

CORRUPTION AS A CHALLENGE TO GOOD GOVERNANCE: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

A CORRUPÇÃO COMO UM DESAFIO À BOA GOVERNANÇA: UMA REVISÃO ABRANGENTE DA LITERATURE

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Abstract

Corruption remains one of the greatest obstacles to sustainable development in most developing countries, with Somalia being among the worst cases. It has long impeded political stability and economic growth in fragile states, and in Somalia it is deeply entrenched at all levels—from small-scale daily transactions to large-scale abuses of authority. Weak institutions, protracted conflict, and clan-based systems of reward have allowed corruption to flourish despite the introduction of formal laws and institutional frameworks. These measures, including anti-bribery and procurement laws or institutional audits, have largely failed due to poor enforcement and the dominance of informal networks. This paper situates the corruption and governance debate within Somalia's context and emphasizes that traditional approaches are insufficient where state capacity is weak. Instead, gradual reforms aimed at directly improving citizen welfare are more realistic. Such reforms include transparent service delivery, merit-based recruitment, and greater participation in decision-making. The role of informal governance systems—clan elders and community leaders—also emerges as crucial, as they can serve as allies in enhancing accountability and legitimacy. The findings suggest that Somalia requires a hybrid approach that combines formal institutional reforms with informal oversight. Empowering citizens, ensuring open access to budgetary and procurement data, and introducing e-governance systems can reduce opportunities for corruption. Ultimately, meaningful change in Somalia depends on adopting governance strategies

Resumo

A corrupção continua sendo um dos maiores obstáculos ao desenvolvimento sustentável na maioria dos países em desenvolvimento, sendo a Somália um dos piores casos. Há muito tempo, ela impede a estabilidade política e o crescimento econômico em estados frágeis, e na Somália está profundamente enraizada em todos os níveis — desde pequenas transações diárias até abusos de autoridade em larga escala. Instituições frágeis, conflitos prolongados e sistemas de recompensa baseados em clãs permitiram que a corrupção florescesse, apesar da introdução de leis formais e estruturas institucionais. Essas medidas, incluindo leis anticorrupção e de licitações ou auditorias institucionais, falharam em grande parte devido à má aplicação e ao domínio de redes informais. Este artigo situa o debate sobre corrupção e governança no contexto da Somália e enfatiza que as abordagens tradicionais são insuficientes onde a capacidade do Estado é fraca. Em vez disso, reformas graduais voltadas para a melhoria direta do bem-estar dos cidadãos são mais realistas. Tais reformas incluem a prestação transparente de serviços, o recrutamento baseado no mérito e maior participação na tomada de decisões. O papel dos sistemas informais de governança — anciãos de clãs e líderes comunitários — também emerge como crucial, pois podem servir como aliados no fortalecimento da responsabilização e da legitimidade. Os resultados sugerem que a Somália necessita de uma abordagem híbrida que combine reformas institucionais formais com supervisão informal.



tailored to local political and social realities while aligning with international standards of transparency and accountability.

Keywords: Corruption. Governance. Forms of Corruption. Causes of Corruption. Anti-Corruption Policies.

Empoderar os cidadãos, garantir o acesso aberto aos dados orçamentários e de compras e introduzir sistemas de governo eletrônico podem reduzir as oportunidades para a corrupção. Em última análise, uma mudança significativa na Somália depende da adoção de estratégias de governança adaptadas às realidades políticas e sociais locais, em consonância com os padrões internacionais de transparência e responsabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Corrupção. Governança. Formas de Corrupção. Causas da Corrupção. Políticas Anticorrupção.

1 INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries such as Somalia, corruption has become one of the main obstacles to sustainable economic growth, weakening institutions and eroding public interest. Corruption is commonly recognized as a ‘cancer’ that creeps into systems, institutions and a country’s economy, thus generating inefficiencies, waste and mismanagement of resources (Monteduro *et al.*, 2016). Corruption is capable of limiting a country’s investments and growth, thus leading to ineffective government as well as decreased social and economic wealth (Langseth, 2013). Corruption persists in developing countries despite the proliferation of legal, institutional, and other measures that have been put in place to fight said corruption. Corruption is a serious global problem and affects all countries in the world. Corruption is a problem not only in developed countries but also in developing countries (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009).

