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Social Solidarity and the Gramscian Subaltern Politics of the Multitude

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Abstract

This article engages with the theoretical-practical debate of contemporary political thought on collective subjectivation, political action, and social transformation at present. Firstly, it discusses the contributions of the contending paradigms of the politics of hegemony vis-à-vis the autonomous politics of the multitude and then explores their shortcomings for identifying potentially converging grounds. It then puts forward theoretical possibilities aiming to reconcile these approaches towards a critical conceptualization of prefigurative politics and the subjectivation of multiple social forces into an emerging political subject, building from the development of constituent subaltern politics through grassroots radical agency within local arenas. In this scenario, social solidarity emerges as a two-sided element possibly allowing for an alternative understanding of the constituent collective subject of our times and the radical democratic politics it brings into play for creating a new social order from local spaces. Lastly, potential research roads to examine these theoretical claims are indicated.

Keywords: Social solidarity; Hegemony; Multitude; Grassroots radical agency; Subaltern politics

Introduction

The successive crises of the neoliberal hegemonic order have unfolded over multiple dimensions of human life throughout the past decades. Most recently, society has endured the Great Recession in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, migration flows have increased dramatically due to civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and systematic human rights violations, the drastic socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic still linger, and international conflicts have broken out here and there, let alone the climate crisis that threatens us all. Altogether, these and other issues of the neoliberal order have produced an overwhelming toll on (collective) social well-being, which, arguably, is but a collateral effect of a crisis-ridden world order wherein the neoliberal governing project "reinvents itself in times of trouble" (Brodie, 2015, p. 48).

Notwithstanding these aggravating and intertwining crises that put the neoliberal capitalist order into a critical juncture of global organic crisis (Gill, 2015), grassroots social forces have responded through autonomous and radical collective action, inaugurating a new cycle of counter-hegemonic resistance and alternatives (Satgar, 2020), as it has been witnessed in different struggles from below – e.g., street protests, social movements, communal alliances and assemblies, citizens organisations, individual and group activism. Accordingly, a wide constellation of independent and horizontal loci of grassroots agency has surfaced in civil society across the globe, enacting radical democratic politics to address these multiple issues of the world order to secure individual and collective livelihood while

resisting the failures of neoliberalism. Furthermore, alternative forms of social life have also emerged (beyond – and often in opposition to – the state and market) on account of grassroots agency, gestating emancipated and egalitarian socio-spatial arrangements in local arenas through new democratic politics. Thus, as Holloway points out, the struggle of the exploited and oppressed social forces against neoliberal capitalism is prefigurative as well, for "we shall live the world we want to create, we shall organise and act in a manner that corresponds to that world" (Holloway, 2014, p. xv).

In this current conjuncture, a common element throughout these multiple loci of grassroots radical agency is the social solidarity that has manifested with notable strength recently and embodies the response of the grassroots to the organic crisis of the neoliberal order, binding together these multiple oppressed social subjects and unleashing their transformative potential to produce alternative social realities. These are, in fact, two faces of the same coin – that of social solidarity – as collective subjectivation and prefigurative politics altogether constitute the foundations of a new social order that, paradoxically, is already experimented in emancipated socio-spatial entanglements at the local level and has yet to emerge towards wider scales. This article elaborates on a historically specific understanding of social solidarity as a two-sided element that, at the same time, allows for an alternative conceptualization of new prefigurative politics and the subjectivation process of multiple oppressed social forces into an emerging political subject. It draws upon different strands of contemporary political thought reflecting on collective movements, political action, and social change to put forward theoretical possibilities seeking to reconcile the contending paradigms of the autonomous politics of M. Hardt and A. Negri's multitude and A. Gramsci's politics of hegemony (and its more radical discursive interpretation from E. Laclau and C. Mouffe) towards a critical approach to grassroots agency and new forms of politics at present. Grounding such conceptualisation on social solidarity as the theoretical-practical element that combines key categories of both paradigms allows for the reconfiguration of the conceptual apparatuses underpinning each approach, hence envisaging the entanglement of the multitude's horizontal and autonomous modes of being and acting into the broad Gramscian (counter-) hegemonic project towards social transformation and emancipation. It argues that this encounter takes place precisely at socio-spatial entanglements within local universes transformed and generated by grassroots radical agency.

This article is divided in two parts. The first part engages with the theoretical debate on popular power, collective agency, political practice, and social change, addressing mainly the contributions and shortcomings of the conflicting paradigms – the autonomous politics of the multitude and the politics of hegemony and revolution – to lay the groundwork for the theoretical possibilities to follow. The second part expands on these possibilities, building upon a conjunctural and contingent understanding of social solidarity for accommodating autonomous and hegemonic conceptual attributes underpinning grassroots radical agency and new prefigurative politics, in order to grasp better the subjectivation process of the emerging collective social subject of our times and the potential of the radical democratic politics it brings into play for creating a new social order from local spaces. The concluding section indicates potential roads for research to examine these theoretical possibilities against concrete evidence.

The Politics of Hegemony and (or Versus?) the Autonomous Politics of the Multitude

The theoretical-practical debate on new modes of subjectivation and political action and the potential of the grassroots agency for social transformation has animated contemporary political thought for the past decades, as it gains traction on account of the emergence of new socio-political developments, e.g., social movements, popular protests, collective

resistances, democratic experiments, and so on (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014). And these have been more than just a few in recent years. This debate has permeated different social science fields (e.g., political theory, international relations, social theory, social movements studies), articulating multi-disciplinary perspectives onto two (apparently) contending feuds, usually inspired by classic and contemporary Marxist thought and post-Marxist reflections. Apart from a handful of notable exceptions (to whom this article will return later), the theoretical perspectives and practical claims have traditionally revolved around the paradigms of hegemony and autonomy, which are informed mainly by the works of Gramsci and Hardt and Negri, respectively.

 The former builds on Gramsci's theory of hegemony and more recent takes on his thought, as in E. Laclau's (and his work with C. Mouffe as well) populist-discursive approach to hegemony. Irrespective of taking a cue from Gramsci or contemporary post-Marxists, the politics of hegemony entails the convergence of multiple subordinate social subjects under an emerging political body (the Modern Prince for Gramsci or other configurations of the political subject according to the post-Marxist tradition), which will rise against the dominant forces in a given hegemonic formation. Bearing the counter-hegemonic political endeavour, this emerging political subject embodies the national popular will and comes to act politically by occupying the integral (or extended) state, as Gramsci understood the amalgamation of the political and civil societies (Gramsci, 1971). Therein, subordinated social forces cohere around the revolutionary political body, thence acquiring discipline and political form (Gramsci, 1919a), for contending for hegemony with the dominant classes of the existing order. Besides striving to dislodge these conservative forces of the hegemonic establishment, a revolutionary political project must necessarily build up the alternative institutions and intellectual resources to underpin the development of a new social order, this time egalitarian and emancipated from capitalist domination, eventually emerging from the shell of the old one (Gramsci, 1971; Cox, 1993).

 In this regard, Gramsci drew attention to the subjective dimension of dominance and subordination, as he insisted on the consensual aspect of power for configuring social relations enabling hegemony to prevail (Cox, 1993) – and so does the post-Marxist tradition, as Laclau and Mouffe emphasised the aggregative potential of discursive practices for cohering a disparate social majority around universalist emancipatory projects (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014). An alternative commonsense – one that instigates the revolutionary praxis and communist consciousness among the subalterns – must pervade the social fabric to provide the organised mobilisation and active politicisation of the working class and other oppressed groups (Gramsci, 1919a). Hence, it allows for the counter-hegemonic project to expand over and entangle every dimension of human life (social, cultural, economic-productive, political, and so on) in order to transform it ultimately. Therefore, following Gramsci's politics of hegemony, social transformation (i.e., revolution) is only brought about through the political action of an emerging political subject that guides and elevates subordinated social forces into the political realm for waging an antagonistic confrontation with the dominant classes in the struggle for hegemony.

 Laclau and Mouffe (2014) have expanded on Gramsci's thought, incorporating a more radicalized and vertical conceptual apparatus, while moving away from key categories of traditional Marxism (e.g., the notion of class struggle, the working-class identity, the triad of the economic, the political, and the ideological levels) for putting forward a populist-discursive approach to the construction of hegemony and the political subject. In this regard, their post-Marxist interpretation of Gramsci's politics of hegemony elevates vertical dynamics of representation and leadership, unity and universality, and antagonistic relations as fundamental for accounting for the political articulation of disparate social forces towards the construction of a unified political subject that is itself capable of

establishing an alternative social order (Laclau, 2001). Elaborating on the understanding of hegemony as constitutively political and the logic of equivalence inescapable to political articulation, they envisaged distinct struggles coalescing into a collective will – consisting of 'empty signifiers' that universalize the particularism of these struggles – through which the emerging political subject represents the community as a whole against existing forms of power (and in the quest for hegemony) (Laclau, 2001).

In Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic logic, discursive mediation – through equivalential chains – is of paramount importance for constructing the hegemonic representation of a totality, hence inscribing this collective will within a more universal new social imaginary (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). Therefore, in this discursive construction of hegemony, and the universalist emancipatory project more broadly, political subjectivation and action necessarily presuppose representation and antagonism, for eventually enacting a subjective transformation of the social relations towards the political constitution of a hegemonic political subject that rises as the leading force within the community and challenges the antagonistic pole:

> Its very condition is that a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it. Such a form of 'hegemonic universality' is the only one that a political community can reach. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. x)

As Laclau (2000) puts it, "there is no way of emancipating a constellation of social forces except by creating a new power around a hegemonic centre" (p. 208), hence representation, understood as a system of mediations, "is essentially inherent to the hegemonic link" (p. 211).

On the other hand, the paradigm of autonomy rejects these social and political processes of antagonism, convergence, hierarchy, and representation, as it builds up from the horizontal and absolute democratic politics for being and acting of the multitude. Hardt and Negri (2004; 2009) have theorised the political subjectivation of the multitude as the process of becoming of multiple subjectivities into a collective social subject that associates, interacts, and organises loosely and horizontally through a dynamic network of independent loci of human agency. Most importantly, in this process of subjectivation, the plurality and autonomy of the social elements entangling into this rhizomatic network are preserved, hence enabling the expansive potential of this new collective social subject, since the multitude incorporates "a polyphonic composition of them, and a general enrichment of each through this common constitution" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 211).

And just as the multitude comes to exist by producing new subjectivities through autonomous politics, it is also through this networked model of association and organisation that it acts politically, insofar as Hardt and Negri (2009) conceive the political act in a post-hegemonic order as the very organisation of social life in common, encompassing every aspect of human life – i.e., nature and society. Given this current biopolitical context of the production of the common, the multiplicity of singularities forming the multitude acts together politically in social production, as politics (and the political capacity of the multitude accordingly) "has (…) never really been separable from the realm of needs and life" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 175). Thus, "horizontally organised multiplicities are capable of political action" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 173) since, as the multitude comes into being autonomously, it organically bears "the power to organise itself through the conflictual and cooperative interactions of singularities in the common" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 175). In this post-hegemonic order, the multitude's horizontal and autonomous politics for being and acting are recursive, as one recognises "how its

productive activity is also a political act of self-making" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 175). Consequently, in contrast to the vertical hegemonic understanding of political subjectivation as the constitution of "a hegemonic power standing above the plural social field" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 169), the horizontal and autonomous paradigm envisages "a theory of organisation based on the freedom of singularities that converge in the production of the common" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 211).

Most recently, Hardt and Negri (2017) have tried to accommodate – to some extent – a tactical leadership to the politics of the multitude, in order to advance decision-making and assembly of this emerging collective social subject for creating new democratic political possibilities. By inverting the "the political relationship that constitutes" (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. xv) leadership, they attempt to subsume it to the strategic role of the multitude itself, thereby reverting the hierarchical logic of vertical leadership inherent to Laclau's construction of hegemony. These key functions of leadership – decision-making and assembly – can be, nonetheless, "accomplished together by the multitude, democratically" (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. xiv). Having that said, the multitude remains capable of organising itself, setting its own terms for cooperation and action and, even if incorporating some dynamics of tactical leadership, the production of subjectivity necessarily remains autonomous by means of the democratic entrepreneurship of the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2017). Thus, cooperation, singularity, freedom, equality and autonomy are the very ontology of the multitude and the radical democratic politics it enacts.

The debate goes on, delving deeper into the contradictions of the different modes of political subjectivation and the political capacity of the emerging collective social subject in each perspective, and the conceptual apparatuses underpinning them. A detailed study of the particularities of each paradigm is beyond the scope of this article – it has already been done aptly elsewhere[1]. This section will focus instead on the shortcomings of these approaches to identify possible grounds for productive tensions to emerge.

Gramsci had traditionally put a great emphasis on the agency and self-determination of the working class, and on the new class consciousness that arose, from the workshops to the trenches, in the years of war (Davidson, 2016), as decisive for the subjective emergence of the worker and the communist subject (Modonesi, 2014) – itself a political subject capable of producing counter-hegemonic resistance and transformation. Moreover, in this context, he was particularly interested "in the role of spontaneous workers' organisations" (Davidson, 2016, p. 124), elevating "the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 79) as the cornerstone of the workers' democracy, inasmuch as these institutions bore the potential of progressing "towards socialism and its realisation" (Gramsci, 1919, as cited in Davidson, 2016, p. 125). Nonetheless, Gramsci would, throughout his further reflections, insist on the need of attributing discipline and political organisation to the working class, thence emphasizing the leading role of a new form of democratic organisation – the Modern Prince in his Prison Notebooks). Especially concerned with the defeat of the factory councils movement in Italy in the early 1920s, he then drew attention to the decisive role of the centralising and disciplining leadership of the revolutionary party for co-ordinating and ordering the working class and other subaltern groups, "leading them towards the ultimate goal" (Gramsci 1919a, p. 80). Otherwise, lacking discipline and communist education, these social forces would remain "highly susceptible to cooptation and [their] goals can easily be integrated into the [...] politics of restoration and renormalisation of emerging or ruling elites." (Fonseca, 2016, pp. 8-9).

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[1] See, for instance, Kioupkiolis, A. & Katsambekis, G. (Eds.), 2014. *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today: The Biopolitics of the Multitude Versus the Hegemony of the People*. Routledge.

At this moment, it became paramount for Gramsci to give a permanent political form to the autonomy and agency of the working class by subsuming it under "a highly centralised hierarchy of competences and powers" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 79), hence elevating the party as the leading subject in the quest for hegemony, as autonomy becomes a "synonym of the political independence of class rather than as process and experience of emancipation" (Modonesi, 2014, p. 12). And this vertical dynamic of incorporating leadership and representative relations at the expense of autonomy gains an even more fundamental dimension in the post-Marxist interpretation of hegemony. For Laclau's (2001) hegemonic logic, the construction of the hegemonic subject necessarily requires "a set of subjective transformations" (p. 8) "between actual political subjects and the community as a whole" (p. 6), allowing for a particular constituent of the community of struggle to emerge as its leading force (Kioupkiolis, 2014), ultimately giving rise to a new hegemonic centre. Accordingly, the hegemonic subject only becomes hegemonic inasmuch as it incarnates the political representation of the other social actors of a community, subjectively transforming their identities altogether (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014).

Even though the historical context had understandably led Gramsci to insist on the driving force of the party for organising and disciplining the subaltern classes, reducing grassroots autonomy and agency under a hierarchical power that rises as the leading subject in a social community, as in the post-Marxist take on hegemonic politics, only does harm to the constituent potential of the multiple social subjectivities exploited and oppressed under capitalism. As Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 166) have pointed out, traditional forms of political organisation and action that are inherent to these vertical and representative relations inherent to the politics of hegemony, "based on unity, central leadership, and hierarchy are neither desirable nor effective" when it comes to grassroots agency and its autonomous political capacity nowadays. The emerging (counter-) hegemonic social subject, acting as a political body that elevates over the social forces it represents, risks eventually being entrapped into the power dynamics of the hegemonic order, exhausting the transformative potential of grassroots agency within its political representative institutions, and inevitably reproducing capitalist relations of power and dominance.

For instance, the political trajectory of the populist radical Left in Southern Europe in the wake of the early 2010s anti-austerity campaign, that has widely been read through the lenses of this populist-discursive construct of hegemony (see Katsambekis & Kioupkiolis Eds., 2019), makes the case against the unified vertical organisation as a necessary condition for acting politically. The journey of Podemos and SYRIZA from the squares to parliaments in Spain and Greece, respectively, is instructive of the limits of subjecting grassroots autonomy and agency to a representative and hierarchical political leadership (Kioupkiolis, 2019). These movement-parties, closely associated with the grassroots campaign against austerity that shook the European periphery in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis (Della Porta et al., 2017), promised to institutionalise the new common sense and radical democratic politics cultivated in the popular encampments in public squares into the political realm. Despite considerable electoral success (Podemos became the junior coalition member of the Spanish government as of 2020; SYRIZA won the 2015 Greek national election, being in government for four years), these movement-parties attained but a few social policies and are now found on the defensive, whether in power or opposition, struggling to halt the far-Right that advances towards national parliaments across Europe. The flawed revolutionary political endeavour of the radical populist Left hence substantiates the inadequacy of the vertical politics of hegemony as the orienting framework for political organisation and action, corroborating that hierarchy, leadership and representative relations can only disrupt the emancipatory potential of grassroots radical agency.

Moreover, the hegemonic understanding of political constitution through unified hierarchical organisation also entails the need for concentration and cohesion of a wide social multiplicity behind the programmatic unity advanced by the emerging hegemonic political subject, thereby legitimising its role as the bearer of the national popular will. Gramsci (1971) envisaged the formation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc (i.e., the unity of structures and superstructures), wherein multiple struggles and social subjectivities cohere towards the working-class struggle and identity embodied by the party (as the Modern Prince), as a fundamental stage for the revolutionary political project to thrive eventually. Laclau (2000) was even more energetic upon the need to supersede the dichotomy universality/particularity in favour of the former, as he insisted that a hegemonic social subject must necessarily assume the universal representation of particular struggles within the social community through the constitution of a new social imaginary, inscribing the collective will within the universalist emancipatory project. Nonetheless, since the social field is radically heterogeneous (and the expansive potential of grassroots radical agency stems exactly from the continuing plurality of its elements), reducing the autonomy and singularities of the converging social subjects will only arouse vertical and centralising tendencies of the counter-hegemonic leading actor. Arguably, by elevating certain ideological and programmatic orientations over an irreducibly heterogeneous social formation, the vertical constitution of a hegemonic unified command threatens to undermine the very creative potential of those multiple social forces coming together, which relies precisely upon "the full expression of autonomy and difference of each" and the "powerful articulation of all" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 87) through democratic organisation and common constitution.

Likewise, the autonomous and horizontal politics of the multitude have also been subject to theoretical and practical critiques from different standpoints, which unfold mainly over two complementary lines of objection, namely the absence of antagonism for producing political subjectivation and the very immanent nature of the multitude's political act. Rather than coming into existence as a response to the multiple crises of neoliberal capitalism, the multitude is spontaneously formed on the plane of immanence, i.e., it emerges out of the natural propensity of social subjects to come together and act in the production of the common in a post-hegemonic world (Hardt & Negri, 2009). As such, the multitude cannot be submitted to a process of articulation into an antagonistic political subject for challenging the established order. Instead of giving form to the multitude, the antagonist politics of counter-hegemony would disrupt and undermine the very becoming political of this emerging collective social subject, reducing the multitude's existence to a mere agent in opposing political relations at play.

Nevertheless, the hegemony of capital over human life fundamentally defines the existing order and, as witnessed in various manifestations of grassroots radical agency in the recent cycle of counter-hegemonic struggles (Satgar, 2020), its successive crises have pushed the exploited and oppressed social forces to rise against its social and political structuring processes of dominance and subordination. Antagonism is, therefore, an organic condition – lying at the very nature of political subjectivation – for the constitution of an emerging political subject that resists the failures of neoliberal capitalism and challenges its hegemony. Gramsci, for instance, elevated the central "dimension of political struggle as rupture – antagonism" (Modonesi, 2014, p. 12). Accordingly, the post-Marxist tradition acknowledges the centrality of "antagonism – and its corollary, which is radical social division" (Laclau, 2001, p. 5) for politics (and for the political synthesis of diverse social forces around the revolutionary political subject that emerges as hegemonic, as a consequence). As Laclau (2001, p. 6) states, the multitude is necessarily "constructed through political action – which presupposes antagonism and hegemony.".

By discarding the fundamentality of antagonism for political subjectivation, the paradigm of autonomous politics consequently fails to conceive an adequate framework for this emerging collective social subject to act politically in a post-hegemonic order, as it relies entirely on the biopolitical context of producing the common nowadays for accounting for the multitude's political act. Even though some of the principles of biopolitical reality are acknowledged here, e.g., "the cooperation of a wide plurality of singularities in a common world (…) and the interminable continuity of the process both based in the common and resulting in the common" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 174), the political capacity of the multitude must necessarily challenge the hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism. Acting politically "implies a disruptive process of challenging established identities and norms" (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 6), thereby universalising the struggles of concrete social forces into a new social imaginary that expands the emancipatory potential of the new hegemonic centre (Laclau, 2000) towards a new social order wherein human life is freed from the rule of capital. Therefore, the political act of the multiplicity of subordinated social subjects coming together at present cannot rely solely on Hardt and Negri's "immanentist" approach, for, in order to become political, their ideas and practices must evolve "into a collective will that will then become an integral state, in the Gramscian sense" (Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2014, p. 216), thence inaugurating a counter-hegemonic political project that is, in fact, a complex social construction (Laclau 2001). Hence, it stands necessarily in opposition to the established structures and processes from which the multitude struggles to overcome and emancipate, rather than emerging from its supposed immanent nature of being-against. Otherwise, relying solely on the innate propensity to act politically that, in turn, stems from the biopolitical production of reality, the multitude is bound to endlessly rise and fizzle out without ever achieving emancipation and genuine social transformation. Antagonism, therefore, besides accounting for political subjectivation, is also the *sine qua non* of the political act of the multitude against the hegemony of capital and towards the production of new social realities.

Despite these contradictions and shortcomings, the paradigms of hegemonic and autonomous politics offer useful conceptual apparatuses and ontologies that, once combined, can potentially lead to a grounded and more accurate understanding of the political subjectivation of the emerging collective constituent subject of our times and the potential of grassroots radical agency for creating alternative social formations. This article, therefore, rejects the established binarisms opposing key categories from both approaches (Katsambekis, 2014; Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2014), as it takes a cue from the theoretical interventions of A. Kioupkiolis and G. Katsambekis (2014; Katsambekis, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2019), who explore potentially converging grounds between these two paradigms for thinking grassroots movements and emancipatory struggles in austerity-ridden Southern Europe. They deconstruct the absolute categories of autonomy and hegemony and their subjects, the multitude and the people, thus allowing for mutual contamination between hegemonic and post-hegemonic conceptions of political subjectivation and democratic agency (Katsambekis, 2014), reconfiguring representative functions for envisioning a genuine democratic praxis for the production of the common (Kioupkiolis, 2014).

Nonetheless, rather than bearing on the populist-discursive approach to hegemonic and post-hegemonic politics as they have done, the theoretical possibilities proposed here are founded upon the liminal stage of Gramsci's revolutionary process: the development of constituent subaltern politics. It argues that the constellation of loci of collective radical agency that emerged recently as the grassroots response to the organic crisis of the neoliberal hegemonic order prefigure what Gramsci had envisaged as alternative, bottom-up and autonomous forms of proletarian life, embodying the cornerstone of the workers'

democracy, and yet it takes the form of a multitude of independent and horizontally collaborating social subjectivities. In this attempt to bridge the horizontal and autonomous politics for being and making of the multitude with the Gramscian counter-hegemonic political project for developing an alternative social order emancipated from capital from local universes, social solidarity emerges as a useful theoretical-practical element that can help to reconcile both paradigms, as the next section will elaborate on.

On Constituent Subaltern Politics and Social Solidarity

In his early writings[2], Gramsci focused his political and intellectual efforts to "stimulate thought and action" of the working class and other exploited groups for developing the "critical and active consciousness of the mission of this class", hence inspiring them towards the ultimate goal of creating "a genuine workers' democracy" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 79). He elaborated at length on

> antagonism and autonomy, that is, on the subjective emergence built from the experiences of insubordination and gestation of areas of independence and emancipation for the working class (…) towards the exaltation of the autonomous formation of the worker and communist subject, its capacity to struggle, and the construction of a new society. (Modonesi, 2014, p. 11)

Tellingly, Gramsci attributed the development of constituent subaltern politics to the working class and other subaltern social subjects, as he understood it precisely as the autonomous and associative experience and action of the entire class put at the service of the proletarian power and revolution, elevating the multiple "centres of proletarian life" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 80) as the cornerstone of the revolutionary project. Therein, the communist consciousness and the revolutionary praxis are nurtured among the subalterns (Gramsci, 1919b), eventually "developing into the skeleton of the socialist state" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 79). What is more, within these autonomous and self-determining socio-spatial entanglements gestated by the working-class independence and agency, the counter-hegemonic common sense is embedded within the everyday life of the multiple oppressed social subjects therein converging, which is itself the primary field of emancipatory struggle.

Gramsci insisted on these independent, self-determining, and collectively organised arrangements of working-class social life – as the occupied factories, socialist clubs, and peasant communities that emerged in Italy (mainly in the industrial North) in the early 1920s – as loci of workers' democracy that, altogether, embodied a dawning system of socialist living (Gramsci, 1919a). Accordingly, he would regard the factory councils movement (especially that of Turin) as the most developed expression of a "future communist management of factory and society" due to its "revolutionary conscience and a rebuilding capacity" (Gramsci, 1920, as cited in Santucci, 2010, p. 73), as workers occupied factories and established autonomous self-management – from culture to production – raising as constituent collective agents with the potential for refunding the state (Gramsci, 1919a; Fonseca, 2016). As the movement took over the management of the workspace, emancipating labour from the ruling of capital, it reconfigured relations of production and exchange, as well as social relations within and beyond the factories, forming an alternative

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[2] In 1919, Gramsci set up the weekly "*L'Ordine Nuovo*" (The New Order) as an instrument of reflection about workers' revolution and proletarian freedom concentrating mainly on the mobilization of the working class from below. In this regard, the articles "*Workers' Democracy*" (1919), "*Conquest of the State*" (1919), "*To the Workshop Delegates of the Fiat Centro and Brevetti Plants*" (1919), "*Unions and Councils*" (1920), "*The Power of the Revolution*" (1920), "*The Factory Council*" (1920), and "*The Congress of Factory Councils*" (1920) are especially noteworthy.

socio-productive system (albeit incipient and transitory) through the collective and self-determining praxis of the subalterns (Gramsci, 1919b).

Moreover, Gramsci also emphasised the importance of developing a "network of proletarian institutions" "rooted in the consciousness of the broad masses" for eventually enhancing all its "future growth possibilities." (Gramsci, 1919b, p. 88). By articulating these multiple arrangements of proletarian social life "into a broad and flexible system that is capable of absorbing and disciplining the entire working class" (Gramsci, 1919a, p. 80), this emerging order of socialist living would bind together the multiple oppressed social forces therein associating and interacting, hence accounting for the political subjectivation of the worker and communist collective subject. As Modonesi (2014, p. 12) points out, for Gramsci, "the autonomy of work acquires political shape in the Council: the producer becomes a political subject" that, collectively, can produce an alternative social reality emancipated from capitalist domination.

Therefore, building from his belief in the mass constructive action of the working class and its constituent subaltern politics for the coming-into-being of a wide social multiplicity into a collective constituent social subject capable of political action, Gramsci would espouse the "working-class autonomy and socialist democracy which constituted the most original and powerful aspect of the factory councils movement" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 78) and the workers' democracy more broadly:

> For Gramsci, then, autonomous and rhizomatic forms of proletarian life, as exemplified by socialist circles, peasant communities, shop-floor internal committees and the factory councils themselves, did not simply represent a new form of trade unionism or new forms of tactical organising on the part of a centralised and bureaucratic revolutionary party, but were, in fact, central and defining characteristics of subaltern autonomous politics in their own right, and needed to be kept as such by their own members and participants. *The autonomy, multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference and horizontality of these collectives, their 'revolutionary conscience and rebuilding capacity,' were generated by the logic of organised participants themselves, regardless of political affiliation or party membership.*" (Fonseca, 2016, pp. 6-7, italics added)

Not surprisingly, the foundational principles of a new social order, as Hardt and Negri (2012) declared on account of the grassroots anti-austerity movement in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis (and other manifestations of radical democratic politics since then) – independence, horizontality, social justice, openness, and collective self-determination – had already been contemplated by Gramsci while envisaging the socialist state to be founded upon the constituent subaltern politics of the working class. Furthermore, the multifarious constellation of loci of grassroots radical agency that have flourished in civil society here and there recently, transforming and generating emancipated and egalitarian socio-spatial entanglements at the local level, in effect, prefigures these very institutions of proletarian social life as in Gramsci's thinking. Notably, in Southern Europe, during the years of austerity and struggle (Hadjimichalis, 2018) social movements have turned towards local communities and neighbourhoods, implementing issue-specific and territory-oriented collective action to produce visible results, embedding the new collective subjectivities and democratic praxis of the movement of the squares within local arenas, therein producing new forms of politics (Nez, 2016).

