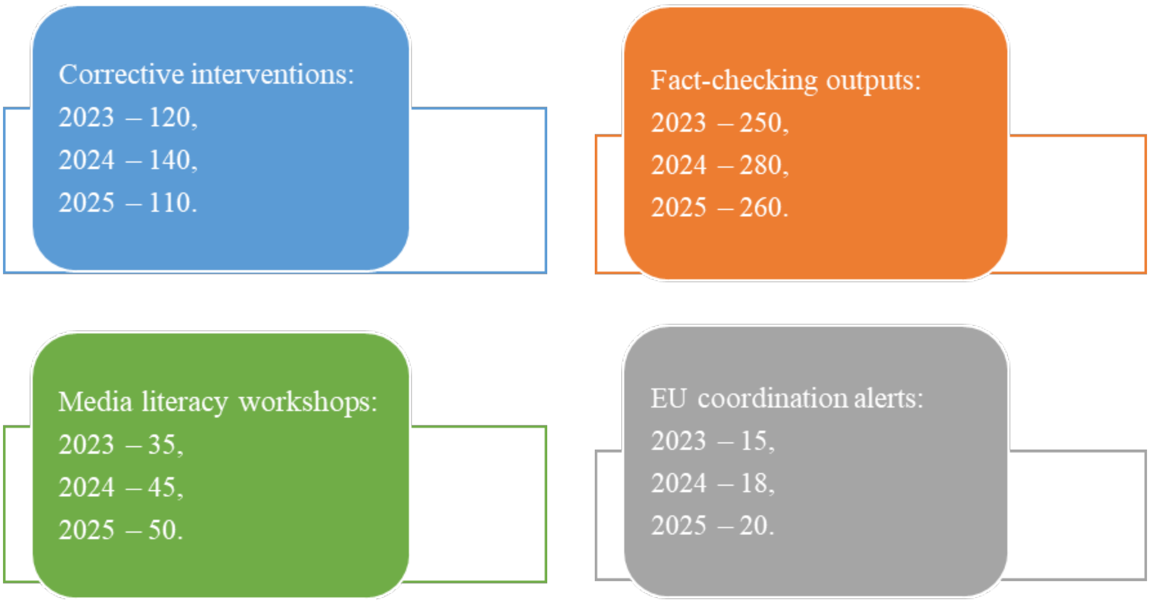

Figure 3 – Distribution of institutional anti-disinformation activities, 2023–2025
Note – compiled by the author based on the source (ENISA, 2023)

Corrective interventions are at their highest point in 2024, which is a year of great electoral activity. Media literacy workshops and fact-checking outputs indicate an upward trend, which is representative of civil-society involvement. The EU coordination alerts are still relatively few but they are directed to the right places. The year 2025 may see a decline in corrective interventions, which can be interpreted in different ways such as resource reallocation or the use of pre-bunk campaigns, which are likely to result in lesser need for reactive measures.

The dynamic between public anxiety and institutional response indicates several policy implications. To begin with, it is necessary for Spain to strike the right balance between detection, reactive correction, and proactive narrative work. To be specific, government funding should be allocated according to the impact periods (e.g., elections) and the types of disinformation that cause high concern (politics, health) that have been identified. Moreover, the partnership between civil-society, academic, and EU mechanisms can create a more efficient process in terms of both speed and reach but it would necessitate the establishment of coordinated operational protocols and the provision of funding for sustaining such cooperation. Lastly, it is of utmost importance to have international coordination to neutralize the narratives that originate from foreign sources, especially the pro-Kremlin FIMI as it possesses the potential of transnational propagation.

The path that Spain followed in regard to public concern and institutional response shows a complicated situation that has several layers of issues. The detection capacity, involvement of civil society, and coordination among the EU together form a solid basis. Apart from this, the speed and magnitude of the current FIMI necessitate further integration, active engagement of public diplomacy, and specific legal and platform interventions. Gaining and keeping public trust is an area where institutional responses have to do even more than correcting lies; they also have to be prepared for the next move of the propagators of false information, be quick in communicating, and be open about their activities.

Ultimately, the results point to a dual challenge: Spain has a successful outreach and detection system but still has to address both ongoing public concern regarding the spread of misinformation, as well as sporadic gaps during periods of significant risk. To address this, Spain must: enhance the development of proactive narratives through campaign development; work toward improving existing mechanisms used for platform accountability; invest in long-term development of media literacy; establish operational coordination among national and EU authorities; and conduct crisis communication exercises that simulate the flow of viral misinformation to enhance resilience.

These actions will ensure that Spain's public diplomacy transforms the experience gained through significant exposure into lasting value, thereby protecting national security and maintaining credibility at both the national and international level.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to evaluate how Spain has used Public Diplomacy to build its National Security Resilience to Disinformation (e.g., the threat represented by disinformation campaigns). It was determined that Spain already has very effective systems for detecting disinformation, as well as effective Fact Checking Networks and growing National Coordination Forums (Coordination Networks) for working together to build National Security Resilience to Disinformation. In addition, it appears that Public Support remains quite strong in Spain, with approximately 70-83% of people concerned about disinformation, thus creating a serious Political Need for Response to this Threat.

The primary strengths identified in Spain's current approach to Building Resilience to Disinformation included: 1) Detection (e.g., the capability to Identify Disinformation); Resilience of Civil Society (e.g., through the use of Networks of Civil Society Organizations), and 3) Collaboration with the European Union (EU).

Limitations to Spain's Public Resilience Response include: 1) Reactive rather than Proactive, 2) Lack of Accountability on Social Media Platforms (e.g., the use by Disinformation sources) and 3) Delays in Operational Response during Crises due to Inefficient Coordination between various Public/Private actors.

Future policy opportunities identified as essential to building domestic resilience within Spain and establishing its global reputation as a competitor in counter-disinformation initiatives include: 1) proactivity in narrative development 2) whole-of-government rapid response, 3) collaborations with Private Sector Companies (social media platforms), and 4) creation of measurable programs to improve Public Media Literacy (Disinfo.eu, 2023; UC3M SmartVote, 2025; OECD, 2024).

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References

The reference list should be in alphabetical order and include only works cited in the text. Consider the following:

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