The cancer of corruption has therefore spread exponentially in most developing countries with devastating socioeconomic and governance consequences (Hope, 2017). Corruption can involve the exchange of very small amounts of money or the granting of small favors’ (petty corruption), pervading the highest levels of government, engendering major abuses of power (grand corruption) and permeating everyday structures of society (systemic corruption). According to (Islam, 2020), it is a complex phenomenon rooted in multifaceted issues such as weak administration, political instability, and a lack of institutional enforcement. Even ‘governance’ is not an unequivocal term; thus, many different definitions contribute in defining a multidimensional concept of governance,

referring to different contexts: the private sector and, more specifically, private corporations, public governance and international institutions (Cepiku, 2005).

Good governance is the active and productive cooperation between the State and citizens, and the key to its success lies in the powers participating in political administration. Only when citizens have sufficient political power to participate in elections, policy-making, administration and supervision can they prompt the State and join hands with it to build public authority and order (Keping, 2018). Apparently, democracy is the only practical mechanism that can safeguard the fully free and equal political power owned by citizens. Hence, good governance is organically combined with democracy. In an autocratic system, it is possible to have good government when the system is at its best, but it is impossible to have good governance. Good governance can only be achieved in a free and democratic political system, as it cannot emerge without freedom and democracy (Gisselquist, 2014).

Globally, corruption is recognized as a major obstacle to sustainable development, as it weakens institutions, distorts markets, and erodes trust in governance systems. Studies show that countries with higher corruption levels tend to experience lower economic growth and weaker democratic institutions (Mo, 2001). Conversely, good governance practices—such as transparency, accountability, and rule of law—are strongly associated with improved development outcomes and reduced corruption risks (Kurtz & Schrank, 2007).

Corruption is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that erodes the socio-economic and political value of any nation. It is also a global phenomenon, intelligible only in its social context. There is a growing worldwide concern over its spread due to so many factors: poverty, crime, low rate of saving, unemployment and to mention a few (Alhassan, 2015). Corruption is at the core of the crisis in issues such as governance and legitimacy, the establishment of a sustainable democratic order, rule of law, national development and the welfare of the citizens. Corruption is the major explanation for the seemingly insolvable problems of poverty, diseases, hunger and general acute development tragedy in Nigeria. Corruption has seriously impeded the growth and effective utilization of resources in the country (Mercy, 2015).

Corruption is prevalent in Somalia and is widely practiced in all levels. It reflects historical and well-established patronage networks which involve a redistribution of resources. The authorities admit that corruption is rampant in the country but are not

convinced that Somalia is the most corrupt country in the world, as suggested by the perception indices (Isse, 2019). The negative impacts of corruption have served as the impetus for international aid institutions to demand the establishment of good governance strategies in Somalia. These strategies attempt to improve integrity, transparency, and accountability in government and private administrative transactions, to achieve sustainable growth and improved service delivery to the public (Halima Ali Ahmed, 2018).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concepts of good governance

The concept of good governance is widely perceived as how power is used to control the resources of the people and ensure the good of the people. It has been argued by (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008) argue that the core aspect of good governance is that the institutions should be impartial in their application of rules such that citizens are not judged based on their status. This is in contrast to definitions that define governance as simply democracy or state capacity. It presents the idea of good enough governance, in which reform efforts should focus on what is attainable rather than pursuing lengthy lists of best practices. Combined, these two views imply that governance is to be viewed as both an effective system to manage communal resources and as a normative system to ensure fairness in the interactions between the state and its citizens, accountability, and inclusiveness (Kurtz & Schrank, 2007).

The most commonly recognized dimensions by scholars are six, namely, rule of law, control of corruption, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, voice and accountability, and political stability. They are recorded in the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), which is a popular way to rank countries. But (Mo, 2001), such measures based on perception are only limited and should not be applied indiscriminately in the evaluation of policies. As stated in According to (Schmidt & Wood, 2019), it goes on to add that another stress is that good government is different in different settings, and that global indicators fail to reflect local facts and institutional differences.