Following the demobilisation of the popular encampments against austerity in public squares, social movements and other forms of grassroots radical agency – e.g., autonomous citizens organisations, neighbourhoods assemblies, individual and group activism,

(trans)national solidarity networks – have developed a wide array of local-oriented social initiatives striving to alleviate the severe conditions imposed by neoliberal capitalism over collective livelihood, as well as radical democratic spaces fostering people's control over the commons (Hadjimichalis, 2018). For instance, in Greek and Spanish civil societies, grassroots radical agency has enabled collective resistance and a transformative praxis within local universes, representing an important legacy of the movement of the squares (Fernández-Savater & Flesher Fominaya, 2016). It has combined traditional forms of collective action of autonomous citizens' organisations with the innovative democratic politics of the anti-austerity movement, building resilience through the provision of informal welfare services (e.g., social clinics, collective kitchens, squatted social centres, etc.) and the fight against home foreclosures, ethnic profiling, and the precarization of public services (Kousis et al., 2020; Lahusen et al., 2021). Complementary, more generative practices have also been developed for creating democratic spaces paralleling state institutions. For instance, social economy has been experimented with (e.g., barter clubs, time banks, social currencies), multiple public spheres for the collective self-management of the commons have been instituted in local communities and neighbourhoods, and alternative modes of production and distribution have also been envisaged (e.g., workers cooperatives, producer-consumer networks, markets-without-middlemen) (Hadjimichalis, 2018; Kousis et al., 2018).

In this regard, grassroots radical agency has enacted constituent subaltern politics through the autonomous and associative power of the multiple social subjectivities coming together within these new socio-spatial entanglements. Moreover, it has provided these local universes with a twofold contribution: shaping the terrain of struggle and resistance against the hegemony of capital and prefiguring new forms of politics towards alternative social realities. Thus, grassroots autonomy and agency have embedded an alternative commonsense throughout the social fabric of local communities and neighbourhoods, fostering the politicisation of everyday life (Garcés, 2019) and, as a result, giving rising to a collective social subject therein.

What is more, these multiple initiatives and spaces of subaltern social life – when conceived as interacting and associating nodes in a dynamic and expansive network of autonomous and horizontal socio-spatial entanglements of grassroots radical agency – indicate the terrain wherein the multitude comes into being at present (Castells, 2015; Saltzman, 2019). As multiple social subjectivities come together within these local arenas, through their cooperative and inventive agency, they are capable of acting politically in the production of the common within small communities and neighbourhoods, in effect expanding over every aspect of human life therein, just as Hardt and Negri (2004; 2009) have theorised the political capability of the multitude. The radical democratic politics enacted by this emerging collective social subject to produce social reality within these socio-spatial entanglements unfold through public spheres and assemblies and mechanisms of deliberative and participatory decision-making, enabling open, horizontal, and egalitarian processes for the collective production and management of everyday life within these local spaces. The absolute democratic praxis for direct self-governance and production of the common put into effect by the grassroots in local communities and neighbourhoods nowadays are, therefore, consonant with the Gramscian constituent subaltern politics of the exploited and oppressed social classes under capitalism, hence laying the foundations for an alternative social order – one that is egalitarian and frees human life from the hegemony of capital – to eventually emerge bottom-upwards, from these local arenas towards wider social arrangements.

Understanding these many socio-spatial entanglements transformed and generated by the autonomous and associative experience of the grassroots as loci wherein the hegemonic

and autonomous politics intertwine, it is possible to identify social solidarity as a powerful subjective element and a productive concept allowing to think anew the coming-into-being of a collective social subject capable of acting politically by producing constituent subaltern politics at the local level. A historically specific construction of the concept of social solidarity, which is located vis-à-vis the organic crisis of neoliberal capitalism and within the most recent cycle of counter-hegemonic struggles (Satgar, 2020), albeit contingent, allows one to envisage alternative possibilities towards resistance and transformation being developed from below and, moreover, its potential subjective impact for the emergence of a new political subject at present. Assuming a generative and innovative dimension, social solidarity, as Agustín and Jørgensen (2016b, p. 17) perceptively put it, becomes inventive of new alternatives and imaginaries, producing "new configurations of political relations, political subjectivities, and spaces". Albeit reflecting particularly on the role of solidarity for producing civil society alliances in the struggle against hegemonic migration politics, their assertion also holds true for the multiple manifestations of grassroots radical agency against the hegemony of capital in recent years (irrespective of which particular dimension of dominance and subordination is challenged), which have altogether shattered the hegemonic commonsense and developed alternatives (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016b).

It can be thought of social solidarity as a two-sided concept for possibly accommodating vertical and horizontal attributes of political subjectivation, grassroots radical agency and democratic politics, in an attempt to reconfigure key categories of the paradigms of hegemony and autonomy, thereby moving beyond the shortcomings of both theoretical approaches. Firstly, in the current conjuncture, social solidarity potentially indicates the awakening of the ultimate level of the collective political consciousness that brings together diverse subordinate social groups in a hegemonic formation and actualises their possibilities for collectively producing resistance and transformation, as Gramsci had envisaged. The development of a universal class consciousness, which inaugurates a new relation of political forces among the subaltern groups, brings them in unison around the political aims of these social classes as a whole and bonded by intellectual and moral unity (Gramsci, 1971). It thus becomes decisive for "the process of political subjectivation, from the relative autonomy of work towards the self-determination of the worker" (Modonesi, 2014, p. 12), hence allowing for the emergence of a (counter-)hegemonic political subject who can act politically in the construction of a historically concrete set of complex superstructures (Gramsci, 1971). The attainment of this universal class consciousness is, therefore, "the most purely political phase" (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 181-182), and it can be said that social solidarity henceforth acquires a political dimension (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016a) inasmuch as it enacts the self-actualisation of the subalterns' own potential for constituting new social realities by themselves. In this regard, the new collective social subject raising from these horizontal and associating nodes of working-class autonomy and agency becomes itself the constituent political subject of our times, eventually being capable of creating an egalitarian and emancipated new order from these socio-spatial entanglements at the local level. Accordingly, Gramsci had acknowledged the constitutive power of solidarity as such:

> *The principles of combination and solidarity become paramount for the working class; they transform the mentality and way of life of the workers and peasants.* Organs and institutions embodying these principles arise; they are the basis upon which the process of historical development that leads to communism in the means of production and exchange begins. (Gramsci, 1919b, p. 83, italics added)

Besides arousing this universal class consciousness of the subalterns (as in Gramsci's thinking), which in turn indicates to the subjectivation of an emerging constituent political subject, social solidarity has also the potential for embedding the revolutionary praxis within the social fabric of local communities and neighbourhoods. In this critical juncture of the neoliberal order and the grassroots responses to its multiple crises, "the forces of solidarity and the devotion hidden in them only wait for the perspective of great struggles to appear in order to transform into a predominant principle of life" (Pannekoek, 1938, as cited in Modonesi, 2014, p. 90). Social solidarity may, therefore, unite the exploited and oppressed social forces in the struggle against domination and subordination and towards emancipation, and their strength – i.e., the constituent potential of the subalterns – "lies wholly in union and solidarity with his comrades" (Gramsci, 1919c, p. 91).

On this account, a second attribute of social solidarity as a conceptual tool is to endow this new collective social subject with the discipline and organisation required for decisive political action through the organic commitment to alternative social formations – in which human life is emancipated from the hegemony of capital and unfolds autonomously from the state and market. Coming to realise the "continuity between one's own life and life as a common problem" (Garcés, 2019, p. 212), these multiple social subjectivities can together imagine and, moreover, generate – through a radical democratic praxis – egalitarian and emancipated forms of life, as those gestated within the socio-spatial entanglements at local arenas developed by the autonomous and associative agency of the subalterns. As such, social solidarity – as a theoretical-practical element of grassroots radical agency at present – binds together multiple collaborating social subjectivities entangled in this network of independent, horizontal, and self-determining local universes, unleashing their affective and social potential for the collective production and management of the common – which encompass every dimension of human life accordingly. Thus, organically committed to these alternative forms of life that oppose and emancipate from the hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism, this new collective social subject can act politically, in effect, for its political capacity is thus exercised in producing new social realities.

As previously discussed, although Hardt and Negri have appropriately theorised the political action of the multitude as the social production of common life, what they left unsaid is the fundamental need to oppose the multitude to the existing order (Laclau, 2001), for thus enacting its political capacity. Raising the multitude against the hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism through the concept of social solidarity, as argued here, allows for realising the political act of the multitude in the production of a new order, thereby elevating the antagonist dimension of political struggle (and consequently, of the political act of the multitude) and, more importantly, its generative character (Agustín & Jørgensen 2016b). Furthermore, albeit Hardt and Negri (2017) have recently conceded to some verticalization of the horizontal movements – or, to put it simply, "a dynamic between verticality and horizontality" (p. 18) – their "hypothesis of a democratic entrepreneurship of the multitude" (p. xviii) rests on subjecting vertical leadership to the horizontal politics of the multitude, rather than on the amalgamation of both dimensions. By employing the concept of social solidarity, one possibly envisages a more nuanced intertwining of hegemonic and autonomous politics, inasmuch as this emerging political subject acquires discipline and organisation for exerting its political capacity precisely through its commitment to an alternative social formation wherein human life in common is finally emancipated.

Nonetheless, as in other cycles of counter-hegemonic struggles, social solidarity (and grassroots radical agency, more broadly) comes up against historically specific structural limits that it has yet to overcome, as the very reproduction of different forms of capitalist power in times of crises, the cooptation of radical and transformative imaginaries by

authoritarian and extremist social forces, the institutional restrictions to the building of new forms of mass power for transforming the state, and the still contingent expansion of post-neoliberal imaginaries (Satgar, 2020). Critically, social solidarity as a subjective element and a productive concept has yet to develop both horizontally and vertically, expanding beyond these local universes for eventually encompassing wider social formations, hence building up to a global counter-hegemonic historical bloc around an emancipatory political project upon which a new order is to be founded.

Conclusion

This article has proposed to ground the encounter of the autonomous politics of the multitude with the politics of counter-hegemony and revolution on the constituent subaltern politics of the exploited and oppressed social forces, which is enacted through grassroots radical agency within emancipated and egalitarian socio-spatial entanglements at the local level. In this regard, social solidarity is indicated as a useful conceptual tool for understanding the process of subjectivation of the emerging subaltern political subject at present and how its political capability for producing new social realities is enacted. Furthermore, the article expanded on social solidarity as a historically specific element that emerges vis-à-vis the current conjuncture of neoliberalism and the structural limits the existing order imposes upon grassroots radical agency. Nevertheless, the multiple initiatives and spaces that emerged in civil society during the current cycle of counter-hegemonic alternatives as the grassroots response to the organic crisis of neoliberal hegemonic order suggest the potential of new social formations – wherein human life unfolds autonomously and free from the ruling of capital – to emerge from these local universes on account of grassroots radical agency.

Bearing that in mind, more important than thinking anew when reflecting upon collective subjectivation and the political capacity of the constituent social subject of our times is to ground these alternative conceptualisations on concrete possibilities of emancipation and social transformation, even if – still – restricted to local universes. Albeit not relying on primary sources of empirical data to support the theoretical possibilities advanced here, this article hopes to contribute to the ongoing debate by deconstructing standing categories and concepts of these contending theoretical paradigms, opening the field for further avenues of investigation and reflection. A fruitful line of inquiry might be examining to what extent horizontal modes of organisation and action of grassroots agency concretely oppose the hegemony of capital within these local arenas, i.e., how horizontal politics for being and acting are, in effect, articulated by political antagonism. That can lead to a better understanding of whether and how different dimensions (structuring processes and relations of dominance and subordination) of the existing order are resisted and, more importantly, are transformed actively and purposely by horizontal and autonomous grassroots radical agency. Complementarily, it is of fundamental importance to analyse how grassroots radical agency can be mutually constitutive for those engaged in these socio-spatial entanglements at the local level, irrespective of whether they are in a position of offering or receiving solidarity. Realising how social solidarity can transform these asymmetrical categories into a holistic approach towards social transformation might blur this division, constituting grassroots generative agency for and by those subaltern social subjects altogether. Another possible research framework benefits from shifting the scale of social solidarity from local universes towards wider scales. By investigating national and transnational alliances for grassroots radical agency, one can possibly envisage constituent subaltern politics being reproduced across broader social formations. That can be helpful for theorising and, most importantly, conceiving the practical repercussions of the dialectics

between local particularities and universal principles underpinning a new emancipated and egalitarian social order to emerge.

Thus, although the theoretical possibilities put forward here can potentially indicate the emergence of a constituent collective social subject tied to local particularities that, nevertheless, bears the potential to produce alternative social realities at wider social arrangements eventually, they are yet to be corroborated by grounding this alternative conceptualisation of collective subjectivation and subaltern political agency onto empirical evidence. Furthermore, the organic crisis of the existing order makes it all the more essential to envisage concrete possibilities of emancipation and social transformation.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of 'Concepts' in John Pocock's Methodology

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Abstract

The study of 'concepts' is one of the problematic issues in the methodology of the history of political thought. The different dimensions of the problem cannot be understood without following the discussions of the 'Cambridge School', of which John Pocock is recognised as one of the main figures, and its debates with approaches such as the 'history of concepts'. But, given that in Pocock's theory, 'language(s)' and linguistic structures such as 'discourse' and 'paradigm' are more important, the role of 'concepts' in his methodology has not been properly investigated. Melvin Richter even once declared that Pocock's approach lacks attention to the history of concepts. This article tries to demonstrate that not only does Pocock not neglect concepts theoretically, and in his research he investigates practically the history of concepts wherever needed, but also, the concepts in his methodology become more effective than he initially assumes.

Keywords: contextualism; migration of concepts; discourse; paradigm; diachronic

Introduction

In the aftermath of positivism's decline, the consequences of the linguistic turn and the development of the historical attitude were revealed in methodological approaches such as 'Hermeneutics', 'Genealogy', 'History of Concepts' and 'Cambridge School'. The new issues that arose from those transformations were quickly reflected in fields such as intellectual history and political thought, and continue to be the source of significant questions for researchers. One of the controversial issues in such a sphere has been the capacities and limitations of the study of 'concepts' in the methodology of historical studies in general and the history of political thoughts in particular. In this regard, we can see three basic and interconnected questions, all related to language and history. First, whether the concepts can be considered the main and separate units of research or should they be examined as a part of language, in connection with linguistic and socio-political contexts. Second, how concepts can play a role in systemic approaches that prioritise the structures of language. The third question is whether the concepts should be examined only synchronically or diachronic studies that seek the stability and transformations of concepts in short and long periods are necessary.

As it is well known, the 'history of concepts' – especially as articulated by Reinhart Koselleck – in which concepts are considered the main and separable units in historical research, is a pioneer in clarifying the capacities of the study of the role of socio-political concepts in historiography. In contrast, scholars such as Quentin Skinner and John Pocock,

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the major thinkers of the Cambridge School, have tried to demonstrate the conditions and limitations of the study of concepts in the methodology of political history.

Some scholars have rightly pointed out that Pocock, whom we sadly lost recently, is recognised today as one of the most prominent and influential contemporary figures in the community of historians of political thought (Nederman, 2024). Knowing Pocock's attitude and its differences with thinkers like Skinner and Koselleck can have a decisive impact on the work of political historians and theorists who need a deeper knowledge of the complexities of the role of concepts in socio-political thought. But, compared to Skinner, research about the components of Pocock's methodological approach, especially the place of 'concepts' in his theory, has been insufficient.

The inadequacy of the investigations into the subtleties of Pocock's theory can be seen even in the explanation of his work by a great scholar like Melvin Richter. In the closing years of the twentieth century, when Richter (1995, 126, 138) sought to introduce the achievements of German thinkers to the English-speaking world and simultaneously encouraged German scholars to pay more attention to Pocock's achievements in methodology, he attributed to Pocock a 'lack of attention to the history of concepts' which he believed it was a similarity between Pocock and Skinner. If we assume this statement to be correct, Pocock must have thoroughly ignored an important part of contemporary historical-political research or deemed it irrelevant. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Therefore, we need to examine that problematic statement by understanding the place of historical study of 'concepts' in Pocock's methodology. This is the aim of the article and two assumptions form the starting point of my research: First, not only theoretically Pocock is not indifferent to concepts, and many instructive points can be found in his remarks about the study of 'concepts' in the history of political thought, but we also find significant attention to the history of concepts in his actual research. It is true that Pocock's methodological focus is on 'political language(s)', 'linguistic context', and structural terms such as 'paradigm' and 'discourse'. But this does not mean a 'lack of attention' to the role of concepts in language and discourse. Second, resulting from some features of Pocock's methodological theory, the effectiveness of concepts goes beyond what he initially assumed. Because when Pocock perceives concepts not as entities separate from the context but as components of its construction, and due to what he calls the 'migration of concepts', the role of concepts extends beyond simply being elements within a discourse.

The "concepts" in the article's title do not refer to specific concepts but rather to concepts in general, and "concept", equivalent to "conceptus" and "Begriff", cannot be reduced to a simple "word" due to its polysemic and interpretable nature. Also, the historicity and language-dependency of "concept" distinguish it from "idea" in the history of ideas, which was assumed ahistorical. Terms such as "context" and "paradigm" are not defined in the introduction, since they will be examined from Pocock's viewpoint in the subsequent sections. The article's theoretical framework is based on several negative and positive assumptions. The negative assumptions include the rejection of (1) the scientific approach to historical research; (2) those linguistic structuralist approaches that, claiming to be scientific, consider synchronic research to be sufficient; (3) the traditional approaches of the history of thoughts which by lining up the names of thinkers in a chronological manner, followed the same problems in their texts or connected ideas in a chain throughout history, without paying attention to the differences of the historical contexts.[1] The positive aspect of the theoretical framework includes these assumptions: (1)

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[1] In criticising such approaches, including Lovejoy's 'History of Ideas', Skinner (2006, 21) notes that the main danger is 'anachronism'.

Regardless of whether we examine long or short periods, the diachronic study is an essential part of the historiography of thoughts; (2) either as the main unit (in Koselleck's 'Begriffsgeschichte') or as a part of larger units in the research programme (in the Cambridge School and historical semantics), it is not possible to properly recognise historical transformations without understanding the meanings, applications, functions, and implications of concepts; (3) an accurate understanding of the place of concepts in historical research requires scrutinising the methodological ideas of thinkers of different schools and their mutual criticisms.

Considering the latter assumption, I do not intend to prove a privilege for Pocock's approach over other approaches, nor to criticise his approach, but rather contribute to clarifying the dimensions and complexities of the role of concepts in the historiography of thoughts by shedding new light on Pocock's methodology. Hence, the appropriate research method to achieve the article's objectives is analytical-comparative. In this way, while focusing on analysing Pocock's works and relevant scholarly literature, I will also draw some comparisons between his approach and that of Skinner, who belongs to the same school, and with Koselleck, the main figure of an impressive rival approach.

To make it clear in what theoretical context Pocock initiated theorising, I will briefly draw the outlines of the Cambridge School, of which Pocock (2004, 538; 2009, viii) considers himself a member, and focus on the features that, from my point of view, have had the most relevance to his methodology.

Pocock as a Member of the Cambridge School, But Not Without Special Ideas

There are various responses to this question: in contrast with what approaches or currents the methodological framework of thinkers such as Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, and John Dunn was recognised as a 'school'? From Samuel Moyn's (2023, 54) point of view, as much as it was assumed that the Cambridge school was formed based on the 'insistence on historical context against the commitment to sempiternity of concepts, problems and unit-ideas' in the thought of Arthur Lovejoy and Leo Strauss, it was also an 'antagonist' of the approaches of Karl Marx and historians such as Lewis Namier. Terence Ball (2001, 128) has also mentioned the confrontation of 'Straussians, the 'epic theorists' of the Berkeley School and assorted postmodernists' with the Cambridge School. According to John Gunnell (2011, 15), the founders of the Cambridge School rejected what they characterised as 'philosophical and ideological renditions of past political thought, such as that pursued by Strauss and Wolin'; because they claimed that 'an authentic historical recovery of the meaning of texts' can only be achieved by a 'careful reconstruction of their political context'. But according to a different interpretation, when postmodern approaches such as poststructuralism and deconstruction were popular, the Cambridge school was considered a humanistic challenge to them due to its emphasis on 'human agency' and recovery of the purpose and programme of the authors of the texts (Vanheste, 2007, 11).

Members of the Cambridge School enhance the significance of the linguistic and historical context so much that many scholars call them 'contextualists'. (Bevir, 1992, 276; Blau, 2017: 11; Boucher, 1985, 217; Hampsher-Monk, 2001, 168; Shapiro, 1982, 572). However, it should be noted that they reject 'orthodox' textualism and contextualism. Because they believe that orthodox views seek to understand all utterances only based on the duality of text and context, while a text should be seen as the authors' 'linguistic actions' results. According to them, in examining the ideas of previous thinkers, it should not be neglected that their purpose was to influence the problems arising from the socio-political context of their time. Thus, the theoretical pivot of the Cambridge school is made from the merging of linguistic contextualism, philosophy of action, and historical attitude. Although

the emergence of a 'school' is always the result of the influence of many thinkers and intellectual currents, the ideas of three thinkers have been more effective in joining together the constitutive elements of the mentioned theoretical pivot of the Cambridge School: Robin Collingwood, Peter Laslett, and John Austin.

Skinner (1988, 103, 234) has declared that Collingwood, as the 'leading anti-positivist philosopher' in England, had a 'major intellectual influence' on him, and he, as an intellectual historian, was indebted to Collingwood for his 'fundamental assumptions'. Also, Pocock (2009, 27) has pointed to Collingwood's impact on his understanding of history and the history of thought, and John Dunn (1996, 22) has referred to Collingwood in his remark about the difference between the reading of classical texts of the history of political theory and the method of scientific proof in the work of physicists. For the sake of brevity, I will categorise the three principles of Collingwood's philosophy that have had a major impact on the Cambridge school: (1) Denying the same questions and 'eternal' problems throughout history. According to Collingwood (1939, 60), the belief in the same questions and eternal problems is a 'vulgar error, consequent on a kind of historical myopia' which leads to the neglect of 'profound differences'; (2) considering knowledge as 'the activity of knowing' based on the logic of question and answer. Collingwood (1939, 30) has stated that by reading Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, he came to the 'principle' that knowledge does not consist only of propositions, statements, judgements (assertive acts of thought), 'but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer', because 'a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic'; (3) integration of philosophy of history with philosophy of action and language. To the question of 'what kind of things does history find out?', Collingwood (1956, 9) answered: '*res gestae*: actions of human beings that have been done in the past'; and his response to 'How does history proceed?' was that 'by the interpretation of evidence'. Since human action is intentional and meaningful, the first answer combines the philosophy of history and the philosophy of action, and the second incorporates the linguistic element into that combination.

Peter Laslett, who, according to Pocock (2004, 535), was considered the 'protagonist' of the Cambridge School's methodology, with his research on John Locke and showing the practical efficiency of investigation in context, greatly influenced the establishment of 'contextualism' in methodology. Laslette's (1949, 1) methodological concern is quite clear in his introduction to Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, where he claims that 'none, or almost none, of the thinkers or historians who have examined Filmerism… have known exactly who Sir Robert Filmer was, when he lived, what he did and what he wrote'. While, as Laslett articulates, placing Filmer in his historical context makes it easier to understand why he wrote as he did. It is evident that this combination of historical contextualism with an inclination to recover the 'author's intention' in Laslett's methodology has profoundly affected the Cambridge School, especially Skinner's ideas. However, also Pocock (2019a, 99) acknowledges that his shift from Butterfield's 'historisation' of political thought to its 'contextualisation' is indebted to Laslett.

The influence of John Austin on the Cambridge School, as Pocock (2009, 130) has pointed out, took place 'in a philosophical context dominated by Austin, Wittgenstein, and those who have responded to them'.[2] Austin's 'speech act' theory simply opened its way in the minds of thinkers who, following Collingwood, realised the importance of action in history and its relation to language. In addition to the distinction between the 'locutionary act' and the 'illocutionary act', one of the pillars of Austin's theory, his view on the

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[2] In describing the history of thought in Britain at the time of the rise of the Cambridge School, Brian Young (2006, 41) declared that one might call it the product of 'the Wittgensteinian moment in English thought'.

'conventional' nature of the conditions of action and utterance was also notably influential. The joint impact of Collingwood's and Austin's ideas on the Cambridge School is evident in this description of Terence Ball:

> Skinner and his fellow Cambridge historians view works of political theory as forms of political action, grasping the point or meaning of which requires that one recover the intentions of the actor/author and the linguistic resources and conventions available to him or her. (Ball, 2007, 353)

As Pocock (2004, 538) declares, the thread connecting his work with other members of the Cambridge School is 'insisting that a certain branch of the study of politics [political history] be perceived as a history of activity'. He sees his own writings on methodology as attempts 'to find linguistic means of presenting an act of political theorising as an act performed in history'. Nevertheless, despite the mentioned intra-school links, Pocock has distinguishable views on issues such as the construction of context, the value of recovering the author's intention, and the range of historical periods under research.

From Pocock's point of view, language structures such as 'discourses' and 'paradigms' are in a more decisive position than the 'author's intention'. David Boucher (1985, 151), in a review of Pocock's arguments, has stated that for him 'the languages are the primary focus of attention' and 'individual authors are of importance because they use and modify them'; this is because for Pocock, 'a language of discourse is never the intentional or unintentional creation of any particular thinker', and 'the language is prior to the speaker'. However, Pocock's position is not that all intentions and actions at any time and situation should be assumed to be under the complete domination of structures. He does not ignore that linguistic transformations and conceptual innovations in normal conditions differ from those in critical situations during transitions and revolutions. Given the remarks of Terence Ball and Pocock (1988, 1) regarding situations such as the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, and the French Revolution, it seems there is no need for further explanation: 'At such times, conceptual innovations are brought about by action, practice, and intention, rather than by unintended structural change occurring in the historical context'.

Mark Bevir (2004, 35) has categorised Pocock into contextualists who see the role of linguistic structures as determining. In this sense, language functions paradigmatically predetermine what and how the writer should write. It is the language that gives the writer 'intention' by providing the tools for expression. Language determines not only the form but also the content of what we want to utter. Bevir acknowledges that Pocock insists that no single language can completely fix the author's intentions. However, according to Bevir's interpretation, Pocock ascribes it to the multiple languages in the context, 'not to the ability of authors to use language creatively to convey their particular ideas'. Bevir's interpretation is somewhat controversial. Because, although Pocock asserts that the units we trace are paradigms, he explicitly states, not entirely consistent with Bevir's interpretation, that 'if an author was what we call "creative", "seminal", or "revolutionary", we can ascribe to him a definite effect (and perhaps intention also) of changing the paradigm structure by some force which his utterances exerted' (Pocock, 1989, 25). Not only does Pocock recognise the possibility of partial 'modification' and 'transformation' in the existing paradigms because of the author's 'utterances', but he also accepts the possibility of changing the 'structure' of paradigms by the 'force' of those utterances. Therefore, when we point to the importance that Pocock gives to linguistic structures such as paradigms, we must keep in mind that at the same time, he insists that a political community is not a 'community of enquiry' and the function of paradigms in the political

field is different from the structure of scientific revolutions (Pocock, 1989, X).[3] In the following, as we examine the role of concepts in Pocock's methodology, what was mentioned about his positions will become clearer.

Research Unit: Language and Discourse, What Place for Concepts?

Unlike Skinner, for whom the recovery of the 'author's intention' is at the center of research, Pocock's (1996a, 51) main concern is a 'discourse or language' as 'a complex and living entity, a system, or even an organism'. Therefore, our primary task here is to explore the role that concepts may have in such a systemic approach.