It is believed that institutions play a key role in long term development outcomes. According to (Rigobon & Rodrik, 2005), institutions are the rulers, and so they determine

the differences in income more than geography or trade integration. It discovers that rule of law mitigates uncertainty, encourages investment and encourages growth. In the same way, (Henderson *et al.*, 2007), that the development countries have a positive relationship between state performance and meritocratic recruitment and career stability within bureaucracies. It is important to note that good governance is not merely a normative ideal but also a source of enduring economic development according to these studies.

Corruption weakens governance through a lack of trust, distortion of public expenditure and discouragement of investment. According to (Lambsdorff, 2003) goes on to show that the more the corruption, the less the growth rate, and the more a country is successful in controlling corruption the more investments it is likely to attract. It reiterates that neutral institutions are the remedy to corruption and therefore rulings are made in accordance with the rule and not according to any favors. These results highlight the importance of transparency and honesty being central to governance reforms. Decentralization is commonly put forward as a process to get government nearer to citizenry and enhance accountability. (Sparling, 2018) demonstrates that decentralization will help governments to be more responsive and efficient when designed appropriately by aligning policies to local demands.

However, (Adams, 2016) cautions that the concept of decentralization cannot be regarded as a solution, as results differ across countries and institutional capabilities. According to these points of view, governance reforms must be place-based and sensitive to local politics. Open government data and other technological initiatives have been encouraged as transparency and participation improvement tools. As indicate, open data initiatives have the potential to increase accountability because citizens get access to information held by the government. However, (Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2014) state that the functional influence of such initiatives is determined by the capacity of the institutions, political motivation, and participation of citizens. So, although digital governance has transformative potential, its success is not a given and it needs robust supporting institutions.

One of the debates in the literature in the governance field is whether nations need to follow a set of common best practices or pursue problem-based reforms. According to (Grindle, 2004), good enough governance should be considered a priority by focusing on reforms that are attainable but which hold the greatest importance in the reduction of poverty. It focuses on the principle of impartiality as the key to quality governance,

whereas (Ajam & Fourie, 2016) demonstrates that effective reforms may have different appearances depending on the situation. All these arguments imply that reforms in governance have to find a compromise between universal values and local realities.

2.2 Forms of corruption

Corruption has many faces, and no generally adopted typology exists because it is specific to a context (Phiri, 2022). It has suggested that classification according to subjective intentions such as seeking power, financial gain, self-enrichment, social motive, and opportunism could be proposed. The typology has since been expanded by scholars in order to encompass political, economic, and administrative aspects (Gong & Lau, 2024). It is important to understand all these forms when designing successful anti-corruption strategies.

- **Political corruption** is the manipulation of policies, laws or administrative procedures by the people in leadership positions to acquire or maintain political office. Such is when the interests of the private supersede those of the collective or community and when power is exercised in the name of individual or group gain instead of societal good (Hancock & Vivoda, 2014).
- **Economic corruption** refers to situations where the agent prioritizes personal gain over the principal's interest. This type of corruption often involves illicit profits, contract manipulation, tax evasion, or diversion of resources, resulting in losses for the state, consumers, or the economy at large (Ades & Tella, 1997).
- **Administrative corruption** arises when public officials violate principles of efficiency, fairness, or truthfulness. It includes nepotism, favoritism, and misallocation of public resources, transferring societal benefits to family members or associates (Charron, 2011).

2.3 Causes of corruption

Corruption is greatly affected by the political system. It has been found that corruption is rife in authoritarian governments because of centralization of power and non-accountability. As an example, (Andersson & Heywood, 2009) observe that dictatorships are more likely to be highly corrupt than democracies because the latter tend

to have institutions that facilitate transparency and accountability. According to (Sandholtz & Koetzle, 2000) states that the institutions and norms of democracy are important in checking corrupt practices. These results indicate that the effectiveness of political systems in alleviating corruption is associated with political systems that have strong democratic institutions.