As mentioned, the difference between Pocock's and Skinner's views on the main unit of research is obvious. But, Koselleck's idea might even seem utterly opposed to Pocock's. Koselleck (1994, 7; 2006, 86) was convinced that although theoretically it is possible to agree with contextualists, in the practice of research as soon as you move from the analysis of a single concept to the examination of the paragraph in which that concept is used there will be no boundaries and whole text and, then, the scientific language and everyday language of that period should also be investigated. Exactly in the opposite way, according to Pocock (2002, 9), the priority is to recognise 'language(s)' and 'discourse', and the historian should pursue 'his first goal by reading extensively in the literature of the time and by sensitising himself to the presence of diverse idioms'. From his point of view,

> It is a large part of our historian's practice to learn to read and recognise the diverse idioms of political discourse as they were available in the culture and at the time he is studying: to identify them as they appear in the linguistic texture of any one text, and to know what they would ordinarily have enabled that text's author to propound or 'say'. (Pocock, 2002, 9)

The speech act of the text's author and the concepts employed are taken into consideration according to the linguistic and discursive context in which the author has acted. But Pocock (1964, 193) once pointed out that some interpreters fail to note that 'to deny that concepts may be isolated and shown to play a determining role in politics is not to deny that they play any role whatever'. For example, the historian of Bodin's or Burke's thoughts deals with research in the 'relatively stable concepts which are regularly employed in the political thought of relatively stable societies'. However, since such a historian has to investigate the process of abstracting concepts from the tradition, he cannot choose the concepts arbitrarily and remains conditioned to the 'context' and society's linguistic tradition.

As noted in the introduction, to understand the role of concepts in Pocock's methodology, we need to investigate his actual research in addition to his theoretical details. An instance of conceptual assessments can be found in his critical commentary on *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, written at the request of Skinner and Nicholas Phillipson. Pocock (1993, 393) has demonstrated that to grasp how the 'concept of revolution' was perceived in seventeenth-century British thought, we need to examine the political conditions of the early modern era, for example, at the time of James Harrington. We should understand 'the responses of printed discourse' to the situation in which the 'anomic conditions' and the 'central trauma of English history' were being experienced, and, in Harrington's phrase, the 'people was a living thing in pain and misery'. This

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[3] Pocock (1990, 21) even once noted that when we speak of 'languages' it may not be appropriate to use 'paradigm'. Melvin Richter (1995, 129) concluded from Pocock's statements that he regretted the use of the term 'paradigm' but not to the extent of abandoning it.

requires knowing the perception of the authors of that time about the 'collapsed' government and the circumstances that led to it. Thus, the historical investigation of the 'concept of revolution' forms a part of Pocock's research programme, but, as he notes, 'it does not follow that the search for this concept should dominate our enquiry'. He takes a further step and acknowledges the impact of 'vertical components' of concepts on discourses. As he put it in *Concepts and Discourses*:

> It is true that the history of discourse comes equipped with an already existing vertical component that formed by the changes and tensions set up by the actions, perceptions, and responses of the human agents acting within and upon the several languages. But it is also true that 'historians of discourse,' alert though they must constantly be for alterations of usage, assumption, nuance, and so on, are not systematically addicted to dissolving the languages they study into the 'concepts'… of which these languages are compounded or to tracing the history of change in each of these severally. (Pocock, 1996a, 50)

Pocock even considers the role of concepts in language and socio-political life as 'constitutive' and acknowledges the dependence of discourses on concepts. In another writing, which is the joint work of him and Trans Ball, we read that 'inasmuch as the concepts that constitute political life and language lose old meanings even as they acquire new ones, political discourse appears, in retrospect, to have been—and even now to remain—in a state of perpetual flux' (Ball & Pocock, 1988, 1).

From the above explanations, it can be inferred that Pocock not only does not neglect the history of concepts but even considers its impact on current political discourses and life profound. However, he maintains that the historical study of concepts separately might not be sufficient and should be included in a broader research programme on the languages and discourses of a historical period. In this sense, despite the differences between Pocock's approach and the 'history of concepts', they can be employed together in research programmes. Koselleck (1996, 65) declared too that he did not see any incompatibility or opposition between the 'history of concepts' and the 'history of discourse'; they are inevitably dependent on each other because, on the one hand, 'a discourse requires basic concepts in order to express what it is talking about' and, on the other hand, 'analysis of concepts requires command of both linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts, including those provided by discourses'.

'Concepts' and Open-multidimensional Context in Pocock's Approach

Pocock (2009, 67) defines a 'context' as a structure of relationships in which actors act; it gives meaning to actions, and 'half-metaphorically' can be called a 'space' that determines the conditions and rules of actions. I found 'open-multidimensional' appropriate to describe Pocock's 'context' for two reasons.[4] First, from his perspective, the context is not temporally and linguistically close, limited, and unidimensional, but rather includes a linguistical multiplicity and different temporalities. Before Pocock, in his formulation of the methodology of investigation in the historical context of a text, Laslett avoided single-time attitudes and considered the context to consist of three moments of composition, publication, and reception. While confirming that formulation, Pocock (2004, 536) finds it necessary to add 'a multiplicity of languages' to it. Because, as he perceives, the 'canonically accepted language' of each branch of human knowledge in a given context is only one of the enormous languages. Moreover, when he speaks of 'languages' he does not

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[4] Pocock (2011, 1) once used the phrase 'plurality of contexts'.

mean closed and objectified systems, but 'sub-languages: idioms, rhetorics, ways of talking about politics, distinguishable language games of which each may have its own vocabulary, rules, preconditions and implications, tone and style' (Pocock, 1990, 21).

Second, according to Pocock, the context itself has a conceptual aspect. Therefore, a dialectical relation between concepts and contexts might be assumed. By distinguishing a 'conceptual world' and a 'social world' and connecting them to 'human action' he even presents a shifting concept of context. In this view, human beings communicate through language systems and create their own conceptual and social world, each of which can serve as 'context' for the other. There is a multifaceted and complex relationship between shifting contexts, language, human action, and history in which language systems do not determine but *help* humans practice their constitutive actions. In Pocock's description of the complexity of context, we do not see rigid structuralism:

> Men think by communicating language systems; these systems help constitute both their conceptual worlds and the authority-structures, or social worlds, related to these; the conceptual and social worlds may each be seen as a context to the other, so that the picture gains in concreteness. The individual's thinking may now be viewed as a social event, an act of communication and of response within a paradigm-system, and as a historical event, a moment in a process of transformation of that system and of the interacting worlds which both system and act help to constitute and are constituted by. (Pocock, 1989, 15)

Another factor for the multidimensionality of the context in Pocock's theory is the influence of 'tradition', that is, what 'we inherit from a social past' (Pocock, 1964, 185). This characteristic separates his theory from theories that include the idea of historical discontinuity. As David Boucher (1985, 155) explains, for Pocock a thinker is a social being and the concepts he uses are part of a 'shared inheritance' that 'variously named as traditions, universes of discourse, languages of legitimation, vocabularies, and paradigms, which must provide the context in which individual thinkers perform their social actions'. The diachronic aspect of 'tradition' and 'heritage' makes the structure of the context, as well as our investigation into it, not limited to a synchronic dimension.

It is not accidental that in his commentary on Pocock, John Toews addresses the diachronic aspect of tradition exactly where he explains the multidimensionality of 'discourse' as one of the main constructive elements of the context in Pocock's theory. By examining what Pocock calls 'the history of political discourses', Toews concludes that 'discourse' has three 'dimensions' from his point of view. First, the 'structural' dimension – which Pocock calls 'languages' includes the 'relatively stable conventions of language, usages, idioms, rhetorics, or vocabularies' – and rules that define what is assumed to be reality and the communicative world. Second, 'speech acts' that have communicative and creative characteristics and should not be considered only as 'events in language', but 'actions on language' to modify and transform it. This dimension arises from the continuous interaction between speech and language, as well as between action and structure. Third, the experiential dimension or the link between experience and language, through which the historicity of "discourse" can be understood. The historicity and diachronic aspect of "discourse" is revealed since 'the past, as the inherited inventory of constituted patterns of meaning, weighs on the present of the linguistic actor'. Also, any impact that individual speech acts may have on linguistic heritage, including innovations and transformations, must 'be situated in a history of experience and related to it in a diachronous, ambivalent and problematic manner' (Toews, 1987, 891).

'Paradigm', another key element of 'context' in Pocock's theory, is defined in terms of 'concepts'; not separated concepts but a constellation of concepts. Paradigms are 'conceptual constellations' with various functions in the discursive milieu of society (Pocock, 1989, 277). In addition, the same diachronic aspect of the impact of linguistic tradition on discourses is also found in paradigms. Considering the role of tradition and linguistic inheritance in Pocock's theory, Joyce Appleby (2006, 129) has indicated its similarities to the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Referring to Gadamer's statement that the texts read by historians are themselves part of an interpretive tradition, Appleby has declared that 'successive paradigms' in Pocock's contextualism are hardly distinguishable from 'successive interpretations' that Gadamer has in mind.

Due to the multidimensionality and openness towards the diachronic aspect of languages in Pocock's attitude, it is difficult to place him, as Mark Bevir (1992, 277) did, among the 'hard linguistic contextualists'. One cannot say with certainty that in Pocock's theory, the [synchronic] structure of the context is the absolute determinant of the concepts' meaning and the actors' intentions. Despite expressing his tendency toward synchronic historiography, Pocock (1996a, 53) himself notes the similarity of 'the diachronic or vertical histories of particular language usages' to 'shafts or tunnels sunk vertically through the stratified deposits of recorded history'.

In sum, Pocock's interpretation of the relationship between concepts and contexts not only distances from dualistic attitudes but also leads to what Gary Browning (2016, 72) describes as the 'openness of conceptual contexts' in Pocock's methodology, which he evaluates as 'instructive'.

Priority of 'Employment' and 'Function' over 'Meaning' and 'Usage'

In approaches such as 'history of concepts' and 'historical semantics', the focus is on the transformations of the 'meaning' of concepts and/or larger linguistic units in history. In the Cambridge School, Skinner (2002, 179) gives more weight to 'application' and 'use' concerning concepts. His phrase is famous that 'the various transformations we can hope to chart will not strictly speaking be changes in concepts at all; they will be transformations in the applications of the terms by which our concepts are expressed'. Thus, he has established his method on the recovery of the 'author's intention' as the determinant factor of the application or use of concepts within linguistic conventions. In Pocock's theory, rather, wherever concepts are thematised, the focus is often on their 'function' and 'employment' in the language(s) and linguistic paradigms at a certain historical moment of political society.[5] Not only has Pocock moved away from Skinner's intentionalism, but he has tried to show that Skinner's own attention has gradually shifted from 'intention' to 'performance'. According to Pocock (2002, 5), Skinner's shift in the focus of attention is reflected in his remark that 'if we are to have a history of political thought constructed on authentically historical principles, we must have means of knowing what an author 'was doing' when he wrote, or published, a text'. Pointing out that in Pocock's methodology the author's intention 'plays a far less prominent' role, John Dunn (1996, 21) stated that for Pocock 'political thought is above all an aspect of the experience of a society in time', and the historian must recover this aspect of social experience. Of course, as I understand it, the lesser prominence of 'authorial intentionality' in Pocock's methodology does not equate to abandoning it. In his research on *Leviathan*, before addressing the elements of the historical context, he mentioned Hobbes' intention in writing that book (Pocock & Schochet, 1996, 161).

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[5] Especially see Pocock, 1964, and 1989.

We should bear in mind that when Pocock uses 'employ' regarding 'concepts', he is talking more about their function in *collective* language than about their 'use' in individual applications. In fact, the 'employ' of concepts within the broader field of the 'function' of a language is imaginable. A clear statement of his conception can be found in his remark that 'the business of the historian of thought is to study the emergence and the role of the organising concepts employed by society, and the knowledge that this role has necessary limitations need not deter him' (Pocock, 1964, 198). We can also see this when his concern is whether all language users in a historical period did or did not 'employ' the concept of state (Pocock, 1996a, 55). According to Pocock (1987, 28), language is the context in which 'text' as 'event' emerges, and, therefore, our histories are more the history of languages or discourse continuities than the history of individual performances. The authors of the past also were 'operating in more continuities of discourse' than they knew at the time.

There is an enlightening description of Pocock regarding the inclusion of the 'employment' of concepts in the wider field of the 'function' of language and discourse and the preference of it over 'a priori meaning', where he speaks about the possibility of a shift in roles. As he argues, a philosophical statement can appear in the role of ideology, and a party slogan in the role of a heuristic device with scientific value. Similarly, political thoughts, which Pocock (1964, 186) sees in the form of discourses, can also perform different functions in different situations, and concepts and abstractions can 'move from one employment to another'. Therefore, the researcher's task is to follow the history of such changing functions and employments rather than assuming 'a priori' characteristics for thoughts and concepts. Also, he notes elsewhere that the pursuit of employment of the concepts should not be limited to theoretical writings. In praising Felix Gilbert's research methodology on the problems of the political milieu of Florence from 1494 to 1512, Pocock (2003, 117) evaluates his study as 'illuminating' because he has worked out both 'the institutional structure' of the regime and 'the conceptual vocabulary which was employed by those actually participant in it— not only in works of theory, but in speeches, resolutions, and public documents'.

From such a standpoint, for example, if we are to understand the concept of liberty in the political sphere of the Renaissance and the beginning of the modern era, we should turn to the investigation of the political discourses' functions at that time and the employments of the concept of liberty in them, not to 'meaning' of the word liberty or freedom; as Pocock himself has done in his research. In analysing the emergence of the discourse of republicanism and civic humanism in the age of Machiavelli and their lasting impact on the European political context, he examines the concept of liberty and tries to show that liberty in that discourse was relevant to the relationships between citizens and the role of citizens in city-states such as Florence. He concludes that in the political language of that situation, the concept of liberty meant the ascendancy of public laws and decrees and decisions of the state over the individual will and appetites (Pocock, 2003, 125).

Interdiscursive Migration of Concepts

One of Pocock's important attitudes about the place of concepts in political languages is the possibility of the 'migration' of concepts from one discourse to another. Melvin Richter once mentioned this feature in his description of Pocock's methodology. In response to why Pocock's programme is 'writing the history of political discourses', Richter (1995, 129) explained that he separates the components of different discourses in one text and shows how the constructive concepts of a particular discourse may migrate to another. Nevertheless, the significance of that feature in distinguishing Pocock's methodology from

Skinner's and distancing his approach from strict structuralism towards an interdiscursive theory has not been sufficiently considered.

In line with his view of the complexity of historical contexts, Pocock (1989, 22) points out that a complex society includes multiple specialised languages and many paradigmatic structures that appear simultaneously. Discussions proceed in the interaction space of these paradigmatic structures; and terms and concepts 'altering some of their implications and retaining others' while they 'migrate from one structure to another'. In Pocock's statements, the precedence of paradigmatic structures over the role of concepts is evident. However, attributing 'migration' and 'altering some of their implications and retaining others' to concepts makes it possible to recognise relative independence and spontaneity for concepts in his approach. It sounds from Pocock's declarations that concepts have the potential to carry and transfer some implications, which are dependent not necessarily on the intention of a particular user but on the various 'origins' of concepts in political discourses. He argues that political statements 'may convey more than one meaning… they are made up of terms of many origins, bearing many possible implications' (Pocock, 1989, 23). Pocock's attention to the 'implications' that arise from the origin of concepts and are carriable in them takes him beyond not only a mere preoccupation with 'meaning' and structuralist semantics, and from a focus on 'usage' in methodological intentionalism, but even from being confined to 'functions' in his discourse-oriented contextualism.[6]

Where Pocock speaks of the migration of ideas and problems, his account also implicitly includes the migration of concepts. For example, in his tracing of the historical migration of 'ideas and problems' from Italy to England and the American colonies during the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it does not require any effort to realise that the migration of concepts accompanied such migration. Apart from the conception of neo-Kantian thinkers, especially Nicolai Hartmann (1958, 6), who considered 'concept' in the strict sense a summarised problem or the content of a problem that has been reduced to its main defining elements, Pocock (1989, 80) himself has asserted that political societies create concepts of their existence in time to increase their historical awareness and critical ability to encounter problems.[7]

Besides the migration of concepts, according to Pocock (1989, 21), the migration of paradigms is also a part of the 'plural character of political society'. Just as the communication network can never be entirely closed in such a society, paradigms can migrate from contexts in which they are specialised for certain functions to contexts in which they are expected to perform other functions. In his investigation of Pocock's theoretical arguments and practical research, Boucher (1985, 167) has likewise addressed these two forms of migration. According to him, the first form is the migration of concepts from a specialised language to the sphere of politics, evident in 'common law', and the second occurs when a paradigm migrates from one geographic context to another. Boucher claims that 'a major pre-occupation of Pocock's works has been to show how the paradigm of civic republicanism, or republican humanism, operated in sixteenth century Italy, migrated to seventeenth century England and travelled on to the political life of America'. In such shifting contexts, the concepts that interact with each other are placed in different linguistic structures and 'bring about modifications'.

The migration of concepts also plays a crucial role in reinforcing the features of 'temporality', 'diachronicity', and 'processuality' in Pocock's methodology. Paying attention

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[6] For a more detailed explanation, see Mossleh, 2023, 65.
[7] According to Hartmann, what Teichmüller called the 'history of concepts' (Geschichte der Begriffe) was nothing other than the pure history of problems/ Problemgeschichte.

to the temporality of socio-political concepts was increasingly developed in the methodological debates of the second half of the past century, the context in which Pocock was thinking. The continuation of that development has led some scholars to declare that in the light of understanding the temporality of concepts, the basic questions of politics should also be rewritten (Freeden & Fernández-Sebastián, 2019, 2). In Koselleck's (1995; 2000; 2006) theory of 'Begriffsgeschichte', the analysis of the temporality and temporalisation of concepts, which reveals the processual and historical nature of their emergence and transformation, underpins the foundations of the theory and method.[8] Koselleck (2002, 5) traces the origin of recognising the temporality of concepts and its connection with political transformations to the 'Sattelzeit', the second half of the eighteenth century, the time of 'the transformation of the premodern usage of language to our usage'.[9]

The integration of the element of 'time' into language and political knowledge is important for Pocock too; however, he considers it one of the characteristics of the transformations of the Renaissance and early modernity. According to his account, in the intellectual sphere of the Middle Ages dominated by scholasticism, what was regarded as rational and worthy of knowledge was 'universal' and timeless. Particular events, which are time-bound and contingent, were deemed of a lower level of rationality and importance. Since history is related to the temporal sequence of particular and contingent events, Pocock (2003, 5-8) argues, it can be said with evidence that scholastic thought did not have any special philosophy of history. In the Renaissance era, a new consciousness of temporality permeated the concepts and the whole language, and a kind of non-theological and secular historiography emerged. Besides such theoretical statements, Pocock's view on the decisive role of temporality and temporalisation of concepts in the history of political thought can be followed in his practical research. Just as an instance, in his study of Hobbes's political language, Pocock (1989, 186) tries to show that Hobbes using a 'radical temporalisation' of the concept of salvation distinguished it from previous conceptions in the Christian tradition. Thus, a historical and time-dependent concept of salvation replaced the 'a-historical' and timeless conception.

The closeness of Pocock's and Koselleck's views on the importance of the convergence of language and time in politics is remarkable in Richter's description (1995, 125). While acknowledging the differences between the two approaches, he claims that there are some surprising common historiographical concerns, to the extent that 'the title of Pocock's collection, *Politics, Language, and Time*, could have served as the title for the English translation of Reinhart Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft*'.[10] We should add to Richter's remark that where the issues of 'temporalisation' and 'migration' of concepts meet in Pocock's theory is the point where the distance between his methodology and the 'history of concepts' is less than anywhere else. It may be said that this closeness is even

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[8] See, also, Lara, 2013, 6; Palonen, 2014, 31-33; Steinmetz & Freeden, 2017, 5.

[9] Margrit Pernau and Helge Jordheim (2015, 13) argue that, from Koselleck's point of view, modernity was essentially formed in connection with the process of temporalisation, which caused the concepts of Western socio-political language to be equipped with a temporal aspect that they lacked before. Reinhard Blänkner (2021, 128), who believes that the 'temporality' of concepts was not Koselleck's discovery, has explained the roots of his understanding of the temporality of concepts in the thought of Martin Heidegger, Karl Schmidt, and Karl Mannheim.

[10] In his writings, Pocock himself has less mentioned the 'history of concepts' and Koselleck, but in *Concepts and Discourses*, which was originally written to contribute to a book about the 'history of concepts', he tried to compare his work with Koselleck's. However, in that article, he focused more on *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and did not comprehensively examine the theory and method of the 'history of concepts'. Consequently, referring to some of Pocock's critical questions, Koselleck (1996, 64) noted that he had answered those questions long ago in his works.

further than what Pocock had in mind and saw in alignment with the main line of his approach. As evidence for this claim, one can refer to a historical study of the concept of barbarism, where researchers have shown that Koselleck and Pocock have similarly investigated the modern concept of 'barbarism' as the result of a process of 'temporalisation' in contrast to the Greek perception that based on the 'spatialisation' of that concept (Boletsi & Moser, 2015, 23).

Because of the connection between temporalisation and migration of concepts in Pocock's theory, the weight of diachronicity and vertical processes is greater than he initially intended. Due to Pocock's tendency to research in wider temporal periods, David Harlan (2006, 99), more than three decades ago, in his famous essay on the history of thought, supposed that Pocock was aligned with Fernand Braudel and François Furet and other members of the Anal school, who insisted on *la longue durée*. Also, Gary Browning (2016, 71) has pointed out that Pocock 'tends to trace long-term continuities in the history of political thought by following the continuing employment of particular languages or discourses of political theory'. Iain Hampsher-Monk (2001, 166) even goes so far as to claim that it is Pocock's emphasis on the diachronic aspect of languages and their transformations that originally differentiates his methodology from Skinner's, which emphasises the 'moment of linguistic action'. Hampsher-Monk's remark about Skinner's position refers to his expression regarding his main preoccupation with 'the pointillist study of sudden conceptual shifts', which, not coincidentally, is related to his assertion about the difference between his position and Koselleck (Skinner, 2002, 180). Acknowledging that 'concepts have a history' whose study requires long-term research, Skinner expresses that such long-term assessments are not his primary interests. Thus, his approach diverges markedly from Koselleck's, exactly where, as mentioned, Pocock's methodological tendency approaches Koselleck's method.

Considering the above explanation, Pocock's (1996a, 49) answer to how to relate the ideal historiography in the Anglophone world, especially his own manner, and the German 'history of concepts' becomes clearer. He imagines a research that, like a fabric with warp and woof, is made of the horizontal synchronic threads of the investigation of existing languages and discourses, and the vertical diachronic threads of the history of concepts. That is what Pocock has conducted in his research on the political thought of England in the second half of the eighteenth century which is an analytical and, at the same time, a meta-analytical study in which the diachronic process of the migration of concepts is linked to a synchronic investigation. To analyse the imperial crisis of that time, he naturally conducted a synchronic investigation of the socio-political context and the rhetoric within the political discourse. However, he also attached to that analysis a diachronic examination of the concept of 'empire', and its relation to (1) the Roman 'imperium' and other concepts such as 'realm' and 'sovereignty', (2) the difference between 'bellum sociale' and 'bellum civile'. By following the historical meaning of empire from sixteenth-century England, he could show how the eighteenth-century political activists' understanding of concepts such as 'federating unity' and 'integration' concerning the broader concept of 'imperium' had affected political conflicts. In the 1760s when the relationship between the North Atlantic and the American continent with the British state became problematic and Parliament sought to legislate for the entire 'empire', the deep ambiguities of that concept appeared. In this regard, Pocock (1996b, 259) has stated: 'Concepts of 'empire' and 'confederation' were about to force themselves on a debating public which lacked language capable of controlling them'. Even this brief quotation clearly illustrates the significance of the diachronic migration of concepts, tracing their origins, and examining their transferable implications and forceful impact on discourses. Furthermore, Pocock's expression, which grammatically puts concepts in the active subject

position, should not be underestimated. This somewhat implicitly, and perhaps unintentionally, brings his position closer to Koselleck (1974, XIV), who emphasised that concepts simultaneously play a role as 'indicators' and 'agents' of socio-political changes.

Conclusion

It is true that even in his last essays, Pocock (2019b), as a committed contextualist, was concerned with defending the concept of 'context' against those who consider globalisation as a justification for abandoning it. It is also evident that research in 'language(s)' and linguistic structural units such as 'discourses' were always a priority for him. However, this research demonstrated that the significance of the history of concepts in the research program, either in his methodological theory or in his practical investigations, was not neglected. He combined the diachronic study of concepts with the synchronic examination of the context wherever he found it necessary in his research. Nonetheless, paying attention to the concepts is not entirely dependent on a scholar's intentionality. It is partly due to the nature of the fundamental concepts, which are indispensable and retain their effectiveness to different degrees. The researchers find themselves in a situation in which they are unable to properly comprehend the socio-political problems without examining those concepts.

Given the openness and multidimensionality of 'context', as well as the interdiscursive capacities created by the migration of concepts in Pocock's theory, as revealed in this article, it remains valuable for advancing methodological development in the history of political thought. Our exploration of Pocock's works illuminates that even in a contextualist methodology the study of concepts holds its special place, which may be more effective than it first seems. But, on the other hand, this enquiry acknowledges the warning of Pocock and his fellow thinkers that it would be inadequate to focus on an isolated concept without considering its linguistic and socio-political context. Finally, for anyone who shares my interest in the 'study of concepts' in humanities and social science methodology, this article clarifies once again that a nuanced understanding of the complexities and innovation in arguments can only be realised by examining the debates between different approaches.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Social Dimensions of Ethno-Linguistic Boundaries in the Azerbaijani Community in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli Region

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Abstract

This paper addresses the topic of social dimensions of ethno-linguistic boundaries in the Azerbaijani community in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region, including language policy, linguistic landscape and structural problems associated with quite low integration. Based on the material collected during the field visits to the Kvemo Kartli region in 2018–2023, I attempt to outline the issues which restrict this minority's access to learning Georgian and the reasons for this state of affairs. Therefore, my research makes a contribution to the study of social and language issues in the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia.

Introduction

The language issue is a complex problem in Georgia and involves the status of languages other than Georgian which are spoken in the country by linguistic and ethnic minorities. The current population of Georgia is 3.7 million, of which 6.3% (233,000) are Azerbaijanis, who constitute the biggest ethnic minority in the country (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2016, p. 22). My goal is to outline the social dimensions of ethno-linguistic boundaries in the Azerbaijani community in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region, including language policy, linguistic landscape and structural problems associated with quite low integration. According to the research conducted by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI, Georgia), one of the main problems is an insufficient command of the Georgian language among Azerbaijanis (*"Qızlar oxusunlar ki, sabah heç kimə möhtac olmasınlar", – Gürcüstan azərbaycanlıları*, 2023). I attempt to identify the reasons behind this state of affairs and explain how minorities are excluded in terms of access to learning Georgian.

The article is based on intensive ethnographic field research conducted in Georgia in 2018–2023 as part of my doctoral thesis project (Kosicińska, 2023),[1] including interviews and conversations during numerous stays in the Kvemo Kartli region (mainly the village of Shulaveri in the Marneuli district)[2] and Tbilisi. My interlocutors were 30 native Azerbaijani speakers (9 women and 21 men) of different age (between 22 and 75 years old) and level of education, who are residents and activists of Kvemo Kartli (mainly the Marneuli district).

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[1] The PhD thesis *Codzienność między granicami: Mobilność i praktyki translokalne w południowo-wschodniej Gruzji* [Everyday Life Between Borders: Mobility and Translocal Practices in South-East Georgia] was written at the Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences under the supervision of Prof. Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska and defended in November 2023 (reviewers: Dr hab. Natalia Bloch, Prof. Oliver Reisner, Dr hab. Łukasz Smyrski) (Kosicińska, 2023).

[2] My trips to Shulaveri lasted from one day up to two months each.

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The linguistic diversity of Georgia and the situation after regaining independence in 1991

The ancient Greek geographer Strabo wrote of more than seventy ethnic groups inhabiting the Caucasus as a whole. Timosthenes, in turn, noted that three hundred languages were spoken throughout ancient Colchis (present-day western Georgia), while medieval Arab geographers called the Caucasus jabal al-alsun – the mountain of languages (Coene, 2010; Grant, 2007). As it is today, some researchers refer to the area between the Lesser and Greater Caucasus as an "ethnolinguistic mosaic", since it is inhabited by more than a hundred ethnic groups unique in their linguistic distinctiveness and customs (Coene, 2010).