The state of the economy is also a contributing factor to corruption. According to (Saleem *et al.*, 2020), emphasize that economic instability, low wages, can provide the conditions under which corruption flourishes as people can turn to bribery and other illegal measures to increase their income. Also, the theory of resource curse is that a country with a lot of natural resources can be more corrupt because the rich accumulate wealth and power, which causes people to act as rentiers. This shows how economic stability and equal distribution of resources are critical in fighting corruption.

Corruption is largely affected by the nature of political systems. Studies have shown that corruption is higher in authoritarian governments because power is concentrated and no one is held accountable. Indeed, an example of this is given by (Klitgaard, 1984) who found that dictatorships tend to have greater levels of corruption than democracies since the latter has systems of ensuring transparency and accountability. In the same, (Paranata, 2025) states that democratic institutions and norms are instrumental in preventing corrupt practices. Such results indicate that political systems that have well-developed democratic institutions are more effective in terms of reducing corruption.

The level of corruption is also caused by economic conditions. According to (Agale & Kolgo, 2018) point out that economic instability and low wages can provide grounds to corrupt practices as people can turn to bribery and other methods of corruption in order to enrich themselves. Moreover, according to the theory of the resource curse, a country endowed with natural resources might have more corruption cases because wealth and power will be concentrated, which will result in rent-seeking behaviour. This explains the significance of stability in the economy, and equitable allocation of resources in the fight against corruption.

2.4 Anti-corruption policies and strategies

Anti-corruption policies refer to official policies implemented by the governments and other organizations to impede, identify and penalize corrupt activities. They play a vital role in consolidation of governance, promoting the trust of the people and promoting sustainable economic growth (Yeh, 2014). Such policies are usually accompanied by law provisions, implementing bodies, transparency provisions and citizen involvement programs. Laws concentrate on making acts of corruption illegal, setting up anti-corruption commissions and stipulating severe punishments. As one example, the implementation of anti-bribery laws, regulations on public procurement, and asset declaration systems have proven effective in those countries where the enforcement and political will are strong (Narayan & Bui, 2021).

Legal measures are supplemented by administrative and procedural reforms that help minimize corruption opportunities. Efforts like recruitment based on merit, financial auditing, and electronic governance systems enhance transparency, efficiency and accountability in government agencies (Tai, 2021). It has been observed that e-governance activities and open data systems have been effective in lowering petty corruption, improving efficiency in the delivery of public services, and increasing citizen accountability. Such reforms offer structural protection against the misuse of state resources and help maintain institutional integrity in the long term.

Social norms and citizen participation are addressed by behavioral and cultural strategies that generate an environment that does not support the practice of corruption. Whistleblower protection, civic education, campaigns aimed at promoting awareness among people and monitoring in communities' programs strengthen ethical actions and advance integrity among the actors (both public and private). Governments can build a holistic anti-corruption system by merging legal, administrative, and behavioral strategies that will enhance good governance, promote accountability, and economic and social growth (Fokuoh Ampratwum, 2008).

2.5 Governance and institutional mechanisms

Corruption prevention and effective public administration require a strong governance and institutional devices. Accountability, transparency and rule of law have a

structural basis in robust institutions (independent judiciaries and professional bureaucracies, and effective legislatures). Institutions that are functioning effectively are associated with lower incidences of corruption and increased trust that citizens have in the governing bodies, whereas institutions that are weak are typically linked to endemic corruption and dismal governance results (Warf, 2017).

Checks and balances, oversight bodies, and accountability mechanisms are institutional mechanisms, which observe the actions of public officials, and set rules they are required to obey. Major participants in the process of misconduct detection and sanctioning include audit institutions, anti-corruption commissions, parliamentary oversight committees, and ombudsman offices. These mechanisms work better when they are autonomous, sufficiently funded, not politicized, and enforced uniformly and without bias (de Waldemar, 2012).

Information disclosure and transparency also enhance good governance as citizens and civil society can hold the officials accountable. Public procurement portals, budget transparency programs, freedom of information laws, and e-governance applications enable stakeholders to check the actions of the government and minimize corruption opportunities (Schnell, 2023). In the case of fragile states such as Somalia, institutional reforms also have to take into account informal power structures, local forms of governance, and elite bargaining arrangements (Menkhaus, 2014). Governance mechanisms can dramatically reduce corruption and increase the effectiveness of the public sector by integrating powerful formal institutions with transparency, oversight, and citizen participation.