Figure 1. The ethnic diversity of Georgia. The main area populated by the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia, the Kvemo Kartli region, is marked in blue.
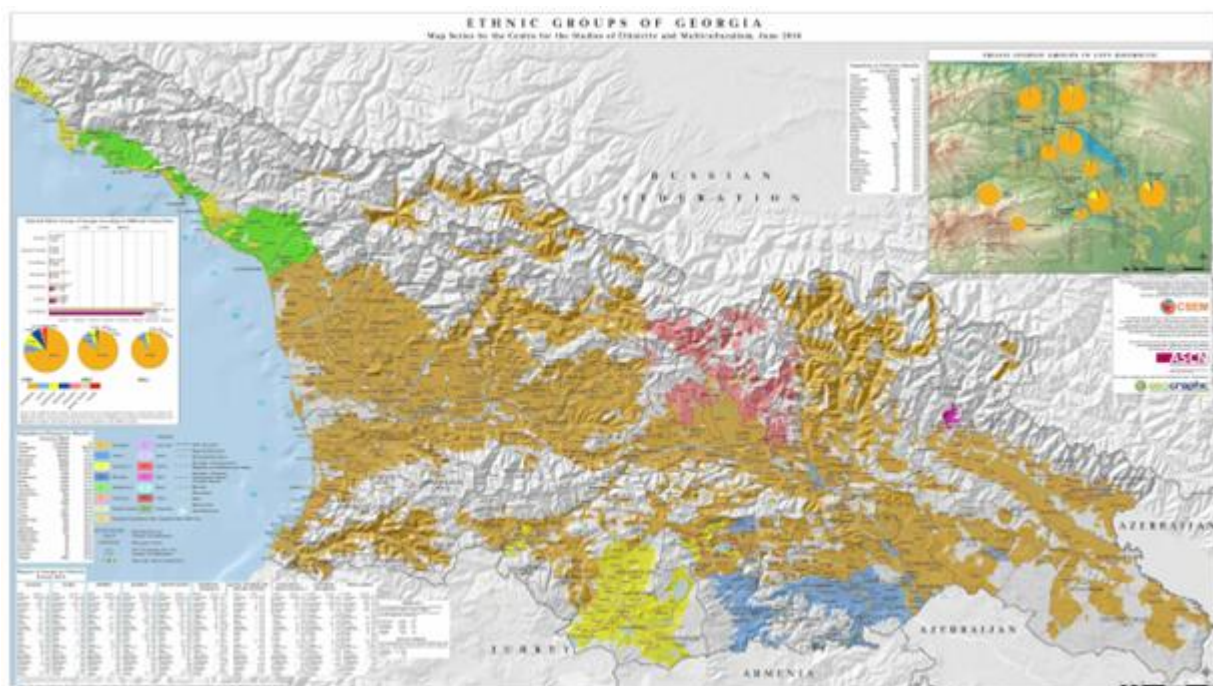
Source: Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (2016).

Despite the linguistic diversity in the Caucasus, which also characterizes Georgia[3], its only official language is Georgian, which was also included in the first independence constitution adopted in 1995.[4] This provision had an emancipatory-symbolic function: it was intended to emphasise the dominant importance of the Georgian language in the state being built, a language which, even during the Soviet era, was not demoted in any official document to the level of a language equivalent to Russian (Tabachnik, 2019).[5] Even though the position of Georgian as the language of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was established in its 1978 constitution, it was Russian that was favoured as the language

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[3] However Dagestan has the highest language density in the Caucasus (Dobrushina & Kultepina, 2021).

[4] Apart from Georgian, another language mentioned in the constitution of Georgia is Abkhazian, spoken only in the separatistic region of Abkhazia, which has been an unrecognised state outside the control of the Georgian government since 1992.

[5] Even in the Soviet times, Georgian was not demoted in any official document to the level of a language equivalent to Russian (Tabachnik, 2019). Such attempts ended in an outbreak of violent protest on 14 April 1978 and resulted in the withdrawal of the USSR authorities from these plans.

of science, law and inter-ethnic relations (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). Kakha Gabunia and Ketevan Gochitashvili write as follows:

> The discrepancy between the legal and de facto status of the Russian and Georgian languages in the multi-ethnic Soviet republic resulted in a paradoxical situation: proficiency in Georgian was mandatory only for the titular nation, i.e. Georgians. Although minority groups had to learn Georgian, teaching was very formal and students were hardly motivated. Most of them studied either in Russian or in their mother tongue. (Gabunia & Gochitashvili, 2019, p. 39)

Nevertheless, the literal and uncompromising approach to this provision by the Georgian authorities was quickly verified by the reality in which the country found itself in the 1990s. In the state where almost every third citizen was of a different ethnic nationality (and used their own native language), it was mainly ethnic Georgians who were able to communicate in the official language. Georgia was unable to provide equal opportunities in the area of knowledge of the state language to all residents of the country, and even more so to provide adequate protection to regional and minority languages. An additional difficulty was the lack of law regulating the language policy in the country (Tabatadze et al., 2008).

Pursuant to the Law on Citizenship of 25 March 1993, all residents in Georgia were recognised as Georgian citizens with no exceptions (Freni, 2011; Gachechiladze, 1997) and there was no clear requirement to know the Georgian language. Georgian citizenship was automatically granted to all those who resided within the territory of the state at the time (Reisner, 2010; Tarasiuk, 2013), without a distinction being made between national minorities or linguistic competence of their members.

The 1995 Constitution included a provision on equal rights for the country's national minorities, prohibiting discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds (Constitution of Georgia, 1995, Article no. 8). The constitution also protected the right of minorities to receive education in their native languages within the public system of education.

However, already towards the late 1990s, languages other than Georgian were gradually pushed out of use in public space, including cultural space, in favour of Georgian.[6]

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[6] In Otar Ioseliani's classic movie *Giorgobistve* [Falling Leaves] (1966), one of the scenes features Azerbaijani vocal music played on the streets of Tbilisi (Ioseliani, 1966). According to my observations, it is difficult to see a similar scene in contemporary reality or even in a film production.

Figure 2. Ethnic Composition of Georgia, 2016.
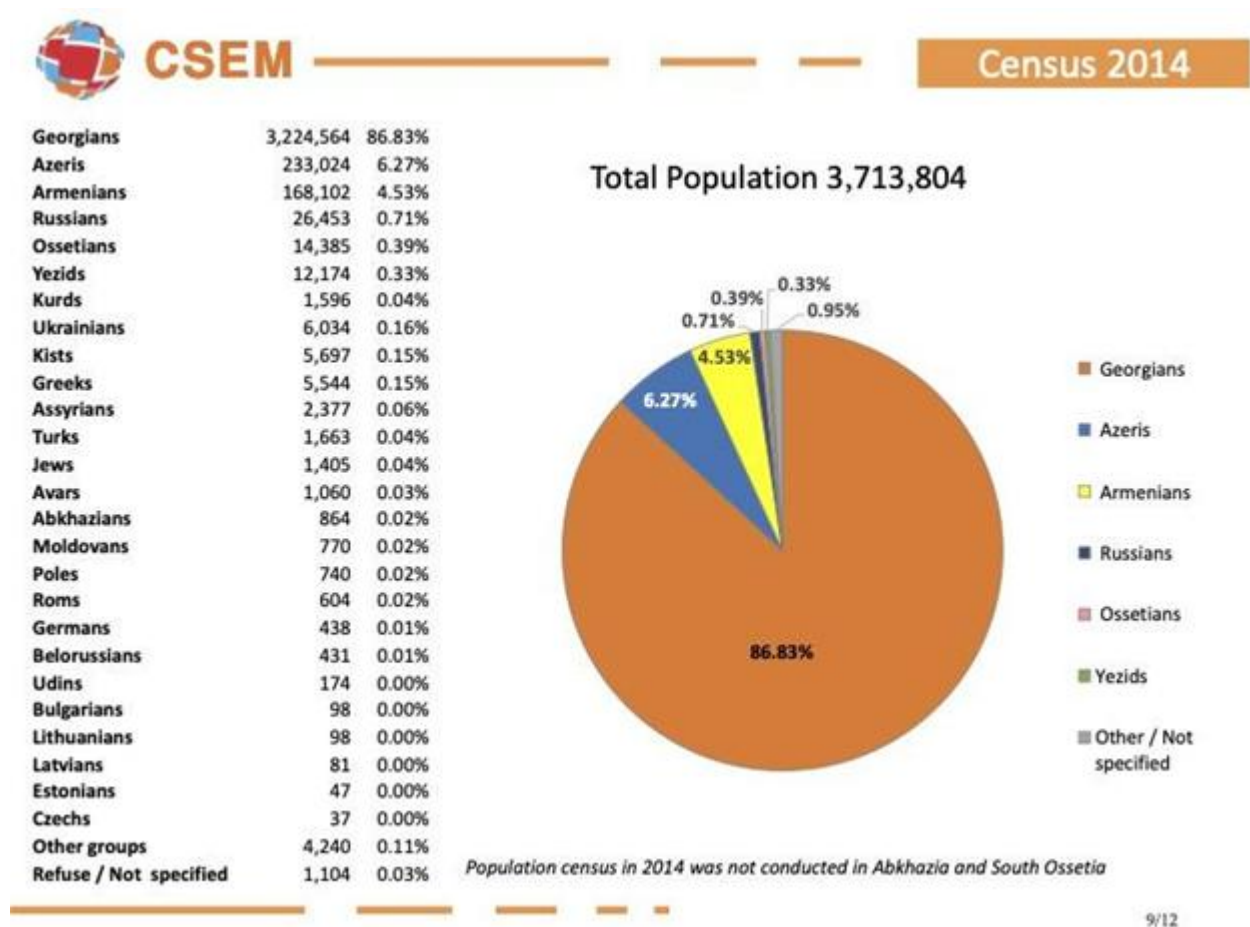
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia (2016).

In 1999, Georgia was admitted to the Council of Europe and pledged to sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, aiming to protect marginalised languages and those in danger of extinction. The Charter includes the stipulation that the protection of and support to regional or minority languages should not be to the detriment of the official languages and the need to learn them. Some scholars considering the rationale behind the Georgian government's refusal to ratify the Charter (even more than twenty years after the document was signed) argue that one reason is the fear of strengthening local separatist aspirations and disintegration of the country (Adamczewski, 2016; Wicherkiewicz, 2010). This makes it clear that despite Azerbaijani language being used by at least 233,000 Georgian citizens (given the statistics on the number of its native speakers), the official status and function of the language has not been confirmed. It remains mostly in the informal space as well as other minority or regional languages in Georgia.

National minorities and education

As it is today, there are 208 public schools in Georgia with languages other than Georgian as the medium of instruction, and 89 so-called non-Georgian-language school sections,[7] where the medium of instruction is Azerbaijani, Russian or Armenian; the total number of

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[7] Sometimes there are two different language sections in one school building.

students attending these schools and sections is almost 52,000 (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). According to the Georgian law on universal education, the language of communication in all educational institutions in Georgia is Georgian, while at the same time national minorities have the right to receive primary and secondary education in their mother tongue (Mekhuzla & Roche, 2009). Nevertheless, the standard of Georgian language teaching in schools attended by minorities is neglected. Researchers point out that Georgian Azerbaijanis are dissatisfied with this state of affairs, as it means, among other things, that they have to pay for private Georgian lessons (e.g. Kosicińska, 2023; Mammadli, 2021; Wheatley, 2005). A number of minority representatives tend to see this as a deliberate policy of the authorities, aiming to encourage emigration among the younger generation of Azerbaijanis (International Crisis Group, 2006): particularly those without knowledge of Georgian emigrate to Russia and other countries; in addition to helping their families through remittances, they also support the Georgian economy.[8] Some minority representatives also express concern about the inferior status of the Azerbaijani language and the lack of support to it at the state level. This might be the aftermath of the policy of the USSR, under which the social prestige of Azerbaijani was also low (Balaev, 2005).

During my field observations, I tried to pay attention to the issue of native Azerbaijani speakers choosing schools with particular languages of instruction, and I also asked about this during interviews and conversations with people who have school-age children or grandchildren. In the available sources, I did not find any statistics providing information on the correlation between preferences for the choice of language of instruction at school and ethnic origin or sense of ethnic or national belonging, and to my knowledge such statistics are not collected. During my research, however, I observed that Azerbaijanis often choose to enrol in schools where the medium of instruction is Azerbaijani or Russian (cf. Nodia, 2002), but also that there are families opting for Georgian-language schools.[9] At the same time, some Azerbaijani residents are concerned about the ideologies linked to religious values that could be transmitted to the student during the course of their education (Baazov, 2002; Berglund, 2016; Komakhia, 2004). Data on the number of students attending individual schools by nationality is not available, and parents' decisions and motivations are not investigated.

Once in a while, one can hear the voices of Azerbaijani activists who criticise educational institutions intended for minorities, accusing them of fostering the separation of ethnic groups from each other and ineffective teaching of the Georgian language. Some call for their closure. One such voice is that of a young entrepreneur and activist from a village located about twenty kilometres from the town of Marneuli. He has lived in Turkey, Poland and Ukraine.

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[8] Remittances from Russia play a significant part in Georgia's economy. In 2021 (before a large influx of Russian citizens into Georgia, which started after Russia's full scale war against Ukraine), they amounted to almost 38 mln dollars, according to the National Bank of Georgia.

[9] During my fieldwork I had a non-structured, spontaneous conversation with the Azerbaijani principal of the Russian school in Shulaveri, which took place in spring 2021. I asked him about the schools his grandchildren were enrolled in and he replied that they attended different ones: the boy was at a Georgian school "because he will stay in Georgia, with his family", and the girl attended a Russian school "because she will marry in Russia in the future". Given the patterns of Azerbaijani marriages in Georgia that I have observed during several years of research, the future husband might be an Azerbaijani migrant living in Russia, perhaps holding Russian citizenship or a Russian residence card. When I quoted this conversation to my friends who come from Marneuli, they did not seem surprised: they confirmed that there is such a pattern.

[I31:] Just one hour of Azerbaijani lessons every day is enough for us. And the others [other school subjects]? Why does maths have to be in Azerbaijani? Maths is maths, right?
[Researcher:] So you are saying it should be in…?
[I31:] Georgian. We even wrote a letter to Garibashvili once, when he was prime minister. But [I31:] Georgia doesn't want to change it. They say people won't accept it. (Interview I31, man, 34, 2020, conversation in English and Russian)

Although during my research I did not see much criticism of Azerbaijani schools from residents who were not involved in public activities, I noticed that some of the relatives of children attending Russian schools seemed to be lost about the choice or regretted not having chosen a Georgian one. However, according to one interlocutor, an activist and employee of an Azerbaijani corporation in Georgia, the relatively recent practice of sending Azerbaijani children to Georgian-language schools is detrimental. In her opinion, they do not have a good command of Georgian after such a school, because the level is too high and they do not start learning it from scratch; neither do they speak their mother tongue properly. These issues are also raised by some researchers. For instance, Christofer Berglund (2016) writes about the problem of private Azerbaijani language lessons taken by children who go to Georgian-language schools and whose parents are keen for them to have a good command of their native language. On the other hand, those who choose to take their final exam in their mother tongue Azerbaijani are required to take an additional exam in Georgian literature if they plan to study Georgian philology. According to my interlocutors, the problem is that Georgian literature is not taught in Azerbaijani-language schools. For this reason, some students take private lessons preparing them for this exam.

Many of those who take final school exams in their native languages rather than Georgian opt for the so-called "1+4 programme", whereby they take a one-year preparatory Georgian course and then move on to a four-year university study programme in the field of their choice (Amirjanova, 2022). There is also a pool of places allocated to members of ethnic minorities (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2017; Tabatadze et al., 2020).[10] This means starting the actual study programme one year later, after an intensive Georgian course at university.[11] The problem is that many non-native speakers of Georgian do not have the opportunity to learn it at school to a level that would enable them to enrol at university without the need to join the 1+4 programme. However, there are also exceptions: there are students whose command of Georgian after an Azerbaijani-speaking school is not weaker than that of its native speakers who graduated from Georgian-language schools.

Language ideologies

The research allowed me to identify the main linguistic ideologies, i.e. sets of beliefs about languages, language users and discursive practices. Like other ideologies, linguistic ideologies are related to political and moral issues and are culturally shaped (cf. e.g. Ahearn, 2012; Irvine & Gal, 2000; Woolard, 1992). I identified them on the basis of interviews and field observations. They concern the perception of the Georgian language by its non-native speakers.

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[10] The programme began in 2010 (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, n.d.).

[11] According to a native English instructor at one of the major state universities and at a private one in Tbilisi, some of his students stated that in fact this programme is not helpful for those with beginner-level Georgian, while others noted that there is a stereotype that they do not know the Georgian language.

The current linguistic situation in Georgia is characterised by the symbolic dominance (Bourdieu, 1991) of one language: Georgian. On the one hand, as the official language of the country, it is perceived as the language of prestige and social advancement, offering a chance to integrate into Georgian majority society. According to Jadwiga Zieniukowa, the question of prestige usually becomes apparent under conditions of interaction, appreciation, rivalry, and sometimes conflict between two or more languages co-existing in a given area (Zieniukowa, 2003). On the other hand, due to a strong culture of migration and transnational and translocal practices, Georgian is perceived as impractical and unnecessary because it is only spoken within one country (unlike, for example, Russian; English is also often mentioned as a second "useful" international language). This is illustrated by a comment made in a conversation I had in Shulaveri about the position of Georgian and Russian languages: "You don't need to learn Georgian; you need to learn Russian, in which you can communicate everywhere you go" (Field Diary, man, 35, 2018, conversation in Russian).

Furthermore, my interlocutors pointed on the difficulties associated with learning Georgian. This is due to the "impracticality" and limited range of Georgian described above, as well as contacts with Georgians. Also relevant is the fact that the place of reference for many Azerbaijanis with whom I spoke is not Georgia as a state or Tbilisi as the capital, but Marneuli. They still call the region in which it is located, Kvemo Kartli, by its historical name: Borchalo.[12] This reflects the translocal practices of local inhabitants and their patterns of mobility (Kosicińska, 2023). For my interlocutors, unfamiliarity with Georgian provokes number of difficulties and challenges, e.g. related to access to public institutions, medical assistance, transport, difficulties with understanding state media broadcast in Georgian and how to navigate the country's legal system. This issue became particularly apparent to the public during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, when Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region became victims of xenophobic attacks related to their knowledge of the Georgian language. They were intimidated by some ethnic Georgians who, through social media, outrageously attacked Azerbaijanis claiming that their low level of education and knowledge of the state language caused the spread of the virus in Georgia.(Kosicińska, 2020, p. 352).

The state of affairs presented above is also reflected in educational choices, although they are slowly beginning to change in favour of schools with Georgian as the medium of instruction. Berglund (2016) points out that until a few years ago, the proportion of Azerbaijani students attending Georgian schools oscillated between 40% and 80% (2015 figures). Their popularity continues to grow, and some families even hire taxis to enable their children to get to a distant Georgian school (Berglund, 2016). Georgian schools are becoming more attractive, as is continuing education at universities in Georgia rather than Azerbaijan, which was not a common practice a few years ago.[13] The aforementioned "1+4 programme", which enables school graduates from minority communities to study at Georgian universities, also plays an important role here.

I observed that Azerbaijani families perceive schools with Russian as the language of instruction as the most beneficial for their children; they believe that graduating from such a school and being fluent in Russian will also increase their chances of finding a job abroad (whereas Azerbaijani can be acquired in their immediate environment, through interaction with family and neighbours). I view the concerns of my interlocutors, irrespective of their position on the choice of the language of instruction, as significantly

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[12] Historically, the area encompassed present-day Kvemo Kartli and parts of north-western Azerbaijan and northern Armenia.

[13] This information comes from my interview with the sociolinguist Kakha Gabunia in Tbilisi in 2023.

related to ideologies about language, which will be discussed further below. The examples of linguistic attitudes cited may stem from the perception that the Azerbaijani language has a low status in Georgia, combined with the systemic strengthening of the status of the official language at the expense of minority languages. Some of my interlocutors openly expressed the opinion that their language – often referred to as Musulman dili (Muslim language) – is a key element of their cultural heritage. They stressed that common language is an important part of their community, perceiving it as the way to upgrade the status of an ethnic minority.

However, often schools with Georgian as the language of instruction are considered as a better choice:

> [I31:] […] Even in Kvemo Sarali, all the rich people who have enough money arrange a special bus and send their children to Marneuli or Shulaveri, to Georgian schools. […] I say, OK, people don't want to, but why do they pay money and send their children to Georgian schools?
> [Researcher:] Oh, they pay for it?
> [I31:] Of course they pay for it, for that bus. Because it's something extra. You don't want your child to go to a public school in Kvemo Sarali because it's Azerbaijani and it's not as good. (Interview I31, man, 34, 2020, conversation in English and Russian)

In his comment quoted further above, my interlocutor objected against the presumption on the part of Georgian authorities that Azerbaijanis would not accept increasing the number of Georgian lessons in Azerbaijani schools. His view was based on the fact that, as observed, people are ready to pay for special transport so that their children can attend Georgian schools, often far from Azerbaijani villages and difficult to get to. According to "word on the street", only those with ample resources can afford such transport. In fact, however, according to many observations, ordinary people put all the money they save into their children's education.

We can compare an excerpt from this conversation to a story quoted by Mathijs Pelkmans, writing about the experiences of old intelligentsia in the Georgian-Turkish border region of Adjara, economically degraded after the collapse of the USSR. One of Pelkman's interlocutors explained the frustratingly long closure of a newly built kindergarten near his home. He seemed convinced that when the time comes for a grandson of one of the still influential former politicians in the region to go to kindergarten, the building would be up and running. However, according to the interlocutor, only well-to-do people would be able to afford to pay. Pelkmans argues that this illustrates the emptiness caused by the loss of prosperity and the prevailing distribution of power in the region. His interlocutor's words also suggest that the attendant inequality is perceived as something that prevents people from access to resources and modern facilities, which in this case are represented by the institution of kindergarten, potentially accessible but actually, though not obviously, inaccessible (Pelkmans, 2006). We can see a connection between these two cases related to access to educational institutions.

Distancing from prejudices

Another aspect important for my study are the political contexts of the position of the Azerbaijani community in Georgia. One of the country's significant economic partners is the Azerbaijani oil company SOCAR (The State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan), while Turkey – considered a state with close political-economic and ethno-linguistic ties

with Azerbaijan – ranks among Georgia's biggest trade partners (Cieślewska & Kosicińska, 2025). Despite the fact that until recently a significant number of Marneuli residents would have chosen to seek employment in Azerbaijan (Wheatley, 2005), Russia or Turkey, this pattern is beginning to change. Indeed, it was greatly influenced by the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 and the restrictions on movement between Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as the war between Russia and Ukraine and the fact that EU countries (especially Poland and Germany) are becoming increasingly more popular destinations of seasonal migration for Georgian citizens, following the introduction of agreement on visa-free travel to the Schengen Area and liberalisation of access to the EU labour market (2017) (Kosicińska, 2023).

I had the opportunity to observe economic migration practices on a number of occasions during my stays in the field. For instance, during a fieldwork trip in summer 2022, I met a construction worker who had emigrated to Germany. Our conversation was occasioned by his visit to my landlady's house (which was part of a tour of his relatives). The following comment he made shows how some Azerbaijanis living in Georgia perceive their position in the country and their migration choices:

> In Georgia they don't want to speak Russian, they call us occupiers. [...] Glory to Ukraine, they don't want Russians. And in Russia, they call us black asses, without respect. For a German it doesn't matter what nationality you are as long as you do what you are supposed to do. (Field Diary, Kulari temi, 28.08.2022, conversation in Russian)[14]

The popularity of Azerbaijani TV channels among Marneuli residents, such as the main government channel AzTv, but also Russian-language channels, is due to the language of their broadcasts and their easier accessibility than that of Georgian TV (Kosicińska, 2018), which, despite its gradual loss of dominance, remains the main news source for half of the adult population in Georgia (Vacharadze & Kobaladze, 2022). The peculiarities of the Marneuli region, which is the area of the most intense interaction between the Azerbaijani, Armenian, Georgian, Greek and Russian populations, also play an important role, and Russian still functions as the local *lingua franca*, allowing communication between residents speaking their native languages, who have heterogeneous linguistic competences (Kosicińska, 2018, 2023). This diversity is partly due to the history of the region, famous for its developed small-scale textile and food industries, and its former appeal as a place of work for many residents of the then Soviet republics (Kosicińska, 2023).

Another interlocutor with whom I spoke in 2020 comes from Mtskheta, ancient capital of Georgia, located sixteen kilometres from Tbilisi. He is an Azerbaijani activist engaged in protecting the rights of Azerbaijanis in Georgia. A member of the "Salam" association and the Social Justice Centre, he is involved in projects organised, among others, in the Kvemo Kartli region. His first languages are Georgian (he graduated from a Georgian-speaking school in his hometown) and Azerbaijani; he also speaks English, which he learned while studying in the United States. He believes that the predominant problem is not necessarily the fact that Azerbaijanis do not speak Georgian; rather, one should look at Georgians' attitudes towards minority groups in terms of society's approach to political and social participation. He also draws attention to marginalised groups within the minorities themselves, as a minority is not a homogeneous community with similar cultural capital

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[14] The Georgian term *temi* refers to a rural administrative district, usually including 5–6 villages. I decided to avoid using the names of the villages; instead, I use the name of their *temi*.

throughout; however, it is often reduced to its most distinctive characteristics, leading to its essentialisation:

> The people, ethnic Azerbaijanis, are encouraged to learn Georgian and they want their children, relatives, young people to learn Georgian, and they do everything in their power to make it happen. But at the same time, there are people who – because of the consequences, the real situation they live in, because of the collapse of the USSR and the law – have not been able to learn Georgian. And these people say – this is one of our biggest findings of the research – that it is good, that it should be normalised that one knows Georgian, knowledge of Georgian should be the norm, but discrimination based on ignorance should not be tolerated, a kind of discrimination or objectification of people because they don't speak the language. It should not be an insult to these people. It's clear that this approach among the dominant ethnic group and on the political, strategic and conceptual scene is first of all, that if you are an ethnic minority, you don't speak the language. Even if I speak the language, Georgian, correctly and perfectly, they can still say, "Oh, you people don't know the language", yes?
>
> First of all, that's the problem, that if they don't know the language, the dominant group frames them and it hurts, if you know what I mean. They can say, OK, it's not my fault that I don't speak Georgian, that I didn't learn how to speak [it] because there was Russia, you had to learn Russian and Georgian wasn't a necessary language. And at the same time there are people, many people who say that the state didn't prepare them, the state didn't give proper resources in education and in schools, wherever, to help these people learn Georgian, you understand what I mean. So, here is the challenge. On the one hand, the dominant group says that all the blame falls on the minority groups because they don't speak the official language and they don't look beyond that or they don't try; and this is the final point of their analysis: when they say that if you want to be fully Georgian, a Georgian citizen, you have to speak Georgian. (Interview I35, man, 34, 2020, conversation in English)

He also points out the shortage of learning resources, a problem that is often overlooked when discussing the issue of the level of command of Georgian among Azerbaijanis (See also *Gürcüstan azərbaycanlıları. Soydaşlarımız bu ölkədə ən böyük etnik qrup sayılır*, 2012).

> Minority ethnic groups, specifically ethnic Azerbaijanis, say: we want to learn Georgian, but [laughter] some people are 60 years old and they don't have enough resources or opportunities, I mean, it's not that I'm insulting them, but they don't have the resources to learn Georgian. No, even if they had the resources, what is happening now? You don't have the right to insult or discriminate against me just because the state didn't support me or equip me with these resources, so I wasn't able to learn Georgian and now you're blaming me, insulting me, just because I don't speak the language. (Interview R35, man, 34, 2020, conversation in English)

Learning and practising Georgian is hindered with little material and environmental resources, and for some also limited contact with native speakers and access to state media. Without knowing the state language it is practically impossible to find a job. One of my interlocutors, a woman under forty, maintained that the only job she could find was

working in a greenhouse, as she had been unable to complete school in the 1990s and therefore did not know Georgian.

Another of my interlocutors is from the village of Algeti[15] in the Marneuli district. She is a well-known activist fighting for the position of Azerbaijanis in Georgia, and her domain is women's rights. She is involved in numerous political and social projects as a leader and advisor. During one of our conversations, she said that she had not been particularly fluent in Georgian until the age of 16, had graduated from an Azerbaijani-speaking school, and had, as she put it, "the mentality of a traditional Marneuli girl". At the age of 17, she started to study Georgian intensively and then entered the university in Tbilisi. She became involved in social activism in 2008, at the age of 20. She later graduated from the private and prestigious GIPA journalism institute, a school considered one of the best in Georgia. Active on social media, she also kept a blog in which she described, among other things, her memories of the 1990s in Marneuli, attacks from a Georgian ethnic group called Svans, and her parents' concerns about her safety when she went to study in Tbilisi.

> [I36:] […] many Georgians have spoken out against hate speech against the Azerbaijani community. […] And this [hate speech] is very, very bad for us, because we have a lot of problems and we have no time for you, sorry, but this is not the time for hate speech. We get sick too, so we asked them to stop. We also started this "please stop" campaign, that it's not good.
> [Researcher:] You mean that campaign when people were making videos and saying in Georgian "I'm Azerbaijani, I speak Georgian and I follow the rules"?
> [I36:] Yes, I follow the rules and I am not a bad person [laughter].
> [Researcher:] Did you also post a video?
> [I36:] Yes, I participated and then I also made a video in two languages with some hashtags "please stop". (Interview I36, woman, 32, 2020, conversation in English)

Creating invisible spatial boundaries

Spaces can connect, but they can also create physical divisions (Lawson, 2001). A similar observation can be applied to linguistic space. A boundary based on linguistic division runs between spaces that do not seem to exist or are invisible. My interlocutors mentioned the difficulties of finding themselves in Tbilisi, moving around the city and communicating in a language other than Azerbaijani. In their experience, it turned out that Russian is not readily spoken by ethnic Georgians. According to Azerbaijani speakers that I talked with, ethnic Georgians accept Russian as a language of communication with foreigners when they interact with tourists. However, they often do not apply this rule to Georgian residents of different ethnic origin, "internal strangers", when their place of birth or residence in Georgia comes up in the course of an interaction. Native Georgian speakers criticise native Azerbaijani speakers who do not know Georgian, and argue that they should be able to speak it as they were born in Georgia and they are citizens of the country.

Fatima, one of my interlocutors from a village near Shulaveri, grew up in Moscow and often expressed concern about her inability to communicate in Georgian and problems with adapting to a foreign-speaking urban environment. Some of our conversations took place in September 2022 in Tbilisi, when I hosted her and her small daughter on their overnight trip to the city and we could talk freely. I noticed her uncertainty as she was getting things done. I also noticed the peculiar, sometimes rather harsh and even rude attitude with which native Georgian speakers treat local people who do not speak the

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[15] The Azerbaijani name of the village is Gorarxi.

language but communicate in Russian. These were embarrassing situations for both my research partner and me. On other occasions, Fatima asked me to help her find the way to a particular place in Tbilisi or to find the address of a specific building. It turned out that she preferred to get around by bus rather than metro, even if this meant taking a longer route. On the metro, due to her lack of command of the language, she could experience problems getting information about the direction of the train or the destination station.

Her case illustrates problems faced by many members of minority communities. They often experience fear of feeling lost, of getting inferior service or being confronted for not knowing the language in a city where openness to multilingualism is limited. As a result, it has become a practice among young men, when planning a trip to the Georgian capital, to take along one of their friends who speaks Georgian at a communicative level and can act as their interpreter.

It is also important to note that the knowledge of Russian among the younger generations is no longer as common as it used to be several years ago. In 1991, the process of gradually abandoning its teaching in schools began, while the government tried unsuccessfully to impose Georgian as the main language of communication (Storm, 2016). Especially after the Rose Revolution, the presence of Russian in schools and media space began to be reduced to a minimum (Akerlund, 2012; Melikishvili & Jalabadze, 2021). As a result of these trends, today there are no longer many young Azerbaijanis able to use Russian as a means of communication. With no knowledge of any language other than their native one, they are doomed to linguistic exclusion and confinement in a minority enclave. The sense of alienation among Azerbaijanis in Georgia caused by its language policy is visible in the material collected by the Georgian ethnographers Natia Jalabadze and Lavrenti Janiashvili:

> In Soviet times, education was in Russian; almost all knew Russian and we spoke with each other in Russian. Now the young generation does not speak Russian and the representatives of different nationalities scarcely have contact with each other. Georgian is taught at schools but this is not enough for our children. Only those who live in mixed villages, or in close neighbourhood, know Georgian better. They even know each other's languages. In Soviet times, when we had some problem or we did not like something, we made a complaint to Moscow and thus achieved our object. But now? Our Georgia does not like Russia anymore! In those times we got everything from Moscow. If you had ten roubles, you could go to the market, you could buy all you wanted and even bring change back home! And now?! You will not be able to take even a single step! In those times, beans cost twenty kopeks, tomatoes five kopeks, cucumbers twenty kopeks. Now we do not live; we merely exist (Field material, Tsalka 2008). (Jalabadze & Janiashvili, 2013, p. 285)[16]

Changing place names

In 1993, the then Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze introduced a law that changed Azerbaijani place names to Georgian or Georgian-sounding names, although their "Georgianisation" had already been taking place in 1990–1991 (Berglund, 2016; see also: Report.az, 2019). According to my observations, there are two types of such changes – one type is a direct translation of a name into Georgian, as in the case of the village of Kvemo Sarali (formerly Yuxari Saral); the other type is a complete replacement of a name, as in

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[16] Extract from an interview conducted during field research in the Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli region in 2008.

the case of Talaveri (formerly Faxrali), mentioned by the interlocutor quoted below. There are also places whose names have been modified to their Georgian-sounding versions, as in the case of Amamlo (formerly Hammamli). Many of the old place names are still used by Azerbaijanis, even though they cannot be found on maps or in official documents. Proper names have an important identifying function for the culture of a national minority as they reinforce community and influence consciousness through the messages they send (Rzetelska-Feleszko, 2000), but as we can see also in this respect Azerbaijani language is neglected in the state's language policy. This problem was raised in one of the interviews:

> [I31:] When they changed the names of the villages, do you remember? Thirty-one village names changed in one day; who gave the proposal to the municipality,[17] who gave it? […] In Bolnisi alone, thirty-one or thirty-two villages have been renamed. Have you been to Faxrali?
> [Researcher:] No, where is it?
> [I31:] In Bolnisi, and they changed the name in '92 and wrote "Talaveri". People still say "Faxrali" anyway. You have to ask people. Imagine if in Poland they changed their name without asking, [for example] Poles in the village of Kazimierz and you don't ask them and change it to "Ivanovka". (Interview I31, man, 34, 2020, conversation in English and Russian)

He believes that the restoration of proper names should be fought for in parliament. This is still a lively topic in the Azerbaijani community in Georgia.

Conclusions

The goal of this article was to present the voices of actors involved in the issue of minority and language policy, but also of those who, for various reasons, do not have a voice at all or have been deprived of it. The participation of minorities in the public and political life of the country is still very limited, which is also pointed out by researchers (see e.g. Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021) as well as Azerbaijani media in Georgia and media in Azerbaijan (see, for example, Agsunews, 2015). This state of affairs is largely due to language use and the resulting restrictions on the Azerbaijani speaking community, which are rooted in the socio-economic situation of ethnic minorities in Georgia. Ethno-religious nationalism, which is related to the language ideologies, treats ethnic Georgian, Christian and Georgian speaking majority as a group which should receive more privileges than other groups. According to Mariam Shalvashvili, "although the Constitution of Georgia does not differentiate between Georgian citizens on the basis of ethnicity, ethno-religious nationalist ideas are so dominant that they become an integral part of the everyday language of government officials" (Shalvashvili, 2021, p. 8). In a survey made by one of Tbilisi based research organisations, one-third of the population still think that only ethnic Georgians should be allowed to be Georgian citizens (Caucasus Research Resource Centres, 2021, p. 12). Researchers point to the historical background of this narration, dating back to the USSR, when religion would not be recognised even if it was the marker of ethnicity. For this reason the native language began to be seen as an important differentiator between ethnicities (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). Kakha Gabunia, one of the developers of educational programmes for minorities in Georgia, emphasises the quality of native language teaching and the level of its command as crucial for further language learning, basing his observations on the theory proposed by Jim Cummins, an author of studies on bilingual teaching and language transfer (Cummins, 1981).

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[17] The interlocutor talks about the Marneuli district, in Georgian: *marneulis municipaliteti*.

The problems I have attempted to outline in this article play a highly important role in the current linguistic situation among the Azerbaijani minority. These include the memory of the events in the 1990s (such as the changes of place names), the lack of trust in the state, problems with local transport, the absence of pre-school facilities in many villages, the lack of conveniently located Georgian schools in many towns, and the sense of alienation in the Georgian-speaking space outside the Kvemo Kartli region, as well as prejudice and mutual stereotypes.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Mapping Patterns and Trends in Uncontested Elections Research (1965–2024)

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Abstract

This article explores patterns and trends in 111 prior studies regarding uncontested elections and their implications for the quality of democracy from 1965 to 2024 in the Scopus database. Since the first article was published in 1965, the topic has attracted noteworthy academic attention, especially in the last decade. Although the number of publications yearly fluctuates, scholarly interest remains consistent, with an average of 40.94 citations per document. Most research comes from the United States, but contributions from other countries such as Canada, Japan, and Germany are also remarkable. In sum, I provide a comprehensive insight into the development of uncontested elections, the significant contributions of various authors, and the thematic trends that have developed over time. 44 questions identified as future research directions open opportunities for further exploration to understand the factors supporting or hindering competitive elections.

Keywords: Bibliometrix; Democracy; Elections; Uncontested; VOSviewer

Introduction

General elections are the main foundation of representative democracy, serving as the core mechanism allowing the people to elect their representatives fairly and competently. In democratic ideals, competitive elections reflect the diversity of political opinions and choices available to society (Clawson & Oxley, 2020). However, in some cases, elections can occur without competition, commonly termed "uncontested elections", "silent elections", "non-competitive elections", or "walkover elections" where a candidate can be elected without competing with other candidates (White, 1985).

Uncontested elections refer to a situation where only one candidate is running for a political position, with no challengers from other parties or even from his/her internal party (Squire, 1989). As a result, there is no direct electoral competition (Fisher, 1981; Foster, 1977; Lloyd, 1965). This phenomenon can be observed in various local, regional, and national political contexts and spans legislative and executive elections, whether in democratic or non-democratic regimes. Due to its potential implications for the quality of democracy, uncontested elections have drawn considerable attention from political researchers and practitioners.

In the last few decades, as confirmed by Kouba & Lysek (2023), uncontested elections have been more dominant in local-scale executive and legislative elections. Countries like the U.S., Japan, and Italy have experienced steady and alarming growth in electoral events at levels with no incumbent challengers. It can be influenced by various factors, ranging

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from the dominance of certain political parties (Kostroski, 1973), lack of political participation from the community (Kouba & Lysek, 2023), complex election rules (Kouba & Lysek, 2023), and very high campaign costs (Adams et al., 2010; Alexander, 2021). The situation is prone to causing various negative implications for democracy, including problems with legitimacy, political representation, voter participation, and the quality of elected government (Konisky & Ueda, 2011; Wrighton & Squire, 1997).

Research on uncontested elections began to receive academic attention in the mid-20th century. In the 1960s, with the wave of democratization that hit many countries, interest in the study of elections and their mechanisms increased (Shin, 1994). However, despite efforts to strengthen a more open and competitive electoral system, there are still many cases where elections take place without competition (Norris, 2018). It sparked academics to explore the causes and impacts of this phenomenon. The literature on uncontested elections has grown over time. In the 1970s and 1980s, research focused more on case studies in different countries, exploring how and why uncontested elections occurred. These studies often identified the role of dominant political parties and power structures that hinder the emergence of political competition (Cox et al., 2020; Daly & Jones, 2020). A comparative approach was adopted in research on uncontested elections in the 1990s and early 2000s. Comparative studies identify general patterns and relate the incident to other factors, such as economic development, political stability, and local political culture (Joseph, 1999). Such an approach provides broader insight into the conditions that support or hinder competitive elections.

Today, uncontested elections remain a focal point for scholars due to their profound implications for democratic quality. Multiple theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain them, with many academics attributing it to a complex interaction between political, social, and economic factors in democratic or authoritarian regimes. The absence of competition indicates deeper structural problems within the political system, whether it is a lack of resources for opposition candidates, internal party dynamics that inhibit the candidacy of rivals, or broader societal conditions that favour incumbents. These elections often reflect power imbalances, where dominant political actors utilize institutional and economic advantages to limit genuine political contestation. The prevalence of uncontested elections can, therefore, serve as a barometer for evaluating the overall health of democracy, as these elections often exhibit fundamental flaws in representation, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Despite its long history and severe implications for the quality of democracy, research on uncontested elections remains scattered and lacks a comprehensive systematic mapping. No synthesis effort integrates these findings to understand the overall progress of the field, identify key trends, and steer future research agendas. This article fills the gap by systematically reviewing the literature on uncontested elections from 1965 to 2024 using a bibliometric analysis. *Bibliometric* is an approach that cultivates quantitative data from academic literature to analyze research trends, publication patterns, and individual-institutional contributions in specific fields (Hood & Wilson, 2001) to understand how the topic of uncontested elections has been studied and developed over time.

I ask three research questions: (1) What has been the historical evolution of studies on uncontested elections over the past six decades regarding publication volume, thematic focus, and geographical coverage? (2) What are the prominent patterns and clusters emerging in the knowledge network on uncontested elections based on co-citation and co-word analysis? (3) Do any knowledge gaps emerge, and what are the directions for future research development?

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it is the first attempt to comprehensively map the progress of research on uncontested elections using a

bibliometric approach. Second, identifying trends and patterns in the literature helps integrate scattered findings and build a complete grasp of the phenomenon. Third, the resulting knowledge gap analysis can steer future research agendas more systematically. This article also has essential practical implications. A better understanding of the dynamics of uncontested elections can help policymakers design appropriate electoral reforms to promote healthy political competition. Amidst the global decline in the quality of democracy, such a comprehension becomes even more crucial to maintaining the vitality of the democratic process.

Literature Review

The complexity of uncontested elections lies in their diverse practices and the non-uniformity of their substance, which often depends on the prevailing electoral system and local political dynamics. The definition of uncontested elections demands a much more complex and in-depth understanding than simply seeing it as a situation where only one candidate is contesting. The variations in the meaning of uncontested elections depend heavily on the prevailing electoral system and patterns of state organization, reflecting the diverse dynamics of democracy (Przeworski, 1991).

The intricacy of electoral systems, especially in proportional systems and multi-member districts, requires us to explore the various nuances of electoral competition (Sartori, 2016). Each electoral system has unique mechanisms and contexts that shape the interpretation of "non-competitive elections" differently. Elections that are technically "not fully competitive" can take many forms. For example, in a proportional system, a district can have a single list of formally competing candidates but, in practice, have very similar characteristics to an uncontested election (Cox, 1997). It can happen when the number of candidates is slightly more significant than the seats available or when political structures systematically limit meaningful political participation (Lijphart, 1994).

In democracies with open political competition, uncontested elections appear as a marginal phenomenon and are considered an anomaly. However, in systems with tighter power control, they can become a systemic part of political practice (Schedler, 2002). Political history, democratic culture, institutional structures, and local political power constellations will determine how uncontested elections are understood and practiced (Huntington, 1991). Such variations reflect the complex realities of electoral democracy, where competition does not always mean actual competition (Beetham, 2005). An electoral system can be formally competitive but substantively restrictive. Structural barriers to independent candidates, unequal access to political resources, or the dominance of a particular party can result in electoral conditions that are nominally competitive but practically lack meaningful competition (Boix, 1999).

The study of uncontested elections insists a more nuanced and contextualized approach. A comprehensive approach should consider the diversity of electoral systems and country-specific contexts, recognizing that the definition of "uncontested" is not a static concept but rather a dynamic phenomenon shaped by the complexities of local and global politics. Scholars present diverse views on uncontested elections. Some argue that they are a regular occurrence in the political landscape (Miller & Listhaug, 1990), while others consider them an anomaly threatening the democratic process (Kouba & Lysek, 2023). In a democratic political system—where freedom of choice and alternative options are fundamental principles—the absence of electoral competition is often seen as a critical issue that could undermine the very foundations of democracy by limiting voter choice and diminishing legitimacy (Beaulieu, 2014). However, several academics contend that uncontested elections reflect political stability or high public trust in a particular candidate or political party (Hermet, 1978; Miller & Borrelli, 1991). Consequently,

uncontested elections sit at the crossroads between being a natural outcome of political dynamics and challenging democratic ideals.

Uncontested elections are not necessarily a negative thing but rather a common occurrence in many countries, including significant democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. While uncontested elections can raise concerns about the health of political representation, several reasons explain why they are commonplace and, in some contexts, even seen as natural and harmless. Uncontested elections depict the existence of political stability and strong public support (Ekman, 2009), rational decisions of opposition parties (Skigin, 2023), the influence of safe districts (Abramowitz, 1991; Kennedy, 2017), efficiency of political resources (Lay et al., 2017), integrity and public trust (Gandhi, 2015), prevention of social and political conflict (Knutsen et al., 2017), and respect for incumbent performance (Hirano & Snyder Jr., 2014).

However, in many cases, uncontested elections are also considered a deviation from democracy that contradicts the basic principles of an ideal democratic system. Elections that do not involve serious competition indicate distortions in the democratic process and, if persistent, can undermine political legitimacy and reduce public participation, which should be the cornerstone of democracy. Some of the reasons why uncontested elections are considered harmful and can be an abnormality in a democratic system are because they reduce the essence of political competition, heighten the potential for abuse of power, reduce political participation, contaminate political accountability, become an indicator of injustice or imbalance in the political system, perpetuate oligarchy and elite power, ignore public dynamics and aspirations, negate public debate and policy innovation, and trigger the prevalence of voter apathy (Kouba & Lysek, 2023; Lay et al., 2017; Norris, 2017).

In summary, uncontested elections represent a complex interplay between electoral systems, political dynamics, and institutional structures. While some scholars highlight their potential to symbolize stability and public trust, others emphasize their detrimental effects on democracy, including reduced accountability and participation. The nuanced perspectives presented in the literature underscore the need for contextualized approaches that account for the specific political, economic, and cultural conditions in which uncontested elections occur.

Methods

This bibliometric analysis presents a comprehensive picture of prior research on uncontested elections for almost six decades, from January 1965 to September 2024. I employed several steps: database selection, search criteria and keyword determinations, and data extraction. These steps warrant that all relevant studies are identified and thoroughly analyzed. Scopus, one of the world's largest and most trusted bibliographic databases, is used for my analysis. It contains millions of articles from thousands of international scientific journals covering various scientific disciplines (Adilansyah et al., 2024; Firmansyah & Hidayat, 2024; Hidayat, 2024).

Once the database is selected, the next step is determining the search criteria and keywords for relevant literature. The search criteria were determined to capture all publications relating to uncontested elections from 1965 to 2024. The selected keywords depicted various aspects of the topic and were designed to ensure that the search accommodated all possible term variations of previous authors. The primary keywords were "uncontested elections", "silent elections", "uncompetitive elections", "unopposed candidates", and "walkover candidates". In addition to these keywords, additional search phrases such as "election without competition", "single candidate elections", and "uncontested political races" were also employed to warrant broader coverage. I then

inspected relevant article titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure results focused on uncontested elections.

Figure 1 presents several filters that are applied to improve the accuracy and relevance of search results. This filter encompasses publication year restrictions from 1965 to 2024, accessible documents pertinent to the issue, theoretical framework and empirical evidence, peer-reviewed status, and the English language. By applying these filters, searches become more focused, ensuring that only literature relevant to the topic is identified and analyzed. 328 documents were found in the Scopus database, but only 111 were interrelated. The next step is the data extraction process, which involves collecting and organizing relevant bibliometric data from each article found. The extracted data has critical information that will be used for further analysis.

Data processing was done with the help of two bibliometric software. The first is VOSviewer, which visualizes bibliometric maps, analyses citation networks, and identifies research clusters based on keywords (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The second one is Bibliometrix RStudio, which analyses trends, collaboration between researchers, and the scientific impact of publications through various bibliometric metrics (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Combining these two software helps automate the data extraction and analysis process so that the results are more structured and ready for further analysis.

From the processed data available, I then elaborated on the core details of the dataset, the number of publications per year, citation patterns, geographical distribution, most popular keywords, co-citation of cited authors, citation map of documents, and others. These systematic approaches provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of the trends and patterns of research on uncontested elections over almost the last six decades. I also identify several future research directions in the research issue.

Figure 1. Literature search flowchart.
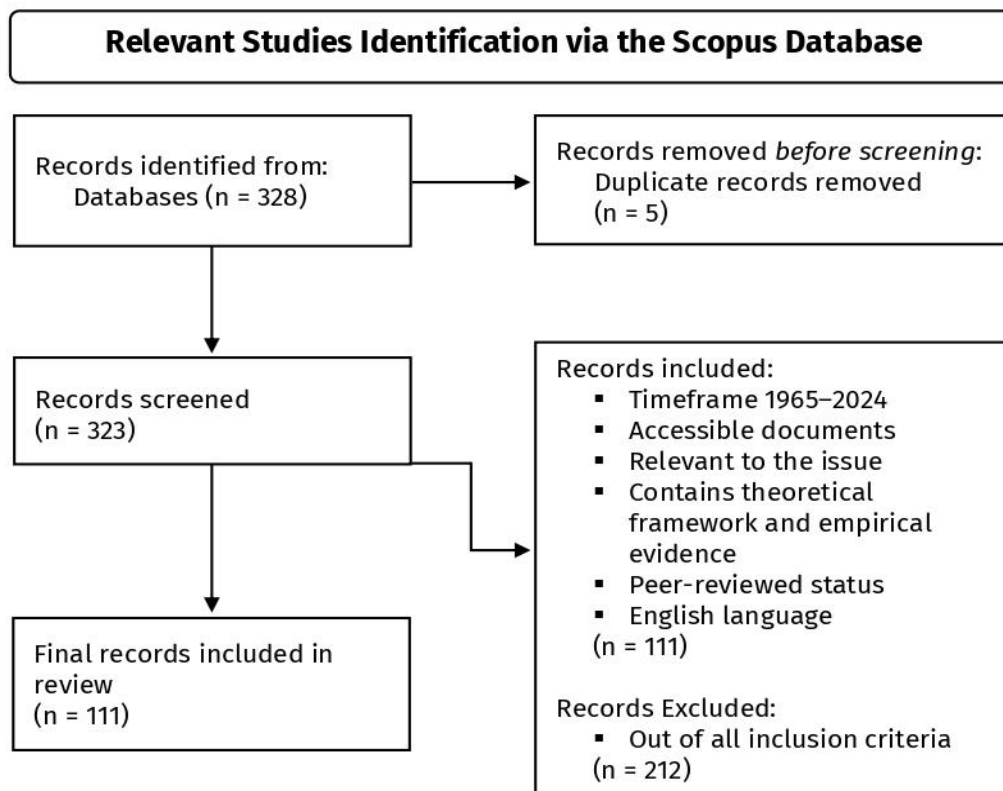
Source: author's own elaboration.

Results

This section presents research production data on uncontested elections, including primary information about the dataset, annual scientific output, country scientific production, most popular keywords, and co-citation of cited authors. These data provide a comprehensive overview of research progress, noteworthy contributions from various authors and countries, and thematic patterns or trends that have developed over time.

Primary Information About the Dataset

The research dataset on uncontested elections covers various aspects that illustrate the dynamics of scholarly publications and the development of knowledge on this topic over a long period, from 1965 to 2024. Table 1 presents 111 documents from 55 different sources, including journals, conference papers and reviews, which form the foundation of the literature on uncontested elections. These data offer a rich insight into the topic, reflecting how prominent themes in uncontested elections have evolved and how researchers and academics have contributed to deepening our understanding of the phenomenon.

Since 1965, the number of publications on uncontested elections has grown steadily at about 1.88% per year. Although the phenomenon is not considered very common in the global political context, it remains an exciting and outstanding topic for political and social researchers. In almost six decades, the research has evolved, reflecting the development of political contexts in different countries and changes in research methods and theoretical approaches used to understand uncontested elections. The average age of the documents is 14.5 years, which suggests that older research remains relevant and is referenced by more recent studies. It also indicates that some crucial or seminal studies continue influencing further research on uncontested elections.

These documents are highly impactful, with the average number of citations per document reaching 40.94. Research on uncontested elections has a strong relevance in political and social studies and influences a range of other studies outside of the topic. The 5,694 references reflect the breadth of literature I have consulted in constructing my arguments. It provides evidence that the study of uncontested elections is rooted in a specific context and linked to the broader literature on democracy, political participation and electoral mechanisms.

Looking at the content of these documents, the use of "Keywords Plus" and "Author's Keywords" provides insight into specific themes and keywords that appear frequently in all papers. Keywords Plus, generated from the citation analysis, includes 83 keywords, while the Author's Keywords, which are directly provided by the authors in all reviewed literature, reach 188. It shows that the topic of uncontested elections is related to a wide range of concepts identified by researchers and also underscores the citation relationships between studies. Using keywords helps map the research field and identify frequently occurring issues and themes likely to be the main focus of scholarly discussion.

In terms of author contributions, the dataset notes that 163 authors have contributed to this literature, with 49 of them being single authors. While collaboration is standard, research on uncontested elections is also often conducted by individuals, which may reflect the nature of the topic and allow exploration through in-depth research and individualized analysis. Of the 111 documents, 58 were written by single authors, stipulating that the research is accessible to academics working alone without extensive team collaboration. Nonetheless, an average of 1.73 authors per document indicated moderate collaboration within the field. International collaborations account for 8.108% of the total documents, depicting that while uncontested elections are often local or country-

specific, some cross-border research is conducted through the cooperation of academics from different countries.

Regarding document type, most publications are journal articles, totalling 98 articles. It reinforces the view that scholarly journals are the primary medium for disseminating research on uncontested elections. In addition, 1 conference paper and 12 reviews are recorded in the dataset, reflecting the diversity of publication formats used to address the topic. Conference papers and reviews also show a recognized depth of research and comprehensive analysis in formats other than journal articles.

Table 1. Core details of the dataset.

| Description	Results
Timespan	January 1965–September 2024
Sources	55
Documents	111
Annual Growth Rate %	1.88
Document Average Age	14.5
Average citations per doc	40.94
References	5694
Keywords Plus (ID)	83
Author's Keywords (DE)	188
Authors	163
Authors of single-authored docs	49
Single-authored docs	58
Co-Authors per Doc	1.73
International co-authorships %	8.108
article	98
conference paper	1
review	12

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

The above dataset provides a rich picture of how uncontested elections have been studied for almost six decades. With steady growth in the number of publications, significant contributions from single authors and international collaborations, and a high average of citations per document, research on this topic has strong academic relevance and makes an essential contribution to the political and social literature. The involvement of researchers from different backgrounds and the diverse types of publications also demonstrate that uncontested elections are a multidimensional issue that can be understood from various analytical and methodological perspectives.

Annual Scientific Output

The annual scholarly production in the study of uncontested elections shows a fluctuating but interesting developmental dynamic from 1965 to 2024. Figure 2 below reflects how academic attention to the topic has changed, from a slow initial phase to valuable growth in recent decades.

Figure 2. Annual scientific output (1965–2024).
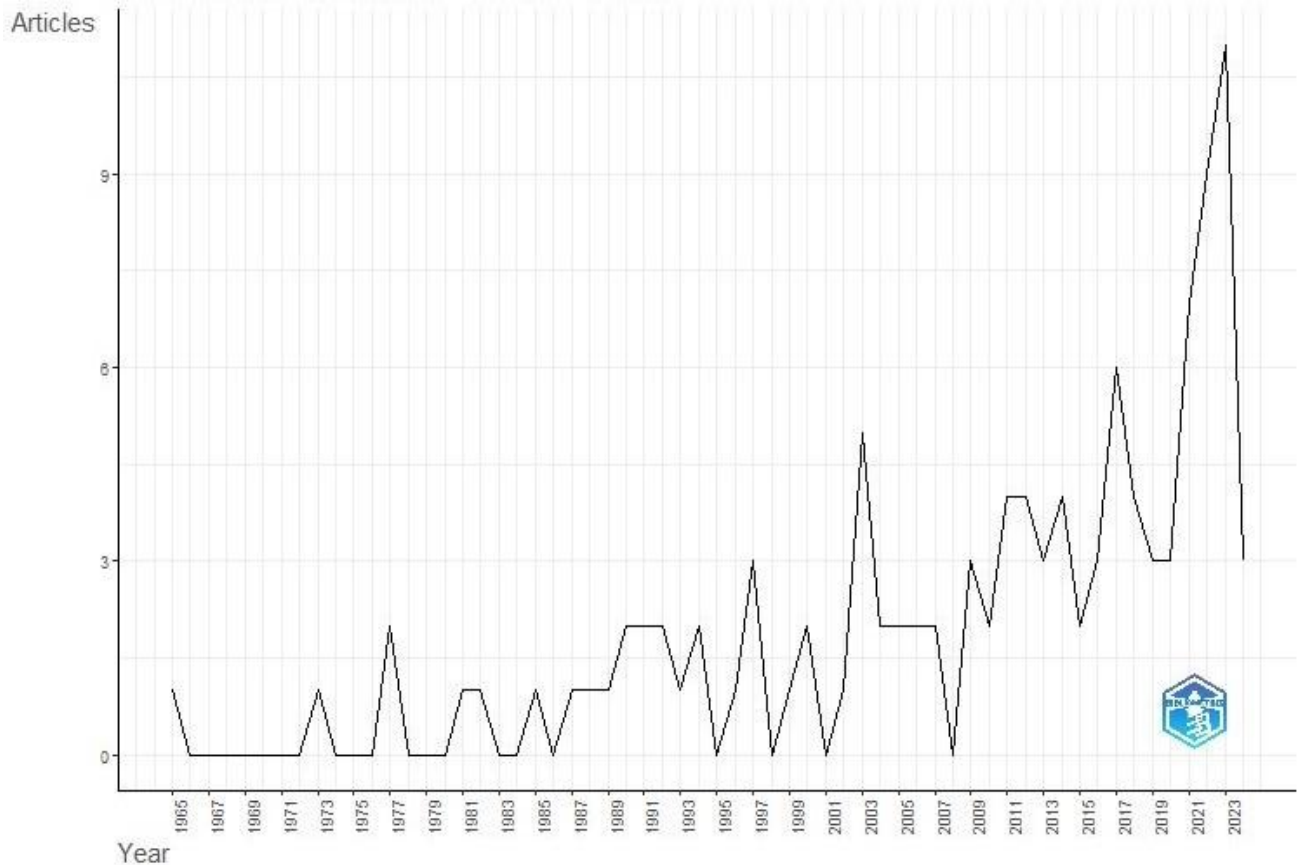
Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

Lloyd (1965) published a seminal article examining the phenomenon of uncontested seats in U.K. general elections from 1852 to 1910, presenting detailed data on their patterns and impact on the distribution of seats between the Liberal and Conservative Parties. The decline in uncontested seats, particularly after the Second Reform Act (1867) and the Third Reform Act (1884), was driven by expanded electorates, fairer seat redistribution, and increased electoral competition. Before these reforms, informal agreements among political parties often resulted in uncontested seats, but rising voter turnout and legislative changes transformed the system. Lloyd highlights the shift from elite-controlled elections based on patronage to a more competitive political environment shaped by effective party organization, particularly by the Conservative Party. By 1910, solid party structures and broader popular participation had dramatically reduced uncontested seats, marking an outstanding transformation in the U.K.'s political and social landscape.