2.6 Gaps in literature

Although much has been studied on corruption and good governance globally, little is known about the dynamics of corruption in Somalia. The majority of the research is based on generalized models or comparisons among developing nations, without properly addressing the context of Somalia and its historical, political, and socio-cultural background, such as clan-oriented patronage networks, years of conflict, and weak institutions of the state (Omiunu & Nganje, 2024). The current body of literature focuses mainly on formal legal action, institutional change, and technological intervention to fight corruption. Nevertheless, few empirical studies have been conducted on the operation of

these strategies in the Somali setting and how they affect corruption reduction and service delivery (Borojo *et al.*, 2024).

Moreover, it is common in previous research to overlook the role of informal systems of governance, citizen action, and state capacity to form corruption and governance outcomes (Zimelis, 2020). Informal systems such as clan-based networks, traditional dispute resolution systems, and local leadership structures are important mediators of access to resources and enforcers of norms in fragile contexts, like Somalia, but little is known about their engagement of corruption and governance effectiveness. In the same vein, citizens have limited engagement in overseeing the activities of the government, reporting on corrupt activities, and holding officials to account, and the systems by which citizen engagement can promote transparency and integrity are not well understood (Huq, 2014).

Although international anti-corruption strategies (legal reforms, institutional strengthening and technological intervention) offer useful lessons in other settings, it is not clear how they can be applied in fragile states like Somalia. Weak institutional capacity, political instability, endemic patronage networks, and the other factors, tend to make the implementation of the standard strategies difficult. This is why such a study as context-specific challenges and opportunities in the implementation of good governance and the ways in which formal institutions can engage with local practices, traditional systems of governance, and citizen participation to decrease corruption and enhance service delivery is urgently needed (Holmberg *et al.*, 2009). This kind of research may offer essential insights to inform development of anti-corruption structures that are feasible and effective in fragile states.

The possible remedy to this gap would equip policymakers, civil society, and international actors with evidence-based actions to formulate powerful anti-corruption systems and reinforce governance, which would eventually lead to sustainable socio-economic development in Somalia (Zack-Williams, 2020).

3 METHODOLOGY

The research design in this study is qualitative and descriptive research which was used accomplished by a thorough review of literature to investigate the issue of corruption as a challenge to good governance. The structure is suitable since it enables the systematic

review and integration of the available academic literature, without the necessity of data collection. The review of peer-reviewed journals, books, and reliable reports provides the research a great variety of opinions on the issue of governance and corruption. This will allow the recognition of common themes, trends and connections among the main concepts including rule of law, transparency, accountability and institutional effectiveness. It also offers insights on how corruption is evident at the political, economic, and administrative levels to give a systematic approach to explaining some of the complex issues in governance.

The methodology has been based on thematic and comparative analysis, in which findings are organized into categories, which include notions of good governance, types of corruption and corruption causation. This will enable the study to point out the common qualities, including the need of unbiased institutions and openness, and the local differences based on the political, economic and cultural characteristics. The synthesis of evidence items presented by several sources creates gaps in literature and potential research gaps, as well as giving a comprehensive idea of how corruption compromises governance. Altogether, such a type of research design will guarantee an extensive and credible exploration of the available knowledge that may be used to draw the informed conclusions and provide the practical suggestions on the governance changes.

4 FINDINGS

The results of the literature review and analysis of the Somali context demonstrate some important patterns. First, corruption in Somalia is widespread, which means that it occurs on political, economic, and administrative levels. It covers small scale corruption in the normal life up to the high level and large scale which strengthens the elite domination. Second, corruption is enabled by weak institutions, political instability and patronage networks based on clans. Third, corruption will hamper the results of development by deterring investment, skewing state spending, losing governance credibility, and trapping people in poverty.

Fourth, the international frameworks focus on legal and institutional reforms, but, in fragile contexts, including Somalia, their practical implementation is limited because of the inability to enforce them. Last, but not least, it has been proven that good

governance, based on impartiality, accountability, and transparency, is the key remedy to corruption, yet any reforms need to be adapted to the socio-political realities in Somalia.