After a single publication in 1965, no articles were published for the next few years (1966–1972). Uncontested elections may have been outside the centre of researchers' attention or that the lack of available empirical data limited research in this area. Publication resumed in 1973 with a single article. Although there was no consistent increase during the 1970s, some turning points are worth noting. 2 articles were published in 1977, and this trend continued with minor fluctuations into the 1980s. The decade of the 1980s saw a steadier increase in scientific production. 1 article was published in 1981, and in the following years, the number continued to grow, reaching a peak in 1990 with 2 articles.

The 1990s saw annual fluctuations, with scholarly production occasionally increasing and decreasing but tending to maintain a relatively constant trend. During this decade, the number of articles ranged from 1 to 3 yearly, with peak years occurring in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1997, where 2 articles were published. While it does not represent a noteworthy spike,

the stability in publications over the decade reflects researchers' continued interest in uncontested elections.

A more considerable trend began to emerge when entering the 21st century. In the early 2000s, although there were some years with only 1 or 2 articles published, such as 2000 and 2002, subsequent years saw a substantial increase in scholarly production. 2003 recorded 5 articles, a massive increase over the previous decade. Since then, the positive trend has continued, with publication rates stabilizing between 2 and 5 articles each year until the end of the 2000s decade.

The decade of the 2010s was a prominent period for the progress of uncontested elections studies. The number of articles published increased significantly, with a peak in 2017 when 6 articles were published. It marks a shift in academic attention, where the topic is increasingly seen as an essential issue in the study of politics and democracy. This increase can be related to global political changes and uncontested elections gaining more attention in modern democracies.

The most remarkable increases occurred in the last three years. In 2021, 7 articles were published and 9 articles in 2022. There was an outstanding spike with 11 articles, and it becomes the highest number in the historical data of uncontested election studies, suggesting that academic interest in the topic is at its peak. These growths have been influenced by the changing global political context, where uncontested elections have become spotlighted in many countries as part of more comprehensive discussions about democracy, political participation and electoral legitimacy. The year 2024 showed a steady trend, with 3 articles published, continuing the momentum from previous years. While fewer than in 2023, this figure reflects a solid and sustained interest in the phenomenon among academics.

In summary, scholarly production on uncontested elections has experienced fluctuating but progressive growth. After an initial period of relative quiet, attention to the topic began to increase, particularly in the late 1990s, and continued to surge notably in the decade from the 2010s to the 2020s. The increase in the number of articles published reflects the recognition of the importance of uncontested elections in political discourse and increased academic efforts to understand the implications of this phenomenon in the context of democracies and electoral systems worldwide.

Country Scientific Production

There are varying levels of scholarly production on uncontested elections in different countries. The scientific production data of countries, as presented in Table 2, may not directly reflect the quality or significance of the research conducted. However, they explain how much these countries contribute to the scientific literature on the topic. The analysis provides an overview of the geographic distribution of scientific research on uncontested elections and how noteworthy each country's contribution is to the global scientific literature on the topic.

Table 2. Country scientific production (1965–2024).

Country	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
United States	65	3346	14
Russia	11	375	10
Finland	3	54	4
Italy	4	193	4
Germany	4	44	3
Netherlands	2	4	3

United Kingdom	9	108	3
Norway	3	150	2
Belgium	1	26	1
Canada	5	59	1
Hungary	1	20	1
Ireland	1	2	1
Japan	3	23	1
Sweden	1	8	1
Turkey	1	67	1
Australia	2	5	0
Brazil	1	0	0
Cyprus	1	4	0
Czech Republic	2	4	0
France	1	0	0
Ghana	1	6	0
Hong Kong	1	6	0
Indonesia	3	15	0
Poland	4	2	0
Spain	1	47	0

Source: author's own elaboration using the VOSviewer software.

The United States tops the document count, with 65 studies addressing uncontested elections. This high interest from American researchers is strongly related to the country's unique electoral system, which is often characterized by issues of representation, political participation, and the impact of less intense competition in certain districts. The large number of papers from the U.S. also reflects academic concern with inequality of political access and its impact on stable democracies.

In Europe, attention to elections is undeniably evident in countries such as Russia, the U.K., Italy, Germany, Finland and Norway. Russia has 11 documents demonstrating the high academic interest in political stability and less competitive electoral processes in a country with strong political influence from specific actors. The U.K., with 9 documents and other European countries such as Germany and Italy (4 documents each), show that the issue of uncontested elections remains an essential part of European political research. In these countries, attention focuses on factors such as proportional electoral systems, the influence of the main political parties and the challenges of promoting healthy political competition.

Canada has 5 documents and shows moderate academic attention to uncontested elections. The focus is on political dynamics in specific regions or remote areas of Canada where political competition is low. Similarly, studies from Australia, Japan, Indonesia, and Poland, which have 2 to 4 documents each, illustrate how the issue of uncontested elections in the Australian, Asian, and Central European regions is becoming a concern for academics.

On the other hand, some countries, such as Belgium, Brazil, Turkey and Spain, have only 1 document each. The few studies from these countries may indicate that uncontested elections still need to be a significant issue in academic discourse or local politics. It could also be due to differences in political systems, where uncontested elections are less common or are not considered a severe threat to the prevailing democratic process.

Countries such as Ireland and France, with only 1 document each, display the same phenomenon. Research in these countries is limited due to different political dynamics or because the academic focus is more on other issues in their electoral systems. Apart from

Japan and Indonesia, only Hong Kong has research documents on uncontested elections in Asia. With 1 document, research in Hong Kong highlights how the unique political context and relationship with China affects elections and political competition in the region.

In summary, initial studies on uncontested elections concentrate solely on the U.S. because of its complex democratic system and unique electoral dynamics. These early studies were likely triggered by a desire to understand aspects such as low turnout in certain elections or a lack of political competition in some areas of the U.S., often influenced by the dominance of a particular party or the role of incumbents. However, in subsequent developments, the focus began to expand to other countries, including Russia, the U.K., Canada, and several European and Asian countries. This broadening of research hub demonstrates the growing global academic interest in understanding how uncontested elections play out in different political contexts. More recent studies look beyond the U.S. to consider local dynamics, such as the influence of dominant parties in Russia, proportional systems in Europe, or the challenges of encouraging political participation in countries with unique electoral systems. Their expanded geographical scopes provide a richer comparative perspective, allowing scholars to see how local factors influence the existence and impact of uncontested elections in various political systems worldwide.

Most Popular Keywords

In research on uncontested elections, keyword analysis provides insight into how different topics relate and how often they appear together in the literature. As shown in Figure 3, there are 10 most prominent words from 188 author keywords in 111 papers.

Figure 3. Most popular keywords (1965–2024).
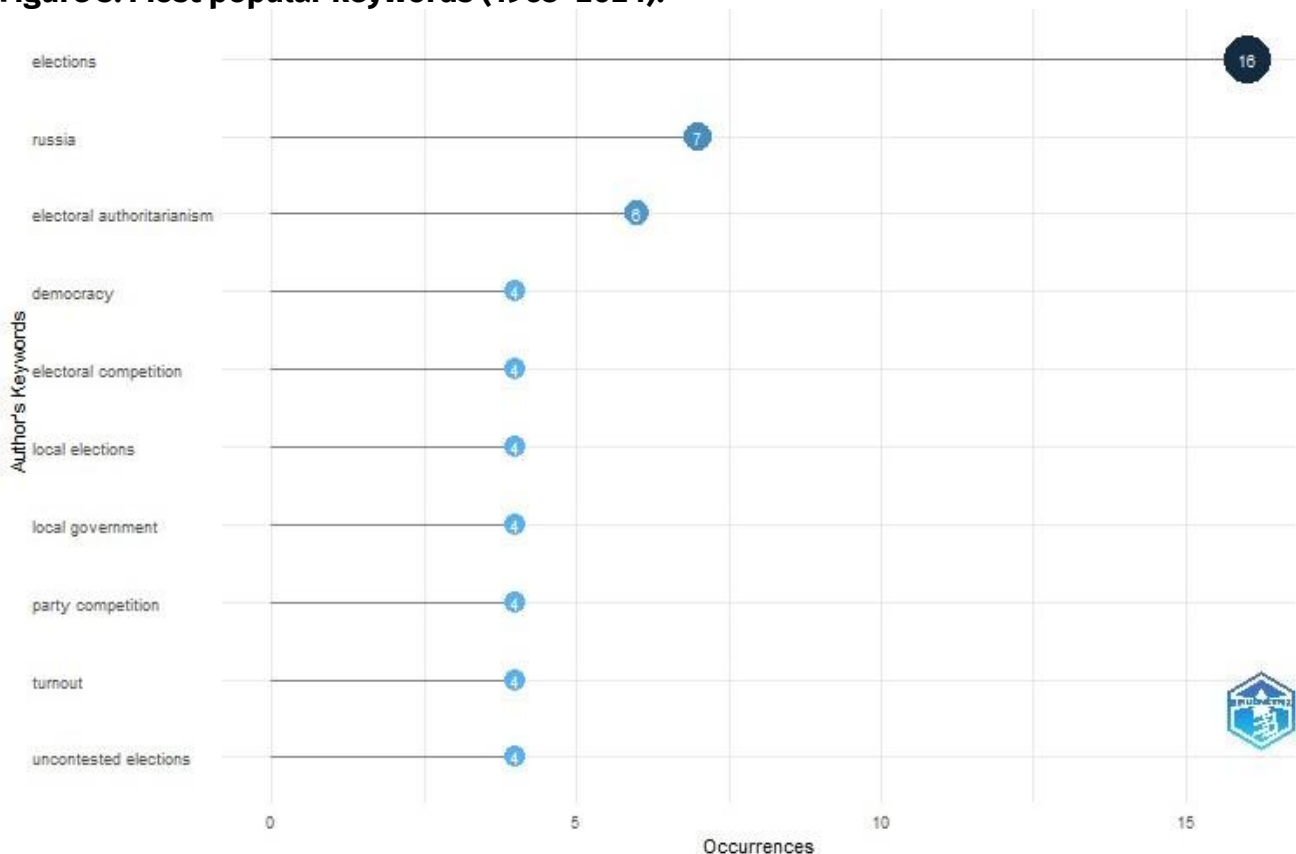
Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio.

The 10 most relevant keywords become essential aspects of uncontested election studies. The word "elections" occurs 16 times the most frequently, indicating that the issue of elections is central to the discussion, particularly in understanding the context in which elections become uncontested or occur without significant competition. Uncontested elections are considered a phenomenon that reduces the quality of democracy as they minimize the options for voters.

"Russia" appears 7 times, indicating that the country is a prime example in the study of uncontested elections. Russia is often used as a case study to explore how less competitive elections can be used as a tool for the ruling authority to maintain power. It is closely related to the "electoral authoritarianism" concept, which appears 6 times. The term describes the practice of authoritarianism in electoral systems, where elections are held but do not meet the standards of fair competition. Such a system allows the regime to maintain formal legitimacy while limiting actual political participation, a feature in Russia and other countries (Romanov et al., 2023; Saikkonen, 2016).

The keywords "democracy" and "electoral competition", which appear 4 times each, highlight a critical issue that has also been highlighted in previous studies, namely how electoral competition serves as a significant element of democracy. The presence of competitive elections is one of the pillars of a healthy democratic system, as this competition allows a change of power and representation that better reflects the people's will. However, in uncontested elections, the competition is often weakened or even eliminated, raising concerns about the quality of democracy in countries that experience the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the terms "local elections" and "local government", which appear 4 times each, indicate that local-level elections have attracted previous researchers' attention. Elections at the local level, such as those for regional heads or city councils, are often less competitive than national elections due to the dominance of specific figures or parties in the region. This focus on local elections is important because it allows researchers to understand how uncontested electoral patterns can occur at the micro-scale and affect the functioning of local government.

"Party competition" also appears 4 times, showing that inter-party competition is a primary factor in keeping elections dynamic. In countries with uncontested elections, inter-party competition is often dampened by various mechanisms, whether through strict regulation, government control, or even intimidation tactics that prevent opposition parties from running. When party competition is limited, democracy is jeopardized because voters are deprived of a diverse set of alternatives.

Finally, the keyword "turnout" appears 4 times, indicating that voter participation is also frequently discussed in this context. Low voter participation in elections can undeniably reflect people's apathy or distrust of the political process. When elections are not competitive, voters may feel their vote will not make a difference, potentially reducing overall participation. It triggers further discussion on the relationship between low levels of competition in elections and low voter turnout.

These keywords thus provide a comprehensive overview of the various aspects considered in the study of uncontested elections, from democracy and electoral competition to their impact on voter participation and the quality of local governance.

Co-Citation of Cited Authors

The co-citation of cited authors provides a foundation for understanding the intellectual networks and academic influence between researchers. When two or more authors are frequently cited together in articles, it indicates a conceptual or theoretical affinity in their

work. Such co-citation patterns reflect the dominant schools of thought or scholarly schools within a field.

I set 22 citations as the minimum because the research domain had more than three thousand authors. The final analysis identified 23 authors. Figure 4 shows the network of authors who have jointly cited other writers. The research displays a two-cluster solution in diverse colours.

The green lines cluster includes authors who focus on research that often links uncontested elections to the context of electoral authoritarianism and how authoritarian-leaning political systems use elections as a means to retain power without real competition. Studies by Gandhi (2015), Magaloni (2010), and Schedler (2002) highlight how authoritarian regimes use elections to maintain legitimacy while controlling the outcome. They investigate strategies of opposition containment and institutional manipulation that preserve regime stability without opening up any space for real competition.

Case studies in Jordan by Lust-Okar (2006) and in Russia by Golosov et al. (2016), Reuter & Robertson (2012), Reuter et al. (2016), and Szakonyi (2022) make considerable contributions to understanding uncontested elections in authoritarian or autocratic states. The prevailing political systems in both countries allow for uncontested elections so that regimes can ensure their power continuity and legitimacy. Moreover, Besley et al. (2010) underscores the consequences of uncontested elections on the birth of public policies that hinder economic growth in the United States. There is also a strong link between low political competition and income growth. Lack of political competition in a state is associated with anti-growth policies: lower capital spending, higher taxes, and a reduced likelihood of using right-to-work laws.

Meanwhile, the red lines category includes authors who focus on the conduct of elections in a democratic context and issues related to electoral competition and voter behaviour. Downs (1957) explores how voters are less motivated to participate in non-competitive elections. His rational voter theory is particularly relevant in understanding the phenomenon of low turnout in elections where the outcome is predictable before the event.

The studies of Ansolabehere et al. (2010), Cox et al. (2020), Hirano & Snyder Jr. (2014), Niemi et al. (1991), and Squire (1989, 2000) focus on electoral dynamics in democratic systems, particularly in the United States. They explore how different levels of competition in local and national elections impact voter turnout and political representation. Jacobson's (1989) and Niemi et al.'s (1991) research enriches the comprehension of legislative election dynamics and voter behaviour at the local level.

Hogan (2003a, 2003b) and Gross & Breaux (1991) analyze how electoral competition at the local level is affected by factors such as party structure and voter demographics. They see that local elections can result in minimal contestation in specific situations if one party or candidate has strong dominance. Moreover, Carey (2018) examines how electoral rules and system design affect competition in elections. The findings confirm that specific electoral systems can limit or encourage higher levels of competition.

Both categories provide complementary perspectives on the study of uncontested elections. Green lines focus on how authoritarian regimes use uncontested elections to perpetuate power and political stability, with theoretical approaches that include electoral authoritarianism, regime stability and democratic transitions. Meanwhile, red lines focus more on the democratic context, where uncompetitive elections are seen as a phenomenon related to voter behaviour, electoral system design and their impact on political representation.

The interaction between the two clusters is reflected in the co-citation patterns that show a productive theoretical and methodological dialogue. Researchers from the green

lines tend to cite fundamental works from the red lines to build arguments about electoral manipulation and political strategy in authoritarian regimes. Conversely, the red lines utilize insights from the green lines' comparative studies to enrich the understanding of variations in democratic practices. Such linkages result in a more comprehensive grasp of uncontested elections as a complex phenomenon involving institutional aspects, the behaviour of political actors, and broader political system dynamics. This co-citation pattern also indicates the evolution of a mature field of study, where various theoretical and methodological perspectives complement each other in building a solid corpus of knowledge.

Figure 4. Co-citation of cited authors (1965–2024).
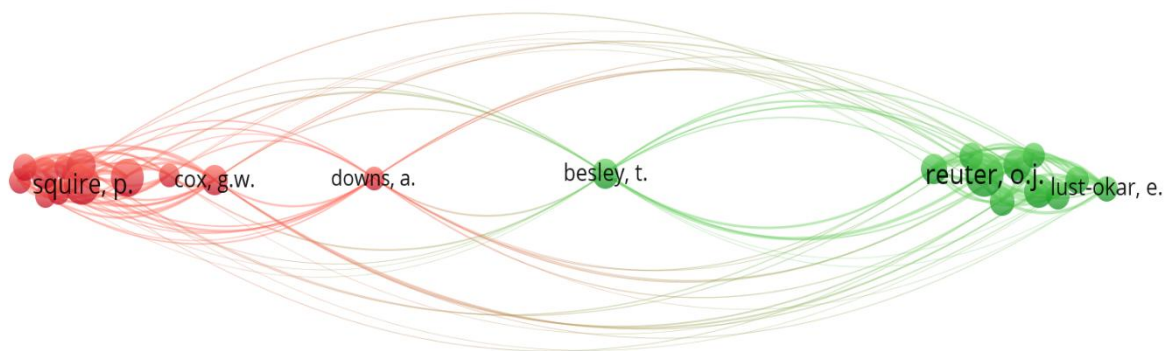
Source: author's own elaborations; visualized using the VOSviewer software.

Discussion

This section explores country-based issues, overarching trends in uncontested election studies, and future research directions. First, country-based issues in uncontested elections studies are outlined generally to find out how political characteristics, power structures and local cultures affect electoral competition in different parts of the world from 1965 to 2024. Next, prior studies' overarching trends demonstrate several prominent themes or patterns. Finally, future research directions are outlined to emphasize the significance of a more in-depth study of the dynamics of uncontested elections and their implications for political systems.

Country-Based Issues

The study of uncontested elections has become a remarkable political science topic covering various countries with different political contexts. This phenomenon describes a situation in which elections occur without alternative candidates or adequate competition, causing the democratic process to tend to be distorted. Each country has specific factors that cause such a situation, ranging from authoritarian political systems that control election results to the dominance of major parties that hinder access to other candidates.

The United States has shown consistent and in-depth attention to the issue of uncontested elections, as evidenced by the number of studies conducted since its inception. Research in the U.S. explores various factors that contribute to uncontested elections. One of them is the impact of incumbent advantage, electoral district systems that reinforce the dominance of certain parties, and voter behaviour influenced by the perception of the absence of competition. Studies by Jacobson & Kernell (1982), Abramowitz (1991), and Squire (2000) underline the significance of electoral competition in

maintaining the health of democracy. In addition, academic works of Brunell et al. (2012) and Hall (2014) highlight how changes in electoral structures, especially at the local level, can inhibit political competition and strengthen incumbents, thus affecting voter turnout.

Russia is also a country with many studies on uncompetitive elections, particularly in the context of electoral authoritarianism. Several studies highlight that elections in Russia are often used as a tool to legitimize authoritarian regimes without offering fair competition. Elections in Russia are tightly controlled to ensure the victory of the ruling party or government-backed candidates, creating the illusion of democracy without providing a real opportunity for the opposition. The government control local and national elections to maintains political stability while minimizing competitive participation (Harvey, 2022; Langenohl & Schmäing, 2020; Minaeva et al., 2023; Northmore-Ball & Tertytchnaya, 2023; Szakonyi, 2022).

Research in the U.K. tends to explore uncontested elections in local elections and 19th-century political history, as shown by Lloyd (1965) and Foster (1977). These studies highlight how dominant parties maintain power in a particular area by minimizing competition from political opponents. In addition, Coats & Dalton (1992) observed that in some contexts, elections without competition can occur due to the dominance of a political culture that discourages active political participation from minority groups or small parties.

In Poland, the study of uncontested elections is more recent and is mainly related to political transitions and democratization challenges. Lewis (1990) examined electoral dynamics in the post-Soviet period and how the transition to full democracy was disrupted by old political practices that limited competition. The research continues with Mazurkiewicz's (2021) analysis of local elections, which are often characterized by the dominance of major parties that prevent the emergence of alternative candidates.

Research in China by He (1996) and Fang & Hong (2020) focuses on the limitations of electoral competition in a one-party political system. Elections in China are often limited to local-level elections, with candidates selected and organized by the ruling party. Uncontested elections in China are an effective tool of political control for the Chinese Communist Party, limiting popular choice and maintaining political stability.

Australia has several studies of uncontested elections, particularly in local and regional elections. Sharman (2003, 2013) highlights that elections in rural areas often need more competition due to the dominance of major parties or candidates with strong support in the local community. It leads to low turnout and choice for voters.

In Jordan, Lust-Okar (2006) examined elections in a semi-authoritarian political system where the government controls elections to limit the role of the opposition. In this system, elections become a means of displaying political stability in the eyes of the international community. However, with actual competition, the role of the political opposition remains strong.

Knutsen et al. (2017) show that elections without competition in countries such as Egypt and Venezuela reinforce authoritarian control. Although elections are held, government control of the electoral process is so strong that alternative candidates often have no real chance of winning. Elections here are more of a formality aimed at maintaining an image of political legitimacy before the public and the international community.

Indonesia provides an interesting case study of uncompetitive local elections. Lay et al. (2017), Purwaningsih & Widodo (2021), and Yakub et al. (2022) explore the phenomenon in the context of regional head elections, where the dominance of incumbents or the influence of local political dynasties often leads to low levels of competition. These studies highlight that elite control over local resources can hinder independent candidates or political opponents from competing fairly.

Studies in Japan, such as those by Suzuki & Han (2019), highlight how Japan's stable political system often results in uncompetitive elections in several areas. The dominance of particular parties or political forces in certain regions severely limits the intention of opposition candidates to compete in the election. As a result, there are not enough candidates running for mayoral and local council elections.

Other European countries such as Germany, Italy and Spain have a limited number of studies but show similar patterns in uncompetitive elections, especially at the local level. Curto-Grau et al. (2018) in Spain, Lueders (2022) in Germany, and Perez-Vincent (2023) in Italy investigate how the influence of major parties in local elections often precludes the opportunity for healthy competition, especially in certain areas with a history of solid political dominance.

In Latin America, Skigin (2023) in Argentina and Hott & Menezes-Filho (2024) in Brazil highlight that elections without competition can result from political systems that favour loyalty to the dominant party. In some cases, this is driven by a robust political culture and a lack of financial support for alternative candidates, which leaves voters without a diverse range of electoral choices.

In summary, studies of uncontested elections in different countries show considerable variations in the factors that lead to low levels of political competition. In authoritarian countries such as Russia, China, and Jordan, uncontested elections are often a tool for maintaining political stability and power. Meanwhile, in democratic countries such as the U.S., U.K., and Japan, this phenomenon is often caused by local political dominance, incumbency advantage and lack of access to new candidates. These studies provide deep insights into how political systems, cultures and economic structures can shape uncompetitive electoral processes worldwide.

Overarching Trends in Uncontested Elections Research

Research on uncontested elections has developed remarkably from 1965 to 2024. Referring to the data processed by VOSviewer and Bibliometrix RStudio software, especially concerning the temporal dynamics, keywords occurrence, and co-citation of cited authors, I manually formulated 8 overarching trends in prior studies over nearly 6 decades, as presented in Figure 5. These trends represent several emerged dominant topics as previous researchers have used multiple perspectives to explore that issue in diverse countries.

When these aspects are analyzed together, some essential connections can be seen about how uncontested elections research has developed linearly and through complex networks of influence, collaboration and paradigm shifts. Research themes and intellectual influences have developed through a rich process of interaction and influence between frequently co-cited papers. When researchers co-cite previous work, it creates an intellectual base that forms the foundation for new themes, resulting in continuity and relevance in follow-up research. In addition, dynamics in knowledge development are often characterized by complex interactions between different ideas and concepts from researchers worldwide. New ideas do not just emerge in isolation but develop through diffusion and adoption within the research community. In an interconnected community, new concepts are absorbed, modified, or even replaced by more relevant concepts according to the context of time and space.

Figure 5. Research trends (1965–2024).
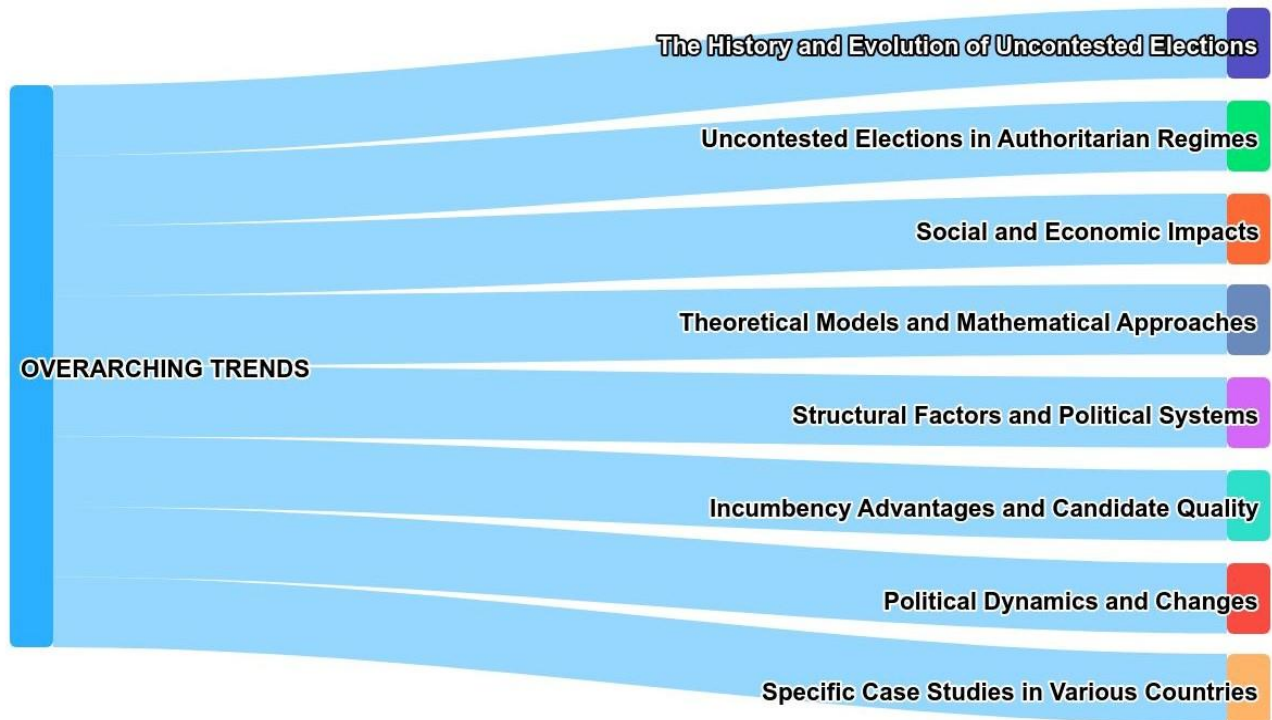
Source: author's own elaboration.

The first trend, *the history and evolution of uncontested elections*, focuses on the evolution and historical context of uncontested elections in various regions and periods. Early studies such as those by Lloyd (1965) and Foster (1977) examined the history of uncontested elections in England in the 19th century, providing insight into how the practice developed in particular contexts. Fisher (1981) and Caramani (2003) continue the study by highlighting the resurgence of uncontested elections and their impact on local political dynamics. As such, this trend examines the historical patterns and rise of uncontested elections in specific contexts to provide a fundamental understanding of the phenomenon.

The second trend, *uncontested elections in authoritarian regimes*, concentrates on the use and impact of uncontested elections in maintaining or challenging authoritarian governments. Research by White (1985) and Knutsen et al. (2017) shows how uncontested elections were used in authoritarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and other authoritarian states to preserve political stability and control the opposition. Lueders (2022) provides evidence from East Germany, emphasizing the responsiveness of elections in a closed system. Thus, this trend explores how uncontested elections are used in authoritarian contexts to control political opposition and perpetuate regime stability and how these elections can also serve as a tool for change.

The third trend, *social and economic impacts*, centers on the social and economic consequences of uncontested elections, including their impact on the accountability of elected officials and the effectiveness of legislative performance. Studies by Konisky & Ueda (2011) and Little (2017) explore the social and economic impacts of uncontested elections, including their effects on legislative performance and the accountability of elected officials. Nordström (2024) extends it by analyzing the performance of legislators in Japan. Thus, this trend illustrates the consequences of the phenomenon on various social and economic aspects, emphasizing the importance of competition in politics to ensure accountability and good performance of elected officials and economic decisions that benefit society.

The fourth trend, *theoretical models and mathematical approaches* rests on developing theoretical frameworks to explain the events and consequences of uncontested elections. Research by Eguia (2006) and Buchler (2007) seeks to build theoretical models to understand the phenomenon of uncontested elections, highlighting these models' economic and political implications. Crutzen & Sahuguet (2018) explore the causes and consequences of uncontested primary elections. Thus, this trend builds and tests mathematical models to understand the incentives and outcomes associated with uncontested elections, highlighting issues such as social suboptimality and the strategic behaviour of candidates and parties.

The fifth trend, *structural factors and political systems* comes in contact with research on how structural factors such as barriers to entry and term limits influence the prevalence of uncontested elections. Coats & Dalton (1992) and Prier & Wagner (2009) examine how structural factors such as political entry barriers and term limits influence the likelihood of an uncontested election. Perez-Vincent (2023) adds to the study of barriers to entry in local politics in Italy. In doing so, this trend investigates the impact of the structure of political and electoral systems on the occurrence of uncontested elections. It reveals how barriers to participation in elections and other institutional factors shape electoral competition.

The sixth trend, *incumbency advantages and candidate quality* centralizes on the role of incumbency advantages and candidate quality in uncontested elections. Carson et al. (2007) and Hirano & Snyder Jr. (2014) examine the relationship between candidate quality, incumbent advantage, and uncontested elections. Geras (2023) examines the influence of party rules on congressional nominations. Thus, this trend explores how the advantages held by incumbents and the quality of candidates influence the likelihood of non-contestation in elections and the implications this has for political representation.

The seventh trend, *political dynamics and changes*, rivets on how uncontested elections reflect or drive changes in political and regime dynamics. Lewis (1990) and Kouba & Lysek (2023) show how uncontested elections reflected or influenced changes in political dynamics in Poland and Czechia. Mazurkiewicz (2020) evaluates uncontested elections at the local level in Poland. As such, this trend looks at the broader political implications of uncontested elections, including links to regime stability and change, shifts in party competition, and the crisis of political representation.

The eighth trend, *specific case studies in various countries*, focuses on an in-depth examination of uncontested elections in specific national contexts. Research by Lay et al. (2017) in Indonesia and Ellinas & Katsourides (2021) in Cyprus provides in-depth case studies of uncontested elections in specific local contexts. Sharman (2003) examines the evolution of party competition in Australia. Thus, these trends provide a detailed analysis of the unique factors influencing uncontested elections in different countries, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon across political landscapes.

Early studies of uncontested elections tended to take a historical perspective, centering on the chronology of emergence and emerging patterns of uncontested elections in particular local or national contexts. In this phase, a descriptive approach was dominant, where the focus was primarily on documenting the historical facts without much in-depth explanation of the causal factors or wider consequences that could arise.

However, as the discipline has evolved, contemporary research now covers a much broader range of aspects. These aspects are from the analysis of the function of uncontested elections in maintaining the stability of authoritarian regimes to the socio-economic impact of a lack of political competition to the development of theoretical models that explain the behaviour of political actors in uncontested elections. These new

trends confirm that the understanding of uncontested elections has evolved, no longer limited to their history but also their structural, social, and political impacts.

The evolution of the discipline underscores how research on uncontested elections has adapted to changing political and social contexts and how researchers have used new approaches to understand the phenomenon more deeply. Such transformations show that the field is increasingly relevant in highlighting essential aspects such as incumbency advantage, economic and social impacts, and regime change dynamics in uncontested elections.

In more detail, based on the frequency of keyword occurrence, there are 3 prominent topics in uncontested elections research: elections, electoral authoritarianism, and Russia. Each topic has a frequency of occurrence and temporal progression that gives an idea of how the research focus has changed over time.

The topic of elections has the highest frequency of occurrence at 16 times, indicating that elections as a democratic process foundation are the main focus of the study. The term began to appear crucially in 2011, marking increased attention to the deviances of maintaining integrity and competition in elections. Its appearance in the median of 2017 and the third quartile of 2022 indicates that the study of elections continues to evolve in the context of the challenges faced by countries, both democratic and authoritarian. Research during this period has often addressed how uncontested elections impact voter turnout, electoral fairness, and the legitimacy of elected governments.

The topic of electoral authoritarianism appeared 6 times between 2016 and 2023. It refers to the phenomenon where authoritarian regimes use elections to maintain power without offering genuine political competition. With the first quartile in 2016, the topic became remarkable as the study of semi-authoritarian countries grew, particularly in regions experiencing democratic backsliding. The median point in 2020 and the rise to 2023 signal that the topic has received increasing attention in the last decade, especially as many countries hold elections but continue to restrict the freedom of opposition candidates, creating the illusion of democracy. Studies on electoral authoritarianism often link this practice to a government control strategy to minimize the risk of power change.

The topic "Russia" appears 7 times and has been the focus of research in the context of tightly controlled elections by the state. Russia came to the fore around 2016, which marked an increased interest in how the Russian government maintains political power through elections that are not fully competitive. By the median of 2022, research on Russia focused on authoritarianism practices involving control over candidates, limited political participation, and the ruling party dominance in each election. The high frequency in the period 2016 to 2022 suggests that elections in Russia are often exemplary in the study of non-competitive elections where the government is highly ambitious to ensure outcomes that favour political stability through an electoral mechanism that appears democratic but is controlled tightly by them.

Overall, the above trends suggest that the prominent topics in uncontested elections research have evolved with the global dynamics of democracy and political stability challenges. Each topic is relevant to understanding how states manage political competition within an electoral framework to retain power and create a sense of legitimacy in authoritarian political systems.

Future Research Directions

To identify future research directions, I adopted specific steps from Bahoo (2020) and Bahoo et al. (2021). The first one is to review the top ten cited articles. These articles were selected for their outstanding contributions to the field of study and their ability to create citation maps, as shown in Figure 6. This map helps identify emerging research trends and

understand how various studies are related. I then can see the network of relationships between diverse studies, identify the topics often discussed, and comprehend patterns and dynamics in uncontested elections research. It helps identify areas that have been widely explored and find gaps that still require further research.

Figure 6. Citation map of documents (1965–2024).
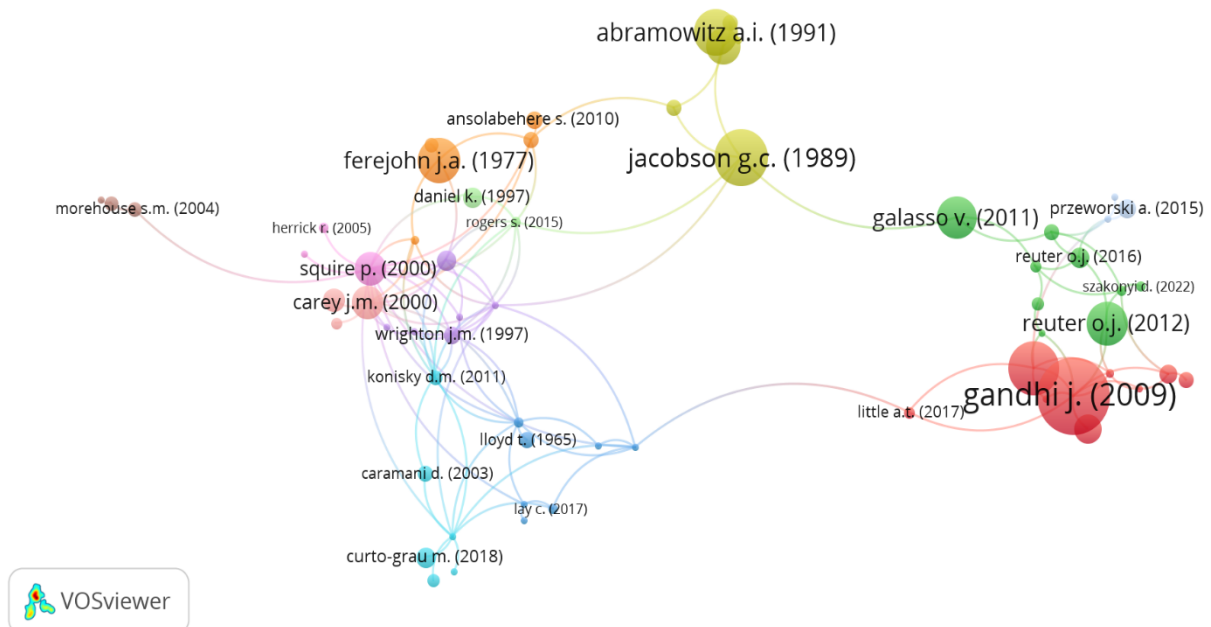
Source: author's own elaborations; visualized using the VOSviewer software.

The second step is to review all influential articles and trends over the past seven years (2017 to 2024). Ensuring the research reflects the latest developments and innovations in uncontested elections is essential. By focusing on influential articles and the latest trends, I can stay up-to-date with the latest discoveries and new methodologies. This step also helps understand the major concerns of the research community and how various innovations are being implemented in current studies.

The third step was reviewing other study sample articles to avoid top citation bias. Reviewing all articles in the study sample ensured that less well-known but still relevant and meaningful research was also considered in the analysis. Articles not highly cited may still contain noteworthy contributions that should be noticed. This way, I can obtain a more comprehensive and comprehensive picture.

The final step is to convert the potential research agenda into research questions. Potential research agendas discovered during the literature review process are converted into specific research questions. These questions were then filtered to exclude those other researchers who had already researched. It helps identify unfilled gaps and areas that require further research. By establishing clear and focused research questions, I can design relevant future studies that can contribute to the understanding and development of uncontested elections.

This systematic process resulted in 44 future research questions listed in Table 3. By following these steps, I can identify future research directions that are relevant, innovative, and potentially impact their field of study. These steps help ensure that the research not only keeps up with the latest developments but also fills existing knowledge gaps and pushes the boundaries of understanding in uncontested elections.

Table 3. Future research directions.

Paper	Approach	Questions
Gandhi & Lust-Okar (2009)	Literature Review	1. Variations in authoritarian electoral structures significantly affect participants' behaviour, but what is the impact of more specific electoral rules, such as the use of independent candidates, on electoral coalition formation? 2. How do staggered election effects affect voter and incumbent behavior? 3. How do different levels and structures of elections affect the behavior of citizens, candidates, and incumbents in broader comparative studies? 4. How do authoritarian elections affect policy outcomes such as economic growth and war? Do these effects vary across regime types? 5. What is the impact of elections on other social and political forces in different regime types beyond influencing the emergence of elite-community conflict, social movement strategies, tribal organization, and gender representation?
Jacobson (1989)	District-Level and Aggregate Time-Series Analysis	6. How can the role of strategic politicians in the context of different countries or systems of government affect election outcomes? 7. To what extent do specific campaign strategies impact candidate electability, especially using voter data and modern media? 8. How does the development of voter behavior and candidate strategies change, particularly with the influence of evolving social and economic factors? 9. Are there considerable similarities or differences in electoral patterns between the U.S. House elections and smaller local elections?
Lust-Okar (2006)	Case Study	10. How does the role of elections in authoritarian regimes affect the stability and legitimacy of the regime? 11. What factors shape voter behavior in authoritarian elections, particularly in the context of the distribution of patronage over policy? 12. Why and how do candidates choose to participate in elections despite constraints on political freedom? 13. How do state elites manage electoral competition to retain power without blatant manipulation? 14. Is the role of political parties in elections under authoritarianism crucial enough to influence outcomes, or is it limited to personalistic groupings? 15. How can implementing democracy promotion programs be adjusted to reduce patronage

		tendencies in authoritarian electoral systems?
Shin (1994)	Literature Review	16. How can the choice of particular strategies and tactics affect the consolidation of democracy in new countries? 17. How noteworthy is political elites' role in the transition to democracy compared to mass involvement? 18. How do certain social and economic factors affect the sustainability of democracy in different cultural contexts? 19. Is a procedural or substantive approach more effective in measuring the quality of democratic consolidation? 20. What is the relationship between the type of democratic transition and the type of political system that emerges in different countries?
Abramowitz (1991)	Case Study	21. How can public funding increase competition in US House elections? 22. Why does more lavish campaign spending by incumbent candidates tend to reduce electoral competition? 23. Is there a difference in the effectiveness of campaign spending between incumbent and challenger candidates in winning votes? 24. How can changes in campaign policy affect the chances of challenger candidates?
Ferejohn (1977)	Case Study	25. How does voter behaviour affect the reduction of competition in congressional elections? 26. Is there a direct relationship between redistricting and decreased electoral competition? 27. How does campaign finance control by incumbents affect competition in congressional elections? 28. Can changes to district structure increase competition in the future?
Reuter & Robertson (2012)	Case Study	29. How did the dynamics between central and regional governments affect the stability of authoritarian regimes in Russia? 30. Does the appointment mechanism of governors impact the performance of local governments in authoritarian regimes? 31. How do patronage relationships in subnational appointments affect the loyalty of local elites to the center? 32. What are the implications of the appointment system for the potential for future democratic reform?
Galasso & Nannicini (2011)	Literature Review	33. How does a party's strategy of placing high-quality candidates affect election outcomes in competitive regions?

		34. Do large campaign expenditures impact the quality of candidates elected in highly competitive areas?
		35. How does the quality of candidates correlate with their parliamentary attendance?
		36. Does the high quality of candidates affect voter turnout in competitive elections?
Carson et al. (2007)	Case Study	37. How does candidate quality affect the sustainability of incumbent gains in different electoral contexts?
		38. Does the relationship between personal vote and candidate quality strengthen the incumbent's position?
		39. How do campaign history factors affect the development of incumbent advantage?
		40. How does redistricting affect the dynamics of candidate quality and winning chances?
Joseph (1997)	Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives	41. How have the dynamics between domestic and international forces affected the democratization process in African countries?
		42. Is the pattern of democratic transition in Africa different from other regions, and what are the reasons for this?
		43. How did economic factors affect the consolidation of democracy in post-1989 African countries?
		44. What is the role of non-state actors in strengthening the democratic process in Africa?

Source: author's own elaboration.

Conclusion

This article presents a comprehensive mapping of patterns and trends in prior studies of uncontested elections over the past six decades, revealing the primary dynamics, contributions and significant shifts in academic attention to the phenomenon affecting the quality of democracy. The overarching trends confirm that previous research was initially focused on the historical and evolutionary aspects of uncontested elections in specific local contexts. However, attention shifted to studies of elections in authoritarian regimes, socio-economic impacts, and theoretical models to explain them. Several researchers have increasingly underscored how the phenomenon indicates democratic stability or dysfunction in different countries, particularly in the United States, Russia and some European countries.

Uncontested elections reflect temporary political stability or widespread support for a particular candidate and signal deep-seated problems in the political system, such as low political participation and the loss of fair competition. The dominance of a particular party, the complexity of electoral rules and high campaign costs have emerged as the main factors driving the phenomenon. Over the period studied, academic interest in uncontested elections has remained consistent with increasing publications, especially in the last decade.

This mapping provides an in-depth insight into the development of uncontested elections research, the critical contributions of various authors, and the thematic trends that have emerged over time. The 44 future research questions open opportunities for further exploration to understand the factors supporting or hindering competitive

elections. The findings enrich academic knowledge and provide practical implications for policymakers in formulating effective policies to increase competition in elections and strengthen political accountability mechanisms.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Traditions of the American Identity[1]
Navigating the Complex Terrain of Whiteness

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Abstract

American identity is shaped by a dynamic interplay of traditions, including liberalism, civic republicanism, ethnoculturalism, and incorporationism, each contributing distinct yet interconnected elements to its development. Central to this evolving narrative is the concept of whiteness, which has transitioned from a presumed social norm to a contested socio-political construct. This study traces the historical trajectory of whiteness, examining its role in defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within American identity. It explores how whiteness has operated as a marker of privilege, a tool of social stratification, and a performative identity, adapting to historical and ideological shifts while sustaining systemic inequalities. Through a historical lens, the study analyzes the relationship between whiteness and American traditions, highlighting its influence on key political and cultural developments, from the codification of racial hierarchies in the early republic to contemporary struggles over race and equity. Ultimately, the study underscores whiteness as a constructed and fluid force that continues to shape the social, political, and cultural dimensions of American identity, raising critical questions about power, belonging, and the future of pluralism in the United States.

Keywords: Whiteness; American Identity; Racial Classification; Sociopolitical Transformation, Inclusion and Exclusion

Introduction

The idea of American identity is a complex and constantly changing concept deeply ingrained in the historical and political fabric of the nation. To fully grasp the complexities of American identity, it is essential to explore the elaborate network of traditions that have significantly influenced its formation. Scholars have acknowledged several important traditions, including liberalism, civic republicanism, ethnoculturalism, and incorporationism, each offering unique elements to the intricate composition of American identity. At this point, it would be important to underline that these traditions are not

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[1] This article has undergone some minor changes after publication, at the authors' request, which do not alter its substance and results in any way

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mutually exclusive but rather coexist and interact with each other in shaping American identity. Recent scholarship has highlighted this complexity and competition among these traditions, with each offering different perspectives on what it means to be American (Hero, 2003; Schildkraut, 2003; Schildkraut, 2007; Yogeeswaran & Gómez, 2012; McDaniel et al., 2016).

At the heart of this discussion lies the elusive concept of whiteness, a foundational element intricately interwoven within the fabric of American identity, experiencing profound shifts over time. This essay embarks on an exploration into the metamorphosis of whiteness within the broader context of American identity, tracing its journey from a customary social construct to evolving into a source of unease and tension. Whiteness, in its varied forms, has wielded significant influence in shaping American society and politics, often serving as a divisive factor and a wellspring of discord. However, it would also be crucial to highlight our stance where we see whiteness is not an inseparable component of American identity but rather a constructed portion of it, challenging the implicit association of Americanness with whiteness. This perspective resists the naturalization of whiteness within the concept of American identity, emphasizing the constructed and contingent nature of both. Scholarly work supports this approach; for instance, Fields (2001) critiques whiteness as an ideological construct that distracts from deeper power dynamics in American society, framing it as a false equivalence to racial identity. Similarly, Devos and Banaji (2005) demonstrate that whiteness is often implicitly equated with Americanness, even when explicit attitudes oppose such conflation, showing how this dynamic marginalizes nonwhite identities. By disentangling whiteness from American identity, we align with scholarship that deconstructs the racial dimensions of belonging and power, such as Goldstein's analysis of the shifting racial identities in the American Jewish experience (Goldstein, 2006). These frameworks collectively underscore the necessity of viewing whiteness as an ever-evolving socio-political construct, not an inherent and unchanging element of national identity.

In line with the abovementioned approach to conceptualizations, this essay critically examines the existing scholarly debates on the transformation of American identity, offering a nuanced understanding of the diverse traditions and belief systems that have shaped its evolution. We identify that, spanning from the early colonial periods to modern times, the notion of whiteness has shifted within the framework of these traditions, taking on varied meanings and functions. It has served as both a force for inclusion and exclusion, reflecting the changing landscape of American society and politics.

As we hereby explore the complex socio-political and historical dynamics of whiteness and its influence on American identity, we will uncover different dimensions, including its portrayal as a social standing, its links to discontent, its emergence as a racial division, and its historical depiction as an intrinsic characteristic. Furthermore, we will investigate how whiteness transformed into a performative aspect during specific historical junctures, notably in the pre-Civil War era, when citizenship and race became closely intertwined. Furthermore, this essay will illuminate the influence of whiteness in American politics, tracing its historical significance in shaping policies and political alliances. It will elucidate how whiteness has been a defining factor in various political movements, ranging from the civil rights era to contemporary debates surrounding immigration and racial identity.

We suggest that the concept of whiteness emerges as a sociopolitical construct tied to the broader American identity. It has acted as a dynamic and ever-changing force, imprinting its presence on the social, political, and cultural aspects of American society. As we examine the conflicting traditions that have molded American identity, we gain valuable insights into the complex essence of whiteness and its lasting impact on the course of the United States.

Major Traditions of American Identity

In order to evaluate the issue we study on, it is significant to understand the complex and competing components of American identity which consist of different traditions that have been outlined by scholars. *Liberal*, *civic republican*, *ethnocultural* and *incorporatist* traditions can be counted as the most important components contributing to the scholarly debate on American identity (Higham, 1993; Hollinger, 2006; Schildkraut, 2007). Each tradition offers unique perspectives and insights into the ever-evolving nature of what it means to be American (Schildkraut, 2007).

Liberalism, as an example, highlights the significance of minimizing government involvement, championing economic and political liberties, and celebrating individualism. These principles have held substantial sway in shaping the core values of the American identity. Conversely, civic republicanism prioritizes civic duties and encourages active participation in community betterment, emphasizing the collective aspect of American identity. Ethnoculturalism, although contested, has historically influenced the definition of American identity based on specific ethnic criteria. Lastly, incorporationism speaks to the dynamic and inclusive nature of American society, where diverse backgrounds and experiences converge. We underline that these traditions offer a rich tapestry of ideas and values that illuminate the multifaceted mosaic of American identity and its continuous evolution. Following sections will delve deeper into the dimensions of each approach that have a crucial role in understanding the development of Whiteness within the American experience.

As defined by Hartz (1955), *liberal* understanding of American identity draws an American image in which liberalism defines the American political culture. In this liberal tradition, the minimal intervention of the government in private life and the promotion of economic and political freedoms with the condition of equal opportunity have been highly prioritized (Schildkraut, 2007). In terms of American identity, this normative tradition involves the endorsement of liberal principles by the group members that are not infringing upon the political and economic rights, as well as freedom of others. More specifically, individualism, notion, and promise of hard work, equality, and freedom, as well as the principle of rule of law, could be exemplified as the components of this tradition (Schildkraut, 2014). The notion of *American Creed*, which has been discussed by Myrdal (2017) and Huntington (2004), in this sense, is the basis of this liberal tradition as the endorsement of American Creed- e.g. hard working, minimum state intervention, political and economic principles- should be sufficient for the group membership, i.e. being American.

Ethnoculturalism, although less acknowledged by the liberal tradition, has also been a constitutive element of American identity. In this script tradition, there have been outlined rigid boundaries for belonging to American identity (Schildkraut, 2007). In accordance with this ethnocentric view defining the national identity based on some certain ethnic conceptualizations, Americans are defined as white, English-speaking Protestants of Northern European ancestry (Smith, 1997). This tradition, as it will be discussed more in detail in the following paragraphs, has been largely acknowledged in American social and political history in the process of defining whiteness. Despite being discredited over time, it is still one of the major traditions shaping American identity by many (Schildkraut, 2007). For instance, this ethnocultural view is visible among the elite and masses in today's American society as they endorse a restricting full range of citizenship rights to certain ethnic and religious groups (Davis & Silver, 2004; Schildkraut, 2007). As maintained by Schildkraut, "...for many people who genuinely reject such exclusions, ethnoculturalism still operates beyond their awareness." (2007, p. 599).

Civic republicanism refers to the civic responsibilities which are enhancing the notion of the well-being of the community. Under this tradition of American identity, it has been stated that a self-governing community in need of individual members to act on its behalf (Banning, 1986). More specifically, in other words, one should be involved in social and political life with the aim of serving the public good (Schildkraut, 2007). As the central component of the American identity, this tradition prioritizes making group members both informed and involved in public life by pursuing collective identity (Schildkraut, 2007).

Being considered alongside the ethnocultural tradition, incorporationism represents a contemporary perspective in defining American identity, rooted in the concept of cultural pluralism (Kallen, 1957). Proponents of this view assert that American identity is distinctive due to its immigrant heritage and its capacity to transform the challenges posed by immigration into sources of strength (Higham, 1993; Glazer, 1998; Tichenor, 2002). This perspective has, as Schildkraut (2007) notes, challenged the traditional ethnoculturalism viewpoint, although some argue that many Americans do not perceive these as mutually exclusive concepts (Citrin et al., 2001). However, it is undeniable that the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the political incorporation of immigrants and African Americans, along with their descendants, have significantly contested the ethnoculturalism perspective. In the following sections, we will further explore the implications and relevance of these developments in the social and political history of the United States, particularly within the context of the literature on American identity and whiteness.

Exploring the Varied Meanings and Historical Implications

As we delve further into our discussion, it is imperative to acknowledge the diverse definitions of whiteness within the scholarly discourse. Whiteness has been conceptualized as both a racial identity and a social construct, deeply intertwined with power dynamics and privilege in American society. It serves as the "unmarked" category against which other identities are contrasted, perpetuating invisibility and privilege while marginalizing non-White identities (Harris, 1993). Scholars have argued that American identity has historically been conflated with whiteness, reinforcing racial hierarchies and exclusion of minorities (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

Some scholars contend that whiteness has undergone a process of normalization throughout the social and political history of the United States (Olson, 2008). Conversely, others emphasize that assuming a normalized whiteness with a monolithic and imperceptible nature that remains impervious to political and cultural challenges is no longer tenable (Winant, 2012). It is noteworthy that many of these definitions have primarily contributed to the ethnocultural interpretation of American national identity, as previously discussed. Nevertheless, in a broader context, it can be asserted that whiteness is a concept that is contingent on both context and time, subject to examination as both a natural (Gross, 2008; Painter, 2011) and social identity (Schildkraut, 2014) in empirical and theoretical analyses within American political literature.

One of the conceptualizations of whiteness pertains to it being a form of social status or whiteness as a position of standing (Olson, 2008). This interpretation revolves around the notion that historical American citizenship endowed a level of honor and status that distinguished its holders, i.e., citizens, from noncitizens, notably slaves (Shklar, 1991). Within this framework, it is noteworthy that the most marginalized member within the white group enjoyed a higher status than the most esteemed member of the excluded community (Ignatiev, 2012), creating a paradoxical relationship where American citizenship simultaneously represented equality among citizens and served as a means of distinction

from non-citizens (Shklar, 1991). At this point, the construction of American identity has been consistently challenged by various groups, including white women, enslaved African Americans, and immigrants over time. For instance, white women have historically participated in and benefited from whiteness while simultaneously advocating for gender equity, exposing contradictions within the identity (Fields, 2001). Enslaved African Americans fundamentally undermined the ideology of whiteness through their resistance and fight for emancipation, challenging the moral and political legitimacy of White dominance (Stein, 2001). Non-White immigrant groups, such as Arab Americans, have further complicated racial categories by asserting both distinct ethnic identities and claims to whiteness to mitigate discrimination (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007). Following sections trace the evolution of Whiteness and American identity.

Early Foundations of Whiteness and Racial Hierarchies (1600s–1870s)

The colonial and constitutional eras established the foundational structures of American identity, where whiteness became a defining characteristic of inclusion. Early laws and practices institutionalized racial hierarchies and exclusion, shaping the dynamics of American society. Scholars like Abrajano and Hajnal (2015) provide insights into how these dynamics emerged. Early colonial America was marked by interactions between Native Americans, white settlers, and enslaved Africans. These interactions laid the groundwork for racial hierarchies, justified by evolving ethnocultural claims and naturalist discourses.