4.1 Discussion of findings

The results confirm the current literature, which recognizes corruption as a governance as well as a developmental crisis (Lima & Delen, 2020). Corruption in Somalia is not merely the product of personal opportunity and it is found within structural and historical processes, such as long-term conflict and clan-based patronage. That is why traditional anti-corruption measures like anti-bribery laws, procurement policies, or institutional audits tend to fail: they presuppose some degree of state capacity and political stability which cannot be provided by Somalia. That (Carr & Simon, 2014) concept of good enough governance, the idea that realistic and incremental reforms are better than impractical best-practice checklists. In the case of Somalia, this implies giving priority to reforms which have a direct impact on the welfare of the people, including the accountable provision of services, equal access to aid and the recruitment of individuals into state bodies based on merit.

On the same note, (Brody *et al.*, 2021) warns that governance prescriptions should not be universalized and states that effective reforms should be problem-oriented and context specific—a lesson that is quite pertinent to Somalia. The informal governance structures are also greatly highlighted in the analysis. Somalia society is still dominated by clan elders, religious leaders and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. Although they are not readily considered in the formal approach to governance, these actors may open-door entry to accountability, legitimacy, and resource management. Good anti-corruption systems should thus incorporate both institutions as well as informal networks. Moreover, technological solutions (e-governance or open data platform) can be used to curb petty corruption by reducing physical interaction between the officials and citizens.

They can be effective, however, as (SEAY, 2013) posit, they require institutional capacity, political incentive, and citizen engagement, which is not yet fully in place in Somalia. Digital reforms without safeguards can be seized by elites thus creating new corruption instead of breaking it. Broadly speaking, the Somali case shows that a hybrid system of governance that integrates formal reforms and informal accountability

mechanisms should be implemented, which should also create state capacity and encourage civic participation over time.

5 CONCLUSION

Somalia has a systemic, multifaceted and socio-politically entrenched corruption. It sabotages government, dilutes institutions and stifles development. Global anti-corruption frameworks offer good lessons, but cannot be deployed wholesale in weak settings. Rather, Somalia needs contextual, step-by-step reforms that integrate neutral institutions, conventional governance behaviors, and accountability through the participation of the citizens. The most sustainable approach to fighting corruption is through good governance, which is based on transparency, accountability, and rule of law. But in weak states such as Somalia, good governance can only be achieved by uniting institutional reforms and informal clan-based institutions and enhancing the level of citizen participation.

5.1 Recommendation

Anti-corruption reforms in Somalia must be contextual and incremental in light of findings. Conventional strategies, including anti-bribery laws and institutional audits simply do not work, as the capacity of the state is weak and the political situation is unstable. Thus, priority must be placed on interventions which have a direct positive impact on the welfare of the citizens such as responsible service delivery, equal access to assistance, and recruitment to the governmental institutions based on merit. In addition, informal systems of governance such as clan elders, religious leaders and customary systems of dispute resolution must be incorporated into anti-corruption strategies to improve legitimacy, accountability and management of resources.

E-governance systems and facilities, as well as open data platforms, are technological tools that allow reducing petty corruption by reducing personal contacts between government and citizens. But these means should be coupled with protections, political incentives and participation by the citizenry to eliminate elite capture. In general, a hybrid system of governance including both formal and informal accountability is suggested. This would help to slowly establish state capacity, to promote civic

engagement and to foster sustainable change in governance and anti-corruption activities in Somalia.

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- **Ali Abdi Yusuf:** Conceptualization, research design, literature search, review and synthesis of findings, drafting the manuscript, and overall project administration.
- **Abas Omar Hassan:** Structuring and contextualization of the study, critical evaluation of the reviewed literature, Supervision, and review and editing of the manuscript.
- **All authors** have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

As this study is based on a literature review, no new datasets were generated. The sources reviewed are cited within the manuscript. Additional information is available from the corresponding author, Ali Abdi Yusuf, at zaciim112@gmail.com, upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Not applicable. This study did not involve human or animal subjects, clinical interventions, or any identifiable personal data, and therefore did not require ethical approval or consent from participants.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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