In 1619, the arrival of African slaves in Virginia marked the beginning of racialized labor systems. Although the liberal tradition, inspired by thinkers like John Locke, emphasized equality and individual rights, it paradoxically justified colonial expansion and slavery by dehumanizing Indigenous peoples and Africans (Locke, 2013). These contradictions became evident in the Declaration of Independence (1776), which proclaimed equality but was interpreted to apply exclusively to white males, excluding enslaved individuals and Native Americans (Jefferson, 1998). The institutionalization of whiteness was legally codified with the Naturalization Act of 1790, which restricted citizenship to "free white persons". This reflected both the ethnocultural tradition's emphasis on shared heritage and the civic republican tradition's linkage of citizenship to whiteness and land ownership (Cuison-Villazor, 2023). During this period, whiteness became fetishized as a natural identity, exemplified by a focus on tall, attractive Anglo-Saxons, while early anthropological studies reinforced strict racial hierarchies (Painter, 2011).

The liberal tradition in American identity, which emphasized individual rights and equality, was deeply exclusionary during the colonial and antebellum periods. John Locke's philosophy justified land acquisition and slavery by dehumanizing non-whites (Locke, 2013). Similarly, the civic republican tradition focused on active participation and virtue but limited this vision to propertied white men. The Founding Fathers equated land ownership with civic responsibility, excluding women, Native Americans, and enslaved individuals from public life (Freehling, 1972; Brown R. D., 1996; Kann, 1999). This tradition culminated in Andrew Jackson's populist democracy, which expanded suffrage to all white men but reinforced whiteness as central to citizenship (Howe, 2007). The ethnocultural tradition, rooted in shared heritage and cultural norms, also marginalized non-European groups. The rise of Anglo-Saxonism during the 18th and early 19th centuries celebrated white Protestant heritage as the foundation of American identity (Horsman, 1981). This ideology justified policies such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which reflected both ethnocultural exclusion and the racial limitations of civic republicanism (Wilkins & Stark, 2017).

In antebellum America, whiteness was increasingly understood as a performance rather than an inherent essence, deeply intertwined with privilege and societal norms. Legal trials

of racial identity became critical in defining whiteness, equating it with citizenship and associated rights such as voting, jury participation, and military service (Gross, 2008). One notable case illustrating the performative nature of whiteness is *Morrison v. White* (1857). Alexina Morrison, a woman in Louisiana, sued for her freedom, asserting she was a white woman mistakenly enslaved. Her physical appearance, behavior, and social interactions, particularly her participation in white social events and relationships with white men, convinced jurors of her whiteness despite accusations of African ancestry (Johnson, 2000; Gross, 2008). This case underscores how whiteness was not solely determined by physical traits but also by social acceptance and behavior. Ultimately, the jury accepted Morrison's argument, granting her freedom. Such cases highlight the fluid and negotiable nature of whiteness within the legal and social frameworks of the time. Whiteness operated as both a social and legal construct, adapting to cultural norms and functioning as a marker of privilege and status. The performative dimension of whiteness reveals its constructed nature, shaped through social practices and legal adjudication, with cases like *Morrison v. White* exemplifying its intersection with societal power structures and reputational dynamics.

As immigration from Europe increased, the concept of whiteness has also expanded further. During the Civil War era, groups previously excluded, such as the Irish and Germans, were incorporated into whiteness. By the 1850s, Catholic and Irish immigrants were classified as "old immigrants" in contrast to newcomers from Central and Eastern Europe. This distinction was framed by nativist perspectives, as articulated by figures like Francis Amanda Walker, who emphasized the racial purity of earlier Anglo-Saxon settlers and warned against the demographic challenges posed by "alien populations" (Painter, 2011). Such essentialist and nativist ideologies positioned whiteness as central to American identity. The incorporatist tradition offered selective pathways to inclusion, primarily for certain European immigrants, while excluding Indigenous and Black populations. Assimilation policies targeting Native Americans, such as missionary efforts and forced cultural erasure, highlighted these boundaries (Prucha, 1995). Similarly, debates over the extension of slavery into new territories underscored the racialized limitations of incorporatism, with whiteness defining the boundaries of inclusion (Foner, 1995).

The literature on pre-Reconstruction American identity also highlights the coexistence of liberal aspirations and exclusionary practices. Scholars like Smith argue that American identity was shaped by an "ascriptive hierarchy", where liberal ideals coexisted with deeply entrenched racial exclusions (Smith, 1993). Ethnocultural narratives, as examined by Horsman (1981), constructed whiteness as a cultural ideal, while Prucha's (1995) work on Native American policy exposed incorporatism's racial limitations. Together, these ideological frameworks reveal the ways in which whiteness became both a defining characteristic and a mechanism of exclusion in the formation of American identity.

The Reconstruction era (1865–1877) marked a critical juncture in the civic republican tradition, as the Republican Party sought to implement ideals of political equality and shared governance. The abolition of slavery, the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, and the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau exemplified efforts to integrate freed African Americans into the political and social fabric of the nation (Foner, 1995). This alignment with civic republicanism aimed to expand citizenship and create a more inclusive polity. However, Southern Democrats mobilized against these reforms, invoking ethnocultural narratives to reassert white dominance. Through violent opposition, such as the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, and the enactment of Black Codes, they resisted federal intervention and underscored whiteness as central to Southern identity (Shapiro, 1964; Parsons, 2011; Treat, 2016). The Compromise of 1877, which ended Reconstruction,

represented the Republican Party's retreat from its commitment to racial equality, prioritizing economic interests and reconciliation with Southern elites over the civic republican ideal of an egalitarian society (Woodward, 2001).

Expansion and Codification of Whiteness (1877–1940s)

The evolution of whiteness as a defining characteristic of American identity continued through the Reconstruction era, into the 20th century, and culminated in the transformative Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This period witnessed significant shifts in racial dynamics, political strategies, and social structures, revealing the adaptability and centrality of whiteness in shaping American identity. Whiteness remained a tool of inclusion and exclusion, defining citizenship, political power, and economic opportunity (Harris, 1993; Blanton, 2006; Anderson, 2007).

The post-Reconstruction period, known as the Redemption Era (1877–1890s), saw the systematic dismantling of reforms that had temporarily expanded African American rights. Southern Democrats institutionalized Jim Crow laws, codifying racial segregation and disenfranchising African Americans through mechanisms such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses (Key, 1984). During this time, whiteness solidified as an ethnocultural identity that unified white Americans across class lines. This racial solidarity served the interests of Southern elites while co-opting poor whites with the privileges of racial superiority (Foner, 1988). Whiteness became a marker of full citizenship, relegating African Americans to second-class status and excluding them from civic republican ideals (Olson, 2008).

The early 20th century, often referred to as the nadir of American race relations, exposed the limitations of liberal ideals in addressing systemic racial inequalities. This period was marked by widespread racial violence, systemic exclusion, and political realignments that reinforced whiteness as a central construct in American identity (Adler, 2017). Whiteness, during this era, evolved as both an exclusionary and malleable tool for maintaining power and privilege amid significant social and economic changes (Collins, 2021).

The post-Reconstruction years were characterized by violent resistance to racial progress, culminating in events like the Red Summer of 1919 (Collins, 2021). During this period, race riots erupted across major cities, driven by heightened competition for jobs and housing amid rapid urbanization and industrialization (Trotter, 2001). These clashes underscored how whiteness operated as an exclusionary identity, protecting economic and social privileges at the expense of African Americans and immigrant groups. The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s further entrenched this exclusionary framework. The second Klan wielded whiteness as a performative and ideological identity, targeting African Americans, immigrants, Catholics, and Jews to consolidate white Protestant hegemony (Woodward, 2001). While rooted in historical racial hierarchies, this iteration of the Klan also reflected new anxieties about cultural and demographic shifts.

Despite liberal ideals of equality, the early 20th century revealed systemic failures to address racial disparities. Both major political parties prioritized white interests, with Republicans abandoning their advocacy for African American rights to appease white voters and pursue economic goals (Olson, 2008). Southern Democrats, meanwhile, doubled down on segregationist policies, reinforcing ethnocultural whiteness as central to their regional identity.

Shifting Political Allegiances and Realignments

The limitations of liberalism became evident during the New Deal era, as programs like Social Security and the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), while aimed at economic relief during the Great Depression, frequently excluded African Americans or subjected them to discriminatory practices at the local level (Katznelson, 2013). These exclusions reinforced the racial boundaries of the incorporatist tradition, emphasizing whiteness as a determinant of economic opportunity. Adding to this systemic inequality, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) institutionalized racial segregation through discriminatory lending practices. Known as "redlining", these policies systematically denied African Americans access to homeownership, a critical pathway to wealth accumulation, while prioritizing loans for white families and excluding Black neighborhoods. This entrenched racial inequality and highlighted the economic privileges tied to whiteness (Rothstein, 2017).

Despite its exclusions, however, the New Deal catalyzed a realignment in African American political allegiances. Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration marked a turning point, drawing many African Americans away from the Republican Party toward the Democratic Party during the economic crisis. This shift was influenced by the advocacy of figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, who engaged with African American leaders and addressed racial issues. Her activism bolstered perceptions of the Democratic Party as a potential ally for African Americans (Weiss, 1983). Symbolic gestures, such as federal appointments and outreach to Black communities, further fostered trust.

New Deal policies, including the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the AAA, often subjected African Americans to discriminatory practices, particularly in agricultural and industrial sectors (Katznelson, 2005). Nonetheless, these reforms, alongside Democratic outreach, attracted African American support as the Republican Party struggled to offer solutions. This shift revealed tensions within the Democratic coalition. Northern Democrats courted African American voters, while Southern Democrats maintained their commitment to segregation, creating intra-party divisions. These tensions culminated in the Dixiecrat Revolt, where figures like Strom Thurmond led Southern Democrats in opposition to the party's evolving stance on civil rights (Phillips, 1969). The Republican Party, in turn, adopted a "Southern Strategy", appealing to white resentment in the South by emphasizing states' rights and opposing federal civil rights legislation (Lassiter, 2007). The New Deal era, therefore, illustrates how whiteness, intertwined with political power and alliances, evolved in response to shifting social and economic landscapes, shaping the trajectory of American identity and political institutions.

During World War II, racial exclusion extended beyond the Black-White binary, affecting various marginalized groups. Federal labor policies sought to expand job opportunities, yet African Americans encountered substantial obstacles in accessing skilled positions. The Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), established to combat workplace discrimination, often lacked sufficient enforcement power, enabling employers to sustain exclusionary practices. This limitation of federal efforts to address racial inequality underscored the role of whiteness as a gatekeeper to economic opportunities (Kersten, 2006). Meanwhile, the internment of Japanese Americans under Executive Order 9066 illustrated how whiteness functioned to exclude perceived "outsiders" from the American racial hierarchy (Ward B., 2012). This systemic exclusion aligned with broader patterns of anti-Asian sentiment, further exemplified by restrictive immigration laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act. These policies revealed the adaptability of whiteness as a tool for defining boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in American society (Griffin & Hargis, 2008).

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Civil Rights Era and Political Realignment (1940s–1970s)

By the mid-20th century, the Democratic Party began embracing civil rights more fully, reflecting a renewed commitment to liberal and incorporatist ideals. Key milestones included President Harry Truman's desegregation of the military in 1948 and John F. Kennedy's support for landmark civil rights legislation. These developments alienated many Southern white Democrats, leading to the Dixiecrat revolt, spearheaded by figures like Strom Thurmond (Phillips, 1969). In response to the Democratic Party's growing support for civil rights, the Republican Party adopted a "Southern Strategy" to attract disaffected white voters. This strategy emphasized states' rights, opposition to federal civil rights initiatives, and narratives of white grievance. Through these efforts, whiteness was redefined as a conservative political identity aligned with resistance to racial integration (Lassiter, 2007).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s fundamentally challenged entrenched racial hierarchies. Through nonviolent protests, legal challenges, and political advocacy, the movement dismantled key components of Jim Crow, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Harold, 2018). However, these victories also prompted significant backlash, with many white Americans shifting their political allegiances to the Republican Party in opposition to civil rights advancements (Mazumder, 2018). From the nadir of race relations in the early 20th century to the transformative Civil Rights Movement, whiteness evolved as a malleable construct, deeply embedded in American political strategies and social hierarchies. Both the Republican and Democratic parties played critical roles in shaping how whiteness operated as a form of standing, perpetuating racial inequalities (Brown J. A., 2016). This period highlights the adaptability of whiteness in maintaining power and privilege amid evolving political and social landscapes (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997). The Democratic Party's alignment with labor while often marginalizing African Americans and the Republican Party's "Southern Strategy" exemplify how whiteness was instrumentalized (Frymer, 2009). This entrenchment of racialized politics was reinforced through legal and social mechanisms that sustained inequality (Thurber, 2023) and through systemic political shifts that adapted to resist racial justice (Ward J. M., 2011).

Post-Civil Rights Era and Contemporary Whiteness (1970s–Present)

The post-Civil Rights era saw whiteness shift from overt dominance to covert mechanisms embedded in institutions and cultural practices, sustaining privilege under the guise of equality (Olson, 2008). This adaptation, described by Winant (2012) as "racial dualism", reflected internal contradictions as whiteness navigated rising ideals of equality while maintaining systemic advantages. Through implicit norms and resistance to reforms like affirmative action, whiteness redefined itself, preserving dominance while aligning with narratives of meritocracy and neutrality. This section examines the covert normalization of whiteness, the dualistic tensions within post-Civil Rights racial identities, and the ongoing complexities of whiteness in contemporary politics.

Covert Mechanisms and White Normalization

In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, whiteness underwent a profound transformation, shifting from being a publicly recognized form of social status to a covert mechanism that perpetuated white advantage within the legal framework of equality (Olson, 2008). This evolution involved the development of implicit norms that defined white interests, assets, and aspirations. These norms, embedded within institutions, policies, and cultural practices, allowed whiteness to maintain dominance without explicit endorsement. As racial discrimination was outlawed, the concept of white standing adapted and persisted with the tacit support of the state apparatus (Olson, 2008).

The shift to covert mechanisms resulted in profound social and psychological ramifications for white Americans. With legal strides to prohibit racial discrimination, white individuals could no longer rely on the state to openly safeguard their racial standing. This transition generated feelings of insecurity, anger, and resentment among a previously privileged population accustomed to normalized racial dominance (Olson, 2008). Brown W. (1993) articulates this phenomenon as "wounded attachment", wherein white Americans, feeling displaced, developed a collective desire for retribution against those they perceived as responsible for their perceived decline. This resentment highlights the inherent contradiction of white normalization: while white privilege persisted structurally, its loss as an overtly recognized status fostered feelings of victimhood and marginalization.

Painter's *The History of White People* examines the historical and ideological roots of these covert mechanisms, tracing how whiteness evolved into a naturalized identity (Painter, 2011). Painter's analysis focuses on the contributions of the American School of anthropology, where figures like Samuel George Morton and Louis Agassiz regarded white racial identity as supreme and inherent (Menand, 2001). This essentialist view of whiteness not only justified slavery but also provided a framework for nativist ideologies that permeated U.S. policy and culture. Within this pseudoscientific framework, whiteness acquired a context-dependent definition that positioned it as permanent and unchanging (Weisberg, 2014). Practices like craniometry—a pseudoscience focused on measuring skulls to assert racial superiority—rationalized slavery and exclusionary policies (Gould, 1978). Painter emphasizes that these ideas were not confined to the 19th century but persisted into the 20th century through instruments like the cephalic index, eugenics, and intelligence testing, which were used to police the boundaries of whiteness, excluding groups like Turks, Slavs, or Jews who did not align with idealized European standards. Even as overtly nativist practices waned, their ideological underpinnings continued to influence modern white normalization, fostering implicit hierarchies that privileged whiteness while marginalizing others.

Painter (2011) also explores the continuity of these exclusionary practices into the mid-20th century, highlighting how sterilization programs targeted marginalized groups under the guise of public health. Often justified by nativist arguments about mental illness and hereditary defects, these practices reflected broader anxieties about preserving whiteness. This historical continuity underscores how white normalization, though less overt after the Civil Rights Movement, remained deeply embedded in societal structures and narratives.

Racial Dualism and Other Tensions

In contrast to Olson's (2008) perspective on the covert mechanisms of white normalization, Winant (2012) offers an alternative lens in *Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary U.S. Racial Politics.* Winant argues that in the post-Civil Rights era, whiteness became fragmented, reflecting a "deep fissuring" caused by the racial conflicts of the time. He posits that whiteness, as a concept, could no longer serve as a straightforward basis for claims of racial superiority. Instead, its justification evolved through redefinitions and reinterpretations of race, driven by the demands of a changing social and political landscape.

This fragmentation created what Winant terms "racial dualism", a framework where whiteness simultaneously inherited the legacy of white supremacy while grappling with the political and social challenges brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. Racial dualism underscores the internal contradictions within whiteness: as the ideals of participatory democracy, economic egalitarianism, and racial equality gained traction, they clashed with the structural and cultural dominance that whiteness sought to maintain. Winant (2012)

highlights how these challenges gave rise to a counter-tradition that opposed white supremacy and sought to make counterclaims on behalf of racially excluded and subordinated groups. For example, affirmative action policies and desegregation efforts directly contested the structural advantages of whiteness, forcing a rearticulation of white identity. Yet, these reforms also provoked backlash, as many white Americans framed them as threats to fairness and individual merit—principles rooted in the liberal tradition (Deslippe, 2012). Critical race theorists argue that these conflicts reveal the persistence of structural racism embedded in policies framed as neutral (Taylor, 2000). Moreover, backlash politics have served to reinforce narratives of white victimhood and reverse discrimination (Steinberg, 1997).

Williams and Janyes (1990) examine how this dualism permeated not only white identity but also broader racial dynamics. They argue that both Black and white communities experienced internal divisions, as the legacy of racial hierarchies collided with the evolving demands for justice and inclusion. Within this framework, whiteness oscillated between notions of egalitarianism and privilege, or color blindness and normalization.

Winant (2012) further emphasizes that these contradictions create a state of confusion and anxiety within whiteness. For example, colorblind ideologies, while rejecting overt racial categorizations, often obscure the systemic advantages of whiteness. This reframing allows racial disparities to persist under the guise of neutrality, reflecting the incorporatist tradition's superficial commitment to inclusion while maintaining exclusionary practices. These tensions also intersect with the ethnocultural tradition. Painter (2011) and Winant (2012) both highlight how whiteness continued to be framed as the normative standard for American identity, even as it faced challenges from civil rights reforms (Painter, 2011; Winant, 2012). Policies such as opposition to affirmative action and resistance to multicultural education reveal how racial dualism operates within ethnocultural anxieties about preserving heritage and national identity (Deslippe, 2012; Dietrich, 2015). This duality perpetuates a framework where whiteness remains central, while simultaneously denying its dominance through claims of equality and meritocracy (Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014). The persistence of racial dualism, as Winant notes, illustrates the adaptability of whiteness in the face of systemic change (Winant, 2012). While overt claims to superiority have largely dissipated, whiteness continues to operate as a powerful yet contested construct, oscillating between maintaining privilege and engaging with the ideals of egalitarianism introduced by the Civil Rights Movement.

Contemporary Perspectives, Complexities, and Challenges

Since the 1980s, partisanship and polarization have persisted in American society, with the Civil Rights Movement playing a critical role in reshaping racial dynamics. Whiteness, as a social and political construct, continues to adapt and intertwine with key traditions of American identity—liberalism, civic republicanism, ethnoculturalism, and incorporatism. These connections illuminate how whiteness sustains its dominance through new forms of stratification and exclusion, even as its overt forms have declined.

The liberal tradition, emphasizing equality and individual rights, remains deeply entangled with whiteness. While the liberal ethos ostensibly promotes inclusion, the persistence of racial stratification reveals inherent contradictions. Bonilla-Silva (2004) describes the Black/non-Black dichotomy as a central feature of racial stratification that "is undergoing a profound transformation where non-white groups experience restricted access to resources, opportunities, and representation" (p. 931). In the contemporary era, this changing old-dichotomy challenges the liberal promise of equality, as systemic inequities perpetuate the "wages of whiteness" (Roediger, 2017). Claire Jean Kim's theory of racial

triangulation (1999) further complicates the liberal framework by showing how Asian Americans are positioned as "valorized outsiders" while Black Americans are "insiders" who remain devalued. This hierarchy reflects the liberal ideal of meritocracy, where Asian Americans' successes are celebrated but leveraged to undermine demands for systemic racial justice. This dynamic underscores how liberalism, in practice, often reinforces rather than dismantles racial hierarchies.

As an example, Arizona's SB 1070, passed in 2010, mandates law enforcement to check immigration status during stops, which critics argue encourages racial profiling, especially against Latinx communities. This law, seen as part of a broader trend of nativist policies, echoes exclusionary practices like Jim Crow and aims to curb demographic shifts while asserting white dominance (Michalowski, 2013; Campbell, 2014). While proponents argue it deters illegal immigration, the law has been criticized for its social and psychological impacts, disproportionately targeting minority communities and perpetuating systemic racial exclusion when it comes to utilizing and receiving public assistance (Toomey et al., 2014). Arrocha (2010) further argues that such laws echo the exclusionary and racist practices of the past, reflecting anxieties and racism about demographic change. These policies operate within the liberal framework of rule of law but perpetuate racialized exclusion where immigrant minorities are consistently racialized and left out of "whiteness" (Rodriguez, 2018), highlighting how whiteness shapes the liberal tradition to maintain its privileges in the presence of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2021) calls "color-blind racism".

In the contemporary era, civic republicanism has excluded non-white groups from public life. Winant (2012) contends that whiteness intersects with civic republican ideals, framing itself as a defender of national identity and the common good. In contemporary politics, this manifests as white grievance narratives, where economic concerns, fears of crime, and cultural anxieties fuel exclusionary policies (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). Olson (2008) identifies resentment among white Americans as a key driver of polarization, as they perceive their racial status to be under threat (Olson, 2008). Republican strategists have mobilized these sentiments, reframing civic republican values to appeal to white voters. Issues like welfare, abortion, and immigration are cast as threats to the virtuous middle class, which is implicitly framed as white (Haney-López, 2014). This strategy reinforces racial divisions while claiming to uphold civic republican ideals. The further decline of overtly biological explanations for racial inequality has led to the recasting of whiteness in terms of universalism and nationalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). This shift aligns with civic republicanism by portraying whiteness as central to the nation's cultural and political integrity. However, these narratives often obscure systemic inequalities and marginalize non-white contributions to the republic.

Ethnoculturalism remains a powerful force in sustaining whiteness during this period. Jacobson (1999) highlights how European immigrant groups, such as the Irish and Italians, were historically racialized as "other" but later incorporated into whiteness. This process expanded the boundaries of whiteness while maintaining its exclusivity, ensuring that it remained central to American identity. In contemporary politics, ethnocultural whiteness is invoked to justify exclusionary policies and narratives. Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2008) describe the "Latin Americanization" of U.S. racial stratification, where skin color, culture, and language increasingly define racial hierarchies. Policies like SB 1070 reflect these dynamics, targeting Latinx minority populations under the pretext of "preserving national identity". These policies echo historical attempts to marginalize non-white groups, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese internment during World War II.

Kim's (1999) racial triangulation framework further illuminates how ethnocultural anxieties shape perceptions of racial minorities. Literature also highlights the ways in which Asian

Americans are often positioned as "honorary whites" through stereotypes like the "model minority" which validate white cultural norms while devaluing non-White Americans (including Blacks and Browns) as cultural "others" (Kim, 2000; Prashad, 2002). Ong further explains how racial hierarchies in the U.S. ideologically "whiten" Asian immigrants while "blackening" others, perpetuating systems of privilege and marginalization (Ong et al., 1996). This dynamic reinforces the centrality of whiteness as the normative standard, marginalizing non-white groups while perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Incorporatism addressed whiteness serving as the benchmark for belonging in this era. Jardina (2019) highlights the salience of white identity as a collective political force, particularly in response to increasing diversity. White Americans often frame cultural change as a threat to national identity, resisting policies and movements that challenge whiteness's dominance. Hooker (2023) examines how racialized experiences of loss, such as Black grief and white grievance, deepen societal polarization. White identity politics frequently invoke incorporatist rhetoric to exclude non-white groups while reaffirming whiteness as central to American culture. For instance, anti-immigration policies and opposition to affirmative action are framed as protecting fairness and meritocracy, even as they reinforce racial hierarchies. Research by Devos and Banaji (2005) underscores the association between whiteness and American identity, revealing biases that influence perceptions of citizenship and belonging. This dynamic perpetuates the incorporatist tradition, where inclusion remains conditional on alignment with white norms and values. Miyawaki's (2015) study, for example, reveals that whiteness shapes the social incorporation of part-white multiracial individuals through marital patterns, with significant racial and gender disparities in their likelihood of marrying whites, reflecting stratified pathways to inclusion (Miyawaki, 2015).

The contemporary period has seen challenges to whiteness's dominance, but these efforts face significant resistance. Lipsitz (1995) describes whiteness as a "possessive investment", where policies and practices disproportionately benefit white communities. This investment is often invisible, obscured by narratives of colorblindness and meritocracy that deny the systemic advantages whiteness confers. Hamilton et al. (2024) examine the racialized stratification of higher education, showing how institutional practices reinforce inequalities while appearing neutral. These findings highlight the current persistence of horizontal stratification, where non-white students are funneled into less prestigious institutions and programs. Such practices illustrate how whiteness adapts to maintain its advantages even within ostensibly inclusive systems. Yadon and Ostfeld (2020) explore the intersection of whiteness and political attitudes, finding that darker-skinned white Americans are more likely to identify strongly with their racial group and adopt conservative views. This phenomenon underscores how whiteness operates as a stratified and contested identity, adapting to demographic and cultural changes while reinforcing its centrality.

In the contemporary context, any discussion of whiteness must also consider the political and cultural dynamics that have profoundly shaped modern understandings of white identity and its role in American society. Political campaigns and public discourse in recent year exemplify a mobilization of racial resentment, as evidenced by events like the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville and the January 6 Capitol insurrection in 2021, both of which were marked by the overt assertion of white identity and grievance. Scholars have argued that recent political discourse capitalized on long-standing racial anxieties and white identity politics, galvanizing a base that viewed increasing racial diversity as a threat to their socio-political dominance (Maskovsky, 2017; Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019; Bunyasi, 2019; Graham et al., 2021). Moreover, campaign rhetoric during this period framed whiteness as an embattled identity needing reclamation, often invoking nostalgic narratives of a

racially homogenous past (McGettigan, 2016; Smith & King, 2021). Such incidents highlight the persistence and adaptability of whiteness as a socio-political construct, highlighting its central role in shaping contemporary discourse on race, identity, immigration, and national belonging in contemporary America.

Conclusion

Defining whiteness is a complex and evolving endeavor that cannot be reduced to a fixed or universal concept. It is deeply intertwined with the broader and continually shifting notion of American identity, shaped by traditions such as liberalism, civic republicanism, ethnoculturalism, and incorporationism. Whiteness, however, is not an inherent feature of this identity but a socio-political construct that has adapted to changing historical and ideological contexts. This adaptability has enabled whiteness to remain a central force in shaping the boundaries of belonging, often by defining inclusion for some while enforcing exclusion for others.

From its early role in colonial society, whiteness has been instrumental in reinforcing hierarchies of power and privilege. Codified in laws such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, whiteness was tied to citizenship and property rights, positioning it as a defining standard of inclusion. Yet, as civil rights movements and demographic shifts challenged these structures, whiteness transformed, aligning itself with ostensibly neutral frameworks like meritocracy and colorblindness. These shifts reveal its remarkable capacity to sustain dominance while obscuring systemic inequities. Whiteness operates as an unmarked standard, simultaneously pervasive and contested, creating a dynamic where it defines belonging while marginalizing nonwhite identities (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

Our analysis highlights that whiteness is not merely a historical artifact but a living, adaptable construct that continues to shape contemporary debates on race, immigration, and national identity. It persists not as an overt ideology but as a normalized framework embedded in institutions, policies, and cultural practices. This normalization obscures its role in maintaining exclusion and stratification while reinforcing the privileges it affords. For instance, the ongoing political polarization and the resurgence of white identity politics demonstrate how whiteness adapts to resist challenges posed by increasing diversity and calls for systemic change (Jardina, 2019).

Ultimately, whiteness reflects the contradictions within American identity itself, drawing upon traditions of freedom and equality while perpetuating structures of exclusion and privilege. These contradictions have created enduring tensions, as whiteness struggles to reconcile its historical dominance with the ideals of an increasingly diverse and equitable society. As a constructed and adaptable force, whiteness continues to shape the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, often under the guise of neutrality or equality. Its ability to maintain systemic privilege while aligning with American ideals highlights its centrality to the nation's socio-political fabric. Addressing these tensions requires a critical examination of how whiteness operates as a socio-political construct, shaping who belongs and whose voices are valued. As the United States grapples with issues of race, equity, and national belonging, dismantling the hold of whiteness is essential for envisioning a future that embraces the pluralism and diversity foundational to the country's ideals.